



# Malbank School & Sixth Form College

*Rejoice in being the best that we can be.*

Mobile Phone use in schools 09/2/26

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you about an issue that is receiving a great deal of attention in schools, government and society at the moment: mobile phones in schools. You will probably have heard that the government is considering an under 16 social media ban as seen in Australia, and alongside this, the Department for Education are making it clear that they do not see *any* place for phones in schools.




As many of you will already know, we already operate a no phone policy from gate to gate at Malbank. This means that students must not have their phone out at any time during the school day and if they do, it is taken from them. Since we introduced this policy many years ago, we have been broadly happy with the impact it has had. I was a member of the leadership team when it was first put in place and can still remember the significant change it made almost overnight. Phones disappeared from lessons and, even more importantly, we saw young people talking, playing and interacting in the way we would hope to see at break and lunch.




Because of this, when the renewed national conversation around physical bans in schools began about a year and a half ago, I was a little skeptical. I felt that our policy addressed the issue well. However, I came to realise that I was missing a key point, and it is one that has come back into focus in recent days in the press.

The wider issue is not simply solved by asking students to keep phones in their bag, it is the mental pull that young people feel towards them, even when the phone is out of sight. I see it in my own children, and I am certainly not immune to it myself. In any moment of downtime, the instinct for many of us is to reach for a screen, especially when we are aware of a notification. Consultant child psychologist Emily Sehmer describes this perfectly when she states: "Even when smartphones are tucked away in a child's school bag or pocket they will continue to occupy a significant proportion of a young person's working memory, leaving it impossible to give their *full* attention in the classroom."

As adults, many of us were fortunate enough to grow up without this constant distraction in our childhood. I know my own ability to focus has changed in the last decade, and that is despite being an adult with the benefit of having had school years spent *without* that digital pull. For young people today, the challenge is far greater and we need to think carefully about how we support them to overcome this.

The wider government push is centred on the growing evidence around the impact of social media on mental health and the data is stark. Between 2012 and 2022, hospital admissions for child mental health concerns rose by 64 percent. Admissions related to eating disorders alone rose by 514 percent.

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Alongside a rise in social media use and screen time, there has been a significant increase in low self esteem, anxiety, depression, behavioural changes, inattention, impulsivity and sleep disorders.

It is with all of this in mind that I have taken the significant step of looking at ways to approach the issue differently from September. I have been talking to other Cheshire East schools and with the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Dan Price, who is clear in his ambition for "phone free schools" across Cheshire. Last week I was privileged to visit two schools that have already begun this journey. One uses magnetic lockable phone pouches, and the other uses small lockers where phones are stored for the full school day. I will also be discussing the matter with the two secondary headteachers across our new trust, TCT, because we share the same sense of moral imperative to do something about this issue. My aim is to give children the headspace they deserve in order to be children in the truest sense, free from unnecessary distraction and influence, and able to focus on what matters most at school: learning, communicating and developing socially in a traditional way, even if only for the six hours a day when they are at school.

I know that parents and students will have passionate views about this. For some, it may feel like an unimaginable shift. However, I truly believe it is a step we need to take and want to reassure that it is one we have been evaluating carefully for some time. With the recent increase in national debate, I felt it right to set out where we currently stand as a school.

As with any major decision, especially one that will require clear logistical planning, we want to listen. Below is a link to a Microsoft Form asking you about your views and possible concerns about phone use for young people alongside questions about your thoughts on the implementation of a phone free environment at Malbank – the survey will be open until the end of the first week back after half term.

[Malbank Phone use Parent Survey – Fill in form](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read this update and if you fill in the form – thanks for sharing your thoughts. When we know more about what our next steps will be, I will of course write again to keep you informed.

All the best

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