Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this policy must follow the process outlined on the creating, updating and deleting operational policies page.

Overview

This policy covers student use of mobile phones and personal devices at:

- government schools
- premises used in connection with the school, where students are undertaking school related activities.

For primary aged students this policy:

- restricts the use of mobile phones and personal devices during school hours
- helps schools to manage student mobile phones and personal devices that are brought to school.

For secondary aged students this policy:

- provides instruction for managing the use of mobile phones and personal devices during the school day
- has guiding information for schools with secondary aged students to consider when developing their local policy.

There are simplified policy templates to assist schools with documenting local context information and decisions in line with the department's policy. Schools will refer to the corresponding sections of this policy when completing the relevant simplified policy template(s).

Scope

This policy provides mandatory instructions to principals about managing student use of mobile phones and personal devices while at school, or premises used in connection with the school where students are undertaking school related activities.

Detail

With the widespread ownership of mobile phones and other digital technologies among students, it is critical that schools, in partnership with families, provide clear guidance for students to become informed, safe, respectful, and responsible digital citizens.

By setting expectations for younger students that personal use of digital devices is not permitted in the learning environment it's anticipated that students will be able to form habits of use that differentiate between when it's appropriate to use these technologies and when it's not.

Department's position on mobile phones and digital devices

The department's position is that students are permitted to bring mobile phones and personal digital devices to school:

- to ensure their safety while travelling
- so parents can contact them outside of school hours.

However, schools may encourage students not to bring mobile phones and personal digital devices to school unless necessary.

Schools with primary enrolments

Primary aged students will not be permitted to access or use their mobile phones or personal devices during school hours. Schools with primary aged students must publish information that is readily accessible to their school community about:

- how and where students' mobile phones and personal devices that are brought to the school will be stored during the school day
- the consequences for non-compliance with the policy and strategies to support adherence to the policy.

Schools must use the [primary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 37.1KB)](#).

Schools with secondary enrolments

Principals of schools with secondary aged students, in consultation with students and their school community, will make local decisions about how and when secondary aged students will be permitted to access and use their mobile phones and personal devices while on school grounds or during the school day (if at all). This must be clearly documented using the [secondary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 36.2KB)](#).

Depending on decisions made by the school, this section of the local policy can include:

- specific times when secondary aged students are restricted from, or permitted to, access their personal device, including during recess or lunch breaks and before and after school hours
- specific circumstances where secondary aged students are restricted from, or permitted to, access their personal device including when specified by a Teacher for a learning purpose or off-site school activities such as camps or excursions
- different permissions or restrictions for different student year levels within the secondary cohort.

Schools with primary and secondary enrolments

Principals of schools with combined primary and secondary enrolments must undertake both processes with their school community. They may make a local decision to either:

- restrict the use of mobile devices across all year levels
- have a different policy for their secondary aged cohort that permits the use of mobile phones and personal devices in specified circumstances.

Both of the simplified policy templates must be completed for schools with combined primary and secondary enrolments:

- primary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 37.1KB)
- secondary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 36.2KB).

Storage

Schools must make local decisions, in consultation with their school community, about how and where students' personal devices that are brought to school are stored during school hours. This could include:

- in the student's school bag
- in an individual student locker
- being kept on or with the student (if access to devices is permitted during the school day)
- in a central storage location.

To minimise disruption it's recommended that schools direct students to switch off or mute their mobile phones and personal devices before storing them. Schools must ensure that secure storage is provided for personal devices that are not permitted to be kept on or with students.

Considerations when making local decisions

Schools should consider the following information when developing their local policy:

- the views of the school community including students, staff, families, and governing council

- the age and expectations of the student cohort

- the potential positive and negative impacts on student learning, including curriculum delivery, and how the device supports student learning

- the potential impact on specific groups of students (such as students with English as an additional language or dialect, students with disability, Aboriginal students, or students from low socio-economic backgrounds)

- local information on how mobile phones and personal devices are used at your school

- the potential positive and negative impacts on student behaviour and relationships

- the guiding information in this policy document

- current research into the impact of mobile phones in schools

- strategies to help students use technology and social networking tools effectively and safely – refer to the social media for schools and preschools policy.

Liability and damage, loss, or theft

The department does not provide insurance for accidental loss or damage to personal items including mobile phones and personal digital devices brought to schools by students. However, claims may be met under the department's public liability insurance where the loss or damage is attributable to a negligent act or omission on the part of the school. The department cannot waive liability with respect to mobile phones and personal devices.

Schools can choose to implement user agreements for secondary aged students and their parents in relation to how mobile phones and personal devices are used at school. This may reduce the risks of these devices being used inappropriately. However, the risk of claims for loss or damage to personal devices remains the same regardless of what is written in a user agreement.

Information published by the school, including local policies and user agreements (if in use), should not include statements that the school does not accept any responsibility or liability for personal devices that are brought to school.

Schools can contact the department's Claims Manager at education.legalclaims@sa.gov.au for more information and for specific guidance about how the school is managing mobile phones and personal devices.

Any incidents of loss or damage should be reported to the Claims Manager for advice on whether a claim may be met under the department's public liability insurance.

Storing or confiscating students' personal devices

The department could potentially be held liable for any loss, theft, or damage while the devices are being held by the school where:

- students are required to hand mobile phones or personal devices in to the school for the duration of the day (including where primary aged students bring their phones to school)

- devices are confiscated by a staff member.

For example, if students are required to hand their phones in to the front office at the beginning of the day and collect the phones when school has finished, then any loss or damage that arises from a failure to keep the phones secure and return them to the correct owner at the end of the day may result in a claim against the department. The school needs to give consideration to the issue of secure storage and identification of each personal device for return to the correct student.

Storing devices in individual lockers

If providing lockers, locks or padlocks to students, the school should make sure they are appropriately secure. Any loss (including theft) or damage that occurs to a personal device that results from a failure of the locker or lock provided by the school, may result in a claim against the department for the repair or replacement cost of the device.

The department does not accept any responsibility for any loss arising from a failure of a lock provided by the student's family or any failure by the student to use an appropriate lock on their locker. However, there may be circumstances where the department may be held liable if any breach of the lock provided by the student's family arose from an alleged failure by the school, including lack of supervision or appropriate response by the school to deliberate tampering with locks or lockers.

Using a personal device for a learning activity

Personal devices can be effective learning tools when used with appropriate Teacher guidance. There are many established uses for mobile technologies in the learning environment, including:

- educational apps and games

- advanced camera functionality

- strong applications for coding and robotics subjects.

When deciding to allow secondary aged students to use their own mobile phone or device for a learning activity, schools should consider whether the activity could instead be undertaken using a device that is owned by the school or has been brought to school under Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) arrangements, such as 1:1 laptops or tablets.

Internet connection for personal devices

If secondary aged students are permitted to use their own mobile phone or device to undertake a learning activity, noting that these devices may have their own internet connection, it's recommended that schools require those devices to be connected to the school's Information Communication Technology (ICT) network. The school's network and internet access is able to be managed to protect students from accessing content that is inappropriate or illegal while using their personal device.

Schools that allow secondary aged students to access the school's ICT network with a privately owned device must have a separate BYOD policy. They must make sure there is:

- clear direction for families about compliant device specifications and operating systems
- an ICT acceptable use agreement for students
- appropriate ICT security
- appropriate electrical safety including charging of devices and tagging and testing requirements.

The department's ICT Services can be contacted via the ICT portal for more information about BYOD policies and ICT acceptable use agreements.

Loss, theft or damage during learning activities

Where secondary aged students are required, encouraged, or allowed to use mobile phones and personal devices in learning activities there may be some circumstances where the department could potentially be held liable for any loss, theft or damage. For example, if secondary aged students are required to bring devices to school and are not provided with secure storage for their phone when it's not in use in the classroom, then any loss or damage that arises from a failure to provide locked storage may result in a claim against the department. This includes damage to a phone in a school bag during the lunchbreak.

Because of this the school needs to consider secure storage of personal devices when not in use in the classroom. There's also a potential for a claim to be made under the department's public liability insurance in the event that any loss, theft or damage occurs to a device as a result of any failure by the school to lock a classroom when the phone is not being used in class.

Consequences for non-compliance

Schools should use their existing behaviour management processes to respond to intentional and persistent breaches of the policy. This includes when students use a personal device inappropriately or at a time when it's not permitted.

Schools should indicate in their local policy:

- if confiscation of a personal device is a possible consequence of non-compliance
- how and when the device will be returned to the student or their parent.

Schools should also consider the issues of secure storage and ensuring that personal devices are returned to their owner. For example, placing devices in envelopes marked with the student's name and then requiring student ID on collection.

Misuse of mobile phones

Incidents of misuse of mobile phones and personal digital devices may be in relation to:

- bullying and harassment
- transmission of explicit images
- photographing, recording or uploading inappropriate content.

These incidents must be managed and reported in line with departmental policies and procedures including:

- reporting critical incidents and injuries procedure (PDF 365.9KB)
- behaviour support policy
- procedures for the suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students
- responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guidelines (PDF 400.7KB).

Some instances of misuse of a mobile phone or other personal device may constitute a criminal offence. Refer to the department's information about crime involving electronic evidence (e-crime) and the actions schools should follow in the case of an e-crime.

Exemptions from the policy

There may be exceptional circumstances where students require an exemption from the requirements of the policy. This could include where:

- the device is used to help monitor or manage a health condition
- the device is a negotiated adjustment to a learning program for a student with disability or learning difficulties
- the device is used for translation in the classroom by a student with English as an additional language
- a student has personal circumstances that require them to have more ready access to their personal device, such as being the primary carer for younger siblings.

Requests for exemptions from parents, adult or independent students, should be considered by the Principal or their delegate on a case-by-case basis. Approved exemptions must be documented in the student's health care plan, learning plan or student file.

Communication and review

The department encourages schools to undertake a wide consultation with their school community when making these decisions, including the views of students.

For schools with primary aged students, principals will consult with students and their school community to determine how and where students' personal devices that are brought to school will be stored during the school day, the consequences for non-compliance, and how all members of the school community will support adherence to the policy (refer to the roles and responsibilities section of this policy).

Principals of schools with secondary aged students will consult with students and their school community to develop and implement their local policy position.

The school's policy must be clearly communicated using the relevant simplified policy template(s) and easily accessible to all staff, students, and families. It's recommended that the policy be published on the school's website in line with school website content requirements.

The local policy must outline how the school community has been consulted in the development of the policy, where the policy can be accessed and when the policy will be reviewed.

Roles and responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are outlined in the primary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 37.1KB) and secondary student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy template (DOCX 36.2KB). Schools can add more information to this section of their local policy as appropriate to their context and their local decisions.

Principal

Make sure:

- the school's policy is clearly communicated and accessible to all students, staff, and families

- there is a process for regular review of the school's policy

- secure storage is provided for student personal devices that are handed in to school staff and individual lockers or locks that the school provides for students to store their belongings are appropriately secure (if applicable)

- processes are in place for monitoring internet and school network use by all members of the school community.

Enforce the policy and responses to instances of non-compliance.

Consider requests for exemptions from the policy from parents, adult or independent students on a case-by-case basis. Make sure that approved exemptions are documented and relevant staff, including temporary relief teachers, are informed about students with an exemption.

Model appropriate use of mobile phones and support families to understand the importance of promoting safe, responsible and respectful use of mobile phones to their children.

Report and respond to incidents of inappropriate use of personal devices in line with department policy and procedures and any legislative requirements.

School staff

Deliver learning opportunities and maintain a safe and productive learning environment. Take steps to minimise distractions from the non-educational use of personal devices in the learning environment.

Respond to instances of non-compliance in line with the school's policy.

Report and respond to incidents of inappropriate use of personal devices in line with department policy and procedures and any legislative requirements.

Make sure that any student personal devices handed in for their care are stored in a secure location and are returned to the student (or their parent).

Model appropriate use of mobile phones and support families to understand the importance of promoting safe, responsible and respectful use of mobile phones to their children.

Students

Comply with the requirements of the school's policy and follow all reasonable directions from the Principal and school staff.

If permitted to use a mobile phone or personal device at school in line with this policy (including in circumstances of exemption), do so in a safe, responsible and respectful way and support peers to do the same.

Communicate respectfully with others and do not use a mobile phone or other personal device to bully, harass or threaten another person.

Respect others' rights to privacy and do not take photos, film or audio records of other people without their knowledge or permission.

Parents

Support the implementation of the school's policy, including the consequences for non-compliance with the policy.

Use the school's formal communication channels in all instances to communicate with the school (including where a student requires early collection from school). Encourage their child to always report to a school staff member in the first instance if they become unwell or experience an issue at school.

Recognise the important role they play in supporting their child to use their mobile phone (or other personal device) in a safe, responsible and respectful way.

Definitions

mobile phones and personal devices

The devices covered by this policy include, but are not limited to:

- mobile phones and smart phones
- smart watches
- iPads and tablets
- other digital devices with capability of connecting to a cellular communication network, the internet or both.

school

A government school (where primary or secondary education or both is, or is to be, provided), special purpose school or special school established under the Education and Children's Services Act 2019. This includes preschools situated at a government school.

primary aged students

Students from reception to year 6 enrolled in South Australian government schools. In the 2021 school year only this definition also applies to year 7 students in government primary schools and schools with combined primary and secondary enrolments.

secondary aged students

Students from year 7 to 12 and adult students enrolled in South Australian government schools (with the exception that year 7 students in government primary schools and schools with combined primary and secondary enrolments will be considered primary aged students in the 2021 school year).

parent

For the purposes of this policy, the term parent refers to all persons responsible for the child. A person responsible for the child means a person who is the child's:

- biological parent, adoptive parent or other person recognised as a parent if the child was conceived following a fertilisation procedure or under a surrogacy arrangement
- guardian
- person standing in loco parentis.

This does not include a person who has had their legal custody, guardianship or responsibility for the child removed by a court, Act or law. As an example, a biological parent who has had their custody, guardianship or parental responsibility for the child removed by a parenting order made under Family Law Act 1975 is not a person responsible for the child.

guardian

A person who has legal guardianship or custody of a child.

in loco parentis

A person acting in a parental style relationship with a child, where the person has intended to place themselves in the position of a parent toward a child and has assumed the same duty and authority as a parent with respect to the nurturing, control and protection of a child. A person in loco parentis may include a person:

- in a de facto relationship with a child's biological parent where they have assumed responsibility for the child
- who has taken over care of a child after the death of both biological parents, or where there has been a family breakdown and the child is estranged from both biological parents
- In an informal fostering arrangement.

This person does not have to assume any or all financial responsibility for a child to satisfy this definition.

secure storage

Storage that cannot be readily accessed by those without permission to do so (such as a locked receptacle).

Supporting information

The following resources relate to mobile phones in schools, e-crime, online bullying, and cyber safety:

Student use of mobile phones and personal devices at school

Crime involving electronic evidence (e-crime)

Bullying

Bullying Prevention Strategy (PDF 5.5MB)

Cyber safety school resources

Keeping safe: child protection curriculum

eSafety Commissioner

Australian Curriculum

Related policies

Critical incidents and injuries procedure (PDF 365.9KB)

Behaviour support policy

Procedures for the suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students

Responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guidelines (PDF 400.7KB)

ICT cyber security standard (PDF 592.7KB)

Cyber safety use agreement template (DOC 42.0KB)

Machinery, equipment and electrical safety standard (PDF 386.3KB)

Social media for schools and preschools policy

Related legislation

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Equal Opportunity Act 1984

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