

Our Lady of Mercy Primary School

Mobile Phone, Smart Watches and Electronic Devices Policy

(Updated in line with Department of Education Circular 0044/2025)

The widespread use of mobile phones, Smart watches and electronic devices among children has raised concerns around **privacy, safety, online harm, and classroom disruption**. In line with **Circular 0044/2025**, Our Lady of Mercy Primary School is updating its policy to reflect the Department of Education's new directive **banning mobile phone use in all primary schools**, with only limited, clearly defined exceptions.

This policy aims to ensure:

- The **safety, privacy and wellbeing** of all pupils
- A **distraction-free learning environment supporting concentration, academic performance and development**
- An opportunity for children to **disconnect** from their online world
- Support for **positive interpersonal relationships**
- **Staff professionalism and leadership by example**

PUPILS – MOBILE PHONES , SMART WATCHES & ELECTRONIC DEVICES

- **Pupils are strictly prohibited from bringing mobile phones , smart watches or any electronic communication devices to school** under Circular 0044/2025.
- This includes mobile phones, smartwatches with messaging/call functionality, tablets, iPods, and similar devices.
- Devices should not be brought on school premises or to any school-related activity, including trips, games, or after-school clubs.

Contact Between Parents and Pupils

- In all cases, parents/guardians must contact the school office if they need to reach their child during school hours.
- Pupils needing to contact home will be supported by staff to do so using the school phone.

Exceptional Circumstances

In line with Circular 0044/2025 the school will adopt a common sense and compassionate approach that is fair and transparent in application in determining exemptions to the ban.

- In **very limited and exceptional cases**, a request may be submitted in writing to the Principal outlining the specific reason a phone is needed **outside school hours** (e.g. for safety when walking home alone after an after-school activity).
- Other exemptions would include **Medical reasons** – phone needed to monitor blood pressure, blood glucose levels, seizures, Additional /specific educational needs for various tasks -visual, hearing, speech and language impairments...
- Any request will be reviewed by the **Principal and Board of Management**, and must meet Departmental criteria for exception.
- If approved:
 - The device must remain **switched off and dropped off at reception first thing in the morning, where it will be stored securely in a box**, during the school day. (recommended by circular)
 - The device must then be collected by the pupil at home time. The onus will be on the student to collect their device from reception and not on the teacher.
 - The school remains open, usually, until 4pm for any child who might forget to collect their device at 2:30.
 - The school will accept **no responsibility for damage, loss or misuse** of the device.
- No other exceptions will be considered.

Breach of Policy

- Devices found in a pupil's possession without written consent will be **confiscated immediately**.
- Devices will only be returned to a **parent/guardian**.
- Breaches will be treated as **serious disciplinary matters** in line with the Code of Behaviour.

USE DURING SCHOOL TRIPS, ACTIVITIES & OUTINGS

- **No mobile phones or devices are permitted** on school trips, tours, matches, or off-site activities during school hours.
- If an **exceptional after-hours contact need arises** on a trip, the same written permission process applies. If approved, the device must remain switched off and will be held by the teacher until the end of the activity.

PHOTOS, VIDEO & SOCIAL MEDIA

- On **special occasions** (e.g. school concerts), parents may be permitted to take photos/videos of their own child, but:
 - Images/videos must be taken discreetly.
 - Photos including other children **must not be shared on social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).
 - This is to respect all pupils' privacy rights under GDPR.

INAPPROPRIATE OR MISUSE OF DEVICES (INCLUDING OUTSIDE SCHOOL)

- If a pupil uses a device (in or out of school hours) to:
 - Bully, intimidate or harass others
 - Send offensive, threatening or inappropriate content
 - Record or share unauthorised photos, videos or audio
 - Share inappropriate material involving school staff or studentsThen disciplinary action will be taken in line with the **school's Code of Behaviour**.
- **Serious misuse** may also be reported to the **Gardaí**, as it may constitute a criminal offence under Irish law (e.g. harassment or illegal sharing of images).

STAFF – USE OF PHONES & DEVICES

- Staff must have mobile phones **on silent** or turned off during teaching time.
- Calls or messages should only be taken in emergencies or with prior agreement.
- Use of mobile phones during non-contact time should be kept **discreet and professional**, and never in the presence of pupils.
- The school phone should be used for parent or agency contact wherever possible.
- Staff with specific duties requiring phone access (e.g. HSCL, SEN coordination, contact with external services) may do so, but always in line with child safeguarding and data protection policies.

PARENTS & VISITORS

- Parents/visitors are asked not to use mobile phones while inside the school building.
- Phones may be used in the **HSCL Room** during organised parent activities.
- **No unauthorised photography or video recording** of pupils is permitted on school grounds.

SUMMARY

This policy is rooted in child protection, wellbeing and educational best practice. It reflects national guidelines under Circular 0044/2025, and we ask all members of our school community to **support its implementation in full**.

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____

Approved by Board of Management

Date: _____