



MOBILE PHONE POLICY

POLICY AUTHOR:

SENIOR DEPUTY HEAD

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NEXT REVIEW DATE:

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RGS Worcester Mobile Phone Policy

1. Rationale

At RGS Worcester, we are committed to supporting the wellbeing, learning, and personal development of our pupils in a modern, connected world. Mobile phones, while often helpful for communication and logistics, can also act as a major distraction, contribute to social stress, and limit face-to-face interaction during the school day. This Policy should be read alongside the following policies:

- The RGS Use of Images Policy
- The Safeguarding Children Policy
- The Artificial Intelligence Policy
- The On-Line Safety and Use of On-Line Devices Policy
- RGS Data Protection Policies

This policy is based on growing evidence, national guidance, and feedback from staff, pupils, and families. It provides a clear and consistent framework to ensure the appropriate use of mobile phones across all Year groups, with particular structure for pupils in Years Seven to Nine.

The enhanced restrictions for pupils in Year Seven to Nine are designed to help young people cultivate healthy habits with technology, and to prevent an over-reliance on mobile phones and social media. **It is important that parents, pupils and teachers recognise that pupils below 13 years of age should not have access to social media, as in law.**

2. Aims

- To reduce distraction and promote focus during the school day
- To support healthy digital habits and self-regulation
- To promote fairness, consistency, and transparency across all Year groups
- To balance the need for structure with family communication and safeguarding

3. Structure and Year Group Expectations

Arrangements for Pupils in Year Seven, Eight and Nine

Pupils in Years Seven to Nine must adhere to one of four approved options for mobile phone use during the school day (8:30am – 3:45pm). This approach ensures consistent expectations while giving families flexibility.

Approved Options

1. Smartphone with Blackout App (recommended – **more information below**)
 - The Blackout app must be installed on a pupil's device by parents and activated during school hours.
 - The app restricts access to third-party apps (e.g. social media, games, camera) but allows essential functions like:
 - Phone calls
 - Text messages
 - Navigation (e.g. Maps)
 - The phone must still be switched-off and out-of-sight (e.g. in a bag) throughout the day.

- If the app is disabled, this will be logged on the School's centralised dashboard and visible to pastoral and administrative staff.
2. Basic or 'Dumbphone'
 - Pupils may bring a simple handset that allows only calls and SMS messaging, with no/limited camera and internet function.
 - Devices must be switched off and stored in bags during the day.
 3. Lockable Magnetic Pouch (for non-compatible smartphones **only**)
 - Pupils whose phones cannot run Blackout due to incompatible software may use a school-provided pouch.
 - Phones must be sealed at the start of the day and unsealed by staff at dismissal.
 - Pouches are not available for convenience, only for **proven** incompatibility (see below for details).
 4. No Phone Brought to School
 - Pupils may leave their phone at home.

Families will confirm their chosen option with the School at the start of each academic year, with full details and permissions for the use of Blackout sent to parents and set-up support offered by Tutors within the first half term.

Spot checks, based on families' chosen options for mobile phone restrictions, will be completed throughout the year by Form Tutors and other pastoral staff.

Inappropriate use of phones will result in School sanctions being applied, with the full range of sanctions being available depending on severity of misuse.

It is important that pupils recognise that if the Blackout app is disabled during the school day without good reason, or the app is deleted so that a phone's status does not appear on the School's dashboard, this will likely result in a higher-level sanction with Disciplinary Units.

Arrangements for Pupils in Year Ten and Eleven

- Pupils in Year Ten and Eleven may bring a mobile phone to school, but it must be:
 - Switched off and kept out of sight from 8:30am to 3:45pm
 - Stored in a bag or locker, not in blazer pockets or on desks
- Phones must not be used at any point during the school day, including break and lunch.
- Sixth Form-only areas are off-limits to younger pupils, and this includes phone use.

Again, inappropriate use of phones will result in School sanctions being applied, with the full range of sanctions being available depending on severity of misuse.

Arrangements for Pupils in the Sixth Form

Sixth Form pupils have more flexible arrangements reflecting their maturity and preparation for independent life. Sixth Formers must adhere to the following:

- Phones may only be used:
 - In Gordon House (the Sixth Form Centre)
 - Before and after school, and during morning and lunch breaks

- Phones must be kept silent and out of sight at all other times, including:
 - Corridors
 - Classrooms
 - The Dining Hall
- Use in lessons is permitted only with express permission from a member of staff (e.g. to check calendar apps etc., but pupils must recognise that most academic requirements can be completed by an iPad.)
- As above, inappropriate use will lead to School sanctions or restrictions on privileges.

4. About the Blackout App

Blackout is a mobile phone management system designed for schools, offering a trust-based approach to phone restriction. It enables pupils to activate co-ordinated Screen Time restrictions during the school day, supporting focus and wellbeing without removing control of their devices or the function of essential apps.

What the Blackout App Does:

- Restricts access to third-party apps (e.g. social media, YouTube, games, camera) during school hours
- Allows essential functions to remain available:
 - Phone calls
 - SMS and iMessage
 - Maps/navigation
- Encourages digital self-regulation
- Displays a simple status (active/inactive) to school staff on a secure dashboard
- Can be paused manually if necessary, but this is logged for review
- Only pupil name and School email address is shared with Blackout as part of set-up for the app. (On request, a parental email can be used instead of a pupil's School email)

What the App Does Not Do:

- It does not track GPS location
- It does not access, view, or store content such as messages, photos, browsing history, or files
- It does not monitor app usage, screen time, or personal data
- It does not lock the device or take remote control
- It does not share data with third parties
- It does not drain Mobile Data (less than 25MB per 3 month period)
- It does not drain a phone's battery, rather improves it due to other app restrictions

Device Compatibility – Minimum Technical Requirements

In order to function properly, the Blackout app relies on built-in operating system features such as Apple Screen Time or Android's Digital Wellbeing system. Devices must meet the following minimum criteria:

Compatible Devices

Apple (iPhone)

- Minimum iOS version: iOS 16 or later
- Must support Apple Screen Time features (and parents must set a Screen Time passcode or manage the device through 'Family' settings).
- Must have access to the App Store

- Device must not be jailbroken

Typically, compatible iPhone models:

- iPhone 8 and newer
- Devices older than iPhone 7 are not supported

Android

- Minimum Android version: Android 11 or later
- Must have access to the Google Play Store
- Must support Digital Wellbeing & Parental Controls
- Must not be rooted

Typically, compatible Android models:

- Google Pixel 2 and later
- Samsung Galaxy A, S, and Note series (2020 models and later)
- Nokia, OnePlus, Motorola, Xiaomi, and other brands with Android 11+ capability

What If My Child's Phone Is Non-Compatible?

If your child's smartphone does not meet these requirements, it will be classified as non-compatible, and they will be offered the lockable magnetic pouch option instead (see Section 3, Option 3).

Appendix 1 provides further information on the permissions needed in order for the Blackout app to operate fully and as directed.

5. Breaches of Policy

All pupils are expected to adhere to this policy. Breaches will result in:

- First offence (phone seen being used during the school day): Device confiscated and returned at the end of the day
- Second offence: Confiscation and parental contact
- Repeated or serious misuse (including disabling of the Blackout app): Escalated pastoral consequences and possible loss of phone privileges

6. Exceptions and Accessibility

Requests for exceptions (e.g. medical monitoring apps or accessibility features) must be made in writing to the relevant Head of Year. Each case will be reviewed individually and sensitively.

7. Support and Parental Involvement

Parents are strongly encouraged to support their child in choosing the most appropriate phone management option, to have open discussions at home about screen use, and to contact the School if they have questions or need guidance.

8. Review and Contact

This policy will be reviewed annually during each Trinity Term and adjusted as appropriate based on feedback, safeguarding guidance, and changes in technology.

Effective Date: September 2025; Reviewed and updated October 2025.

Policy Owner: Senior Deputy Head

Next Review: June 2026

Appendix 1

Blackout App Permissions Information

To function effectively and enforce the School's policy, the Blackout app requires several permissions on both iOS and Android devices. These permissions must be granted when the app is installed and the Activation Code is entered.

For iOS (Apple) Devices

- **Screen Time:** This is the primary permission that allows Blackout to manage device usage. It must be enabled to allow the app to set limits on app use, block access to apps, and enforce schedules.
- **VPN:** The app utilizes a VPN (Virtual Private Network) to ensure that students cannot bypass the restrictions set by the app. This is a key feature that provides stronger protection against workarounds, but only blocks traffic and does not monitor it.
- **Notifications:** Blackout needs this permission to control app notifications. This helps to reduce distractions by preventing alerts from blocked apps from appearing during the school day.
- **Background App Refresh:** This setting must be enabled for the app to run in the background, keeping the blocking function active.
- **Low Power Mode Off:** This function can disable background app refresh and other background activities, which could interfere with the app's functionality.

For Android Devices

- **Usage Access (App Usage):** This permission allows Blackout to access installed apps and monitor their usage. This is crucial for the app to know which apps to block.
- **Overlay Permission:** This permission allows Blackout to draw over other apps. The app uses this to prevent access to certain installed apps by creating a visual block or overlay on the screen.
- **Do Not Disturb (DND):** Blackout uses this permission to manage notifications and remove distractions. This helps to ensure that alerts from blocked apps do not override the active blocking.
- **VPN:** On Android, the VPN permission is used to prevent notifications in a restricted zone as part of the app's core functionality.
- **Notifications:** Similar to iOS, Blackout needs notification permissions to remove alerts from blocked apps during school hours.