MOBILE PHONE POLICY

Policy Author:	Senior Deputy Head
Date Created by Author:	June 2025
Most Recent Review:	September 2026
Next Review Date:	September 2027

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 the UK Government guidance on mobile phone use in schools, and the expectation for all schools in England to be 'phone free'. This means, in reality, that pupils must not access or use their mobile phones during the school day and when on school site; the restrictions outlined in this policy achieve this outcome, adhering to Government guidance and the Independent School Standards (April 2026).

The full Government documentation can be found here.

The specific enhanced restrictions for mobile phones apply to all pupils in Year Seven to Eleven, and 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.

Expectations for mobile phones usage for students in the Sixth Form are outlined below, and although the same restrictions do not apply to these students, they must not undermine the expectations for the rest of the pupils. This adheres to the Government guidance for schools with Sixth Forms, as outlined above.

The use of Smart Glasses or any other wearable recording device, video or audio, is prohibited at RGS Worcester. No member of staff, pupil, parent or visitor may use or wear any such recording device when on School premises.

In addition to mobile phones and smart glasses, this policy extends to smartwatches and other smart wristwear. To maintain a completely phone-free environment, any wearable device containing independent cellular connectivity (4G/5G), microphone or camera hardware, or offline audio/video recording capabilities is strictly prohibited on school premises for all pupils in Year Seven to Upper Sixth. These devices must not be brought into school under any circumstances by any pupil. A list of illustrative examples of prohibited and permitted devices is included in Appendix 2.

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 to Eleven

Pupils in Years Seven to Eleven 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.

In addition to the restrictions outlined below, pupils must not access or use their phone when on school premises. This restriction applies once pupils enter the **inner gates** of the school from the outer perimeter. There are signs on each of the School's entry points to remind pupils of this expectation. Even after the end of the teaching day, pupils must not use their phones until they have left the inner gates.

Any use of a mobile phone during the school day and when on school grounds will result in an immediate confiscation of the device, and a Single Detention for a first offence given. Sanctions will escalate for repeated misuse.

For pupils found using their phones when leaving the site at the end of the school day, confiscation will not occur, but sanctions will be given and logged with the Whiteladies Office.

<u>Approved Options for Phones</u>

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 - this will happen automatically on a timing system.
    - 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)
        - NFC payments
    - The phone **must still be switched-off and out-of-sight** (e.g. in a bag) throughout the day.
    - If the Blackout 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 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 the Blackout app 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.

Form Tutors will check pupils usage every morning, ensuring that the Blackout app is running as it should be, and non-compatible phones are locked in pouches. For those families who choose for their child not to have their phone in school or to use a 'dumbphone', this will be checked each morning alongside all other Tutor checks.

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.

Any phone due to be running the Blackout app that does not connect to the dashboard each day, will be challenged by Heads of Year, overseen daily by the Senior Deputy Head. Pupils must appreciate that any attempt to circumnavigate or disable the limitations imposed by the app will result in significant sanctions.

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, as well during study periods.

- Phones must be kept silent and out of sight at all other times, including:
    - Corridors
    - Classrooms
    - The Dining Hall
    - Walking across site

- 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, any use outside of these expectations will lead to confiscation and School sanctions being applied.

Arrangements for Smartwatches and Wearables

To prevent unmonitored communication and covert recording in-line with DfE regulations, all pupils at RGS Worcester are prohibited from wearing or bringing smartwatches with communication or recording capabilities to school. Pupils are permitted to wear only traditional analogue watches, non-smart digital watches, or basic fitness trackers that lack microphone, camera, and recording hardware (which function as step counters and timepieces when disconnected from a smartphone).

Pupils in Year Seven to Eleven will not have notification functionality through any permitted smartwatch, as the tethered mobile phone will be restricted by one of our management options outlined above. Students in the Sixth Form may maintain a permitted smartwatch connection to their phones, and within the restriction methods outlined in this policy, but must not be seen to be using a permitted smartwatch for anything other than checking the time around the School site and outside of Gordon House.

Every pupil in all Year groups bringing a watch to school must have an active parent-signed digital declaration form on record, indicating the exact device category.

4. About the Blackout App

Blackout is a mobile phone management system designed for schools, offering a digital approach to phone restriction. It enables pupils to activate co-ordinated Screen Time restrictions during the school day, supporting focus and wellbeing without removing the safety functions of a mobile phone. The app, essentially, turns any smartphone into a 'dumbphone' during school hours, and is regarded as a 'digital pouch'.

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
    - NFC payments
- 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

The Blackout app requires mobile data to operate fully. If pupils reach their monthly 4G/5G allowance, they must hand-in their devices to the Whiteladies Office for safekeeping in the mobile phone cabinets. Alternatively, connection to a specific WiFi network utilised only for Blackout is possible, and pupils should speak with the IT team about this.

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). Alternatively, they may choose one of the other options listed above.

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, or the Blackout dashboard logs non-use of the app for a particular day without reasonable explanation): Device confiscated and returned at the end of the day; Single Detention given as a fixed sanction.
- Second offence: Confiscation and parental contact; Double Detention given.
- Repeated or serious misuse (including disabling of the Blackout app without reasonable explanation): escalated consequences, starting with a Pastoral Detention, and possible loss of phone privileges

Smartwatch Violations:

- Any prohibited smartwatch being openly used by a pupil will be confiscated and taken to the Whiteladies Office for secure storage.
- First offence: confiscation and returned at the end of the day; Single Detention issued.
- Second offence: confiscation; parental contact; Double Detention given.
- Third offence: ban on bringing any wearable wristwear to school and higher-level sanction applied for deliberate policy breach.

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; Blackout can 'white list' particular apps, and so using a device to monitor a specific health diagnosis does not prevent a pupil from running the app.

<u>Medical and SEND Exemption (Smartwatches)</u>

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014, pupils who require a smartwatch for continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) or other registered medical tracking or diagnosed purpose may be granted an exemption. When approved, a tailored risk assessment will be created and the device can be used to run the required

medical application during the school day, with all cellular, messaging, and notification settings disabled.

Catering Payments

We ask that pupils use a physical card or cash option for payment at breakfast or break servings; although the Blackout app allows NFC payments, pupils should only use this option as a last resort if they have forgotten to bring another payment method with them. Under the government's allowance for specific, risk-assessed circumstances, pupils are permitted to have their device visible only at the catering till point having switched-on their phone.

Once the transaction is complete, the phone must be immediately switched-off and put away. Using the phone for any other purpose at the till, or having it visible while queuing, will result in immediate confiscation by the member of staff on duty.

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.
Fully reviewed and updated following Government guidance: June and September 2026
Policy Owner: Senior Deputy Head
Next Review: September 2027 (or sooner, depending on any further changes to regulatory expectations)

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.

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.

Appendix 2: Illustrative Smartwatch Device Categorisation Examples

Please note: The following list provides illustrative examples to assist parents in verifying device compatibility. It is not exhaustive. Parents are required to verify the technical specifications of their child's device, specifically checking for built-in microphones, local voice recording capabilities, cellular SIMs, and cameras, before allowing them to wear it to school.

Prohibited Devices (Not Permitted for **all** pupils):

- Apple: All Apple Watch models (Series 1-10, SE, Ultra). Contains native voice recording hardware and microphones.
- Samsung: All Galaxy Watch models (Active, Series 3-7, Ultra). Contains offline voice recorders and microphones.
- Google and WearOS: Google Pixel Watch (all generations), Fossil smartwatches, Mobvoi TicWatch.
- Garmin (Voice-Capable Models): Garmin Fēnix 8, Garmin Venu 2 Plus, Garmin Venu 3 / 3S, Garmin Forerunner 570. Contains physical microphones and speakers.
- Children's GPS and Cellular Trackers: Xplora (X5/X6/XGO3), Gabb Watch, TickTalk, Spacetalk, VTech Kidizoom.
- Covert/AI Recorders: Any wearable device or pendant featuring built-in audio recording hardware.

Illustrative Permissible Devices (Permitted across **all** Year Groups):

- Garmin (Standard Sports Models): Forerunner (55, 165, 255, 265, 955, 965), Fēnix (6, 7, 7 Pro), Epix (Gen 2, Pro), Instinct series, Vívoactive 5, Vívomove series, Vívosmart 5. (Note: These lack microphones and speakers).
- Huawei: Huawei Band series (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11 Pro), Watch Fit series (Fit SE, Fit 3, Fit 2 Active).
- Fitbit: Inspire series (1-3), Charge series (4-6), Luxe, Flex.
- Xiaomi and Amazfit: Smart Band series (7-10 base models without microphones), Amazfit Band series, Bip 3/5 base models.
- Hybrid and Traditional: Withings Hybrid watches, Casio G-Shock (Bluetooth step-tracker models), Timex Ironman, standard digital or analogue watches.