



Monday 25th February 2019

Dear Parents / Carers,

Remarkably, half an academic year has passed since September already! I have been so impressed by the positivity of most of our students and the desire to improve their school, however I am writing to you regarding the use of mobile phones within school. This is an issue which has been much publicised in the news over recent months, in fact you may even be aware that the Minister for Education has recently called for a ban on mobile phones in school.

Over recent months I have become more and more concerned about reports linking the use of social media by young people, with poor mental health. Our policy at St Thomas More has been that students are allowed to use their mobile phones during social times only and exclusively in the dining room, however you will be aware that the research is now suggesting that the way that social media is used can be detrimental to the mental health of young people. Furthermore, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) has now published the results of a survey of secondary school Headteachers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in March. This confirms the following:

- 95% felt that the mental health and wellbeing of a proportion of their pupils had suffered as a result of social media use, with many (39%) saying more than half of their pupils were affected.
- Almost all had received reports of pupils being bullied on social media, with 40% saying that incidents were reported on a daily or weekly basis.
- Almost all had received reports of pupils encountering upsetting material on social media – such as sexual content, self-harm, bullying, or hate speech – with 27% saying incidents were reported on a daily or weekly basis.
- 89% had received reports of pupils being approached by strangers on social media sites.
- 93% had received reports of pupils experiencing low self-esteem as a result of seeing idealised images and experiences on social media, with 22% saying that pupils reported such feelings on a daily or weekly basis.
- 96% had received reports of pupils missing out on sleep as a result of social media use, with 32% saying they received such reports on a daily or weekly basis.
- Nine out of 10 head teachers (93%) said that new laws and regulation should be introduced to ensure social media sites keep children safe, and 77% said the government and social media companies should produce more information for parents.





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We educate our students about staying safe online, however social media is a genuine threat to this as we simply cannot control it. The school needs to be a safe space where children can be children, where young people can talk, laugh and socialise face to face, rather than via a device, and where any issues - either online or outside of school - can be left at the school gate.

As a result of this, from Monday 4th March students will not be permitted to use mobile phones for any purpose whatsoever whilst in the school, from 9am to 3.10pm. This includes making calls, texting, using the internet, taking photos/videos, and checking the time. Mobile phones must be switched off (not on silent mode), and out of view of all fellow students and staff at all times. This also applies to iWatches and any other electronic devices or web enabled sources of information.

A real focus for us as a school has been to ensure the very best climate for learning so that students are fully prepared for lessons and any distraction is eliminated. Mobile phone use within school has a detrimental effect on learning in classrooms and the socialisation of our students in school. Therefore, students will be informed during the coming week within their assemblies that, as of Monday 4th March, **mobile phones must not be used by pupils within school from 9.00am until 3.10pm.** Students who need to contact their parents or parents who need to contact their children should do so through the office. **Those students who are seen with, or using, a mobile phone in school within these times will have the phone confiscated until the end of the day where they will be able to pick it up from reception.**

To ensure that the policy is clear, we have summarised how the policy will be implemented below:

1. Mobile phones should be **'off and away'** at all times. Any phone seen or heard will be confiscated; this includes phones on display in shirt pockets.
2. Phones that are confiscated will be returned to students at the end of the day in the first instance, although should there be a repeated occurrence a call will be made home with the requirement for a parent / carer to collect the phone on their child's behalf.
3. The restriction is in place at all times while students are in the grounds of the school building.

We would ask that you further discuss this with your child over the weekend in order to reinforce the positive benefits of a school day free from mobile phones and social media. May we take this opportunity to therefore thank you in advance for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Mr Rayner
Headteacher

