

24 June 2025

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As part of our ongoing efforts to provide the best possible learning environment for our students, we are revisiting and resetting our policy regarding the use of mobile phones on school premises in preparation for next academic year. You will remember I contacted you earlier in the academic year and the results of the survey from that consultation were overwhelmingly in support of managing phone use more effectively.

Mobile phones have become an integral part of our daily lives, providing convenience and connectivity. However, their presence in the school environment has also introduced challenges that require our collective attention.

Research from the Department of Education published this year shows that:

Impact on mental health & wellbeing:

- There has been an increase in major depression (145% in girls / 161% in boys) since 2010 when smart phones were introduced.
- Rates of self-harm have tripled, and rates of suicide have increased by 91% in boys and 167% in girls since their introduction in 2010.
- There has been a 52% Increase in screen time between 2020 and 2022, with 25% of young people using mobile phones in a way that is consistent with behavioural addiction. (*feeling panicky or upset when the phone is unavailable, finding it difficult to control the amount of time spent on the phone and using the phone to the detriment of other enjoyable activities*).

Impact on learning:

- The presence of a smart phone affects attention and concentration, impacting learning and recall [of knowledge].
- It can take up to 20 minutes for students to refocus on what they were learning after receiving a notification on their device.

- Young people exposed to more than 2 hours of screen time on smart phones per day have worse working memory, processing speed, attention levels, language skills and executive function compared to those who do not.

As an academy we have a duty to create a learning environment which is calm, safe and free from distraction so all students, whatever their background, can learn and thrive.

As such, from September 2025 to support our students to ensure that mobile devices are not to be seen, used or heard during the school day we will be introducing a new mobile device management policy.

1. Every student in years 7-11 will be assigned a personal Focus Pouch, which they will be expected to bring with them to school every day. (See photo below.)



2. At morning line up time students will put their phone in their pouch and lock it so that they cannot be distracted by their phone during the school day.
3. Students will unlock the pouch as they leave the school site at the end of their day. The pouches will be kept by the student throughout.

NB: If there is an emergency, you can of course contact the school and vice versa.

Trial Week

To get students used to the focus pouch system we will be holding a preparation week starting on 14th July 2025 where students will use the pouches and get used to the system.

Further details can be found in the Mobile Devices Management Policy on our school website here [ORA Mobile Device Management Policy](#).

The exception to this is for students who have been given permission by the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Ms Goodfellow, to use their phone for medical purposes, e.g. to check insulin levels. Students with permission to use their mobile device for medical purposes will be given a Focus Medical Pouch which is secured by Velcro rather than locked, enabling the student to access their phone when needed for their medical need. Ms Goodfellow will be speaking to parents and students prior to the trial week, please wait to hear from her.

We firmly believe it is in the best interest of our students' educational experience and personal development and ask that all parents and carers discuss and reinforce the policy at home as appropriate, including the risks associated with mobile phone use and the benefits of a mobile phone-free school environment.

If you have any concerns or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us. Further details regarding the trial week and management of phones will be shared in due course.

Thank you for your understanding and support as we strive to create the most conducive learning environment for our students.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ms Williams', with a stylized, cursive-like script.

Ms Williams

Principal

Ormiston Rivers Academy