

February 2020

Dear parents and carers

We are considering changing our policy as regards use of mobile phones and other related devices in school and would like to give you the opportunity to offer any feedback before any final decisions are made.

At the moment, students are expected to have mobile devices turned off during all lessons unless a teacher has given permission for their use as a learning tool for a specific activity. They are also not allowed to use devices on corridors at any time. However, devices *are* currently permitted in the canteen and outside at breaks and lunchtimes, as well as before and after school hours.

As things stand, we are minded to follow the lead of many schools around the country and forbid the use of mobile devices at all times other than when teachers give explicit permission. There are several reasons for considering such a policy and the main ones are:

- The mounting body of evidence that suggests excessive mobile phone use can be harmful to young people. Constantly checking phones for messages, alerts, social media 'likes' and so on makes it very difficult to switch off from the accompanying pressures many young people can feel under. We believe there are strong arguments for supporting them in having at least a few hours during the day where they can 'detox' from all of this. Our experience (including many discussions with parents) strongly suggests that an element of compulsion is usually needed to achieve a total break from phones; simply encouraging young people to limit use doesn't generally work very well as a strategy on its own.
- Over the last couple of years, we have noticed a big increase in the numbers of students seemingly glued to their devices at social times. There is something rather sad about watching a hall full of children sitting having their lunch and scarcely talking to one another because they are looking at their phones.
- Access to electronic devices acts as a disincentive when encouraging students to take part in one or more of the (arguably) more productive many extra-curricular activities available to them.
- Whilst we have far fewer issues than most schools, it cannot be denied that there has been an increase in the number of problems caused by ready access to phones during school hours. These include inappropriate use of cameras and unkindness/bullying over social media. The experience of schools who have banned phones is that these kinds of issues are significantly reduced.
- Even when on silent, phones act as a distraction in lessons. Banning phones more or less altogether would make it far less likely that students would have phones in pockets buzzing and distracting them during lessons.

Generally, our policy has worked well enough but, on balance, we think that now is probably a sensible time to change the policy for the reasons given above. The precise details will need careful thought, but the kind of policy we are thinking about would mean:

- The only times phones or other electronic devices (including tablets and wireless earphones) are allowed would be when a member of staff has given explicit permission for their use, under supervision and for

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a specific learning need (e.g. the use of an app for GCSE revision). We recognise mobile devices can be a useful learning tool and do not want to lose this by banning them altogether.

- At all other times, devices would need to be turned off and kept in bags from the moment students arrive on site in the morning until they leave the buildings at the end of the day.
- A ban on smart watches altogether (because we are noticing a growing problem of smart watches causing a distraction in lessons and it would be too difficult to enforce the points above with watches).
- This would all apply from the moment students entered the school site in the morning up until the end of the school day.
- Failure to follow the policy would result in confiscation until the end of the day and, on the second occasion in a half-term, the device being kept until a parent or carer can come and collect it (i.e. the same policy we currently have for when devices are used when they shouldn't be).
- Sixth form students would retain the privilege of being able to use devices in their non-contact periods in designated spaces.
- Parents needing to get messages to students would be able to do this by contacting Student Services, who will pass messages on. Likewise, students needing to contact home during the day are always able to do so via Student Services. We appreciate this might be a little less convenient, but schools who have banned phones tell us they have never had any significant problems – and, indeed, this kind of approach always worked perfectly well in the days before mobile phones!

Tutors will be talking to students over the next couple of weeks and students will be given the opportunity to make their views known on this issue via form representatives and the hall and school council structure.

We would also welcome any feedback from parents and carers on the prospect of us moving towards such a policy. There is no need to respond if you do not feel strongly either way and/or if you are comfortable with a revised policy along these lines. **Please email any feedback to amogey@lymmhigh.org.uk by Friday 13th March.**

Once we have considered any feedback from parents and carers alongside that from staff, students and governors, I will write again with a final decision. In practice, this means that any change would be unlikely to come into effect before May half-term at the earliest.

Kind regards



Gwyn Williams
Headteacher