COWLEY
INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

Hard Lane, St Helens, WA10 6PN. Tel: 01744 678 030
Email: **enquiries@cowleysthelens.org.uk** | **www.cowley.st-helens.sch.uk**

Executive Principal: Mr CM Sheeran, MSc., B.A. (Hons), N.P.Q.H
Principal: Mr R Cormack, BSc (Hons), N.P.Q.H

April 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

The plans to introduce a mobile phone ban at Cowley are developing, and I appreciate your comments, suggestions, and support.

The following has taken place so far:

- College Governor consultation
- Letter to parents
- Staff consultation
- Parent consultation
- Student consultation and 'vote'
- Student assemblies

I appreciate this is a very emotive topic and we saw this at the parental consultation, where we had parents stating that we should "move to a full ban," to parents very concerned about their child not being safe without a mobile phone.

The Department for Education has instructed schools to develop and implement a policy to prohibit the use of mobile phones and other similar devices which reflects the school's context. You can find the policy by following this link: Mobile phones in schools - February 2024 (publishing.service.gov.uk).

There are four options:

Option one   No mobile phones on the school premises
Option two   Mobile phones handed in on arrival.
Option three   Mobile phones to be kept in a secure location, that students cannot access throughout the day.
Option four   Never used, seen, or heard.

Following consultation and examining our current context the college has chosen option four. However, we are calling this **"Always powered down and in bags."** This will support students to build this reasonable and appropriate habit, so they are focused during lessons and throughout the school day. I am fully aware that many parents, governors and staff would want the college to move to option one or two, but at this time we feel that option four is an appropriate and reasonable step forward. Saying this, we may change or build on this expectation in the future, and we are looking at what the procedures will be required for the new Year 7 cohort starting Cowley in September.

Mr Bennett has now written a draft policy, and once finalised it will be shared with all parents/carers and students.

Below are some questions that have been asked by parents/carers. I am sure these will help you visualise the procedures before the policy is released later this term.

Best wishes,

Mr Cormack
 Principal

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Frequently asked questions.

What can I do as a parent to support the new mobile phone policy?
The DfE guidance clearly states that parents/carers must support the policy and reinforce and discuss the policy at home.   I recommend that parents use the "powered down" procedure at key times at home, as we are aware that some students are using their phones at bedtime and this is impacting on their sleep, wellbeing, and learning.

How will I be able to communicate with my child during the college day?
Your child will not be able to receive any calls or messages throughout the day as their phone will be "powered down and in bags," until they have left the site at the end of the day. Any emergencies or urgent messages required will go through the main office and the year team. This system works well for the many students who currently do not bring a phone to college.

What consequences will there be for not following the expectations?
The main consequence is that students will be distracted, and this will impact on learning and GCSE outcomes. However, on a day to day basis there will be deterrents and consequences similar to what we currently have with confiscations and detentions; these will be included into the policy. If a student has their phone in a formal examination, they are reported to the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) for malpractice and likely to be disqualified from the examination.

Will the policy include smart watches, EarPods and other devices?
Yes, these items will be prohibited under the new policy.

When will the policy 'go live'?
We understand that we are building new positive habits and routines. The policy will be launched later this term.

How will the staff know if my child has their phone in their pocket, they cannot search my child?
Schools have statutory powers to search students, or their possessions and we also sometimes use a 'wand' to quickly check for items like vapes and phones.   We currently conduct random and targeted searches every day. Once the policy is in place, if a phone is found during a search the phone will be confiscated and sanctions issued. We are confident that students will follow the reasonable expectations of "powered down and in my bag."

I am concerned that the phone may get damaged or stolen if it is kept in my child's bag, how will the college ensure my child's phone is safe?
Theft at Cowley is extremely rare. Students have an option of using a locker, or they can drop their phone off in the morning at the main office for the day. Cowley does not take responsibility for students' personal belongings.

My child is diabetic and monitors his blood sugar through his mobile phone.
Yes, we are aware of the all the diabetic students at Cowley, and they receive care and support. Your child will be spoken to about phone use specific to their needs.

Why don't you just go 'all in' and ban the phones completely? I went through school without a mobile phone.
Your view is similar to many parents, governors and staff. The policy that we adopt must be workable in our context. We feel at the present time option four is the best, however, it may be that we move to other options in the future.

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What will the school do about students recording antisocial or aggressive behaviour?
This is an issue in all schools, it is unacceptable and appalling behaviour that we will not tolerate. Parents/carers and schools have a responsibility to educate students about appropriate behaviours and we will continue to do this at Cowley. Saying this, as phones will be "powered down and in bags" this should not take place. We have also reviewed our behaviour policy to show how serious this antisocial behaviour is deemed.

My children use their phones for checking homework and their timetable on ClassCharts, how will the college respond in this case?
Every student is given a college planner, which is a mandatory piece of equipment. The planner includes the student timetable and a place for them to record homework. Students will not be able to check ClassCharts during the college day when the policy is launched.

My child uses his phone at break and lunch for completing revision by watching GCSE Pod. I think it is wonderful that the college funds GCSE pod for the students as it really helps. Will students be able to use their phones for independent learning at lunch and break?
No, all phones will be "powered down and in bags" all day. GCSE pod and other online learning resources are great; however, they will need to be used at home after college.

Will the policy apply on the Sixth Form site?
No, this is only for the 11-16 site, however Sixth Form students will need to follow the procedure if they are on the 11-16 site.

My child stays behind for clubs and fixtures will they be permitted to use the phone at these times?
The college offers more extracurricular opportunities than any other school that I am aware of, and I am proud of the time the staff offer to the students. Staff will use common sense in these cases, so the students are focused on the activities they are participating in.

What will happen if my child is on a school trip?
More information will be shared in the policy.