

9th December 2019



Dear Parent/Carer,

From Term 1, 2020 there will be a new mobile phone policy for all government schools. The policy means **phones brought to school must be switched off and stored securely during the school day.**

The aim of this policy is to provide:

- a safe environment to learn without inappropriate mobile phone use (including cyberbullying) or distractions
- greater opportunities for social interaction and physical activity during recess and lunchtimes.

When announcing the new policy, the Minister for Education James Merlino said:

- *“This will remove a major distraction from our classrooms, so that teachers can teach, and students can learn in a more focused, positive and supported environment. Half of all young people have experienced cyberbullying. By banning mobiles we can stop it at the school gate.”*

Psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg agreed that

- *“All schools have a legal obligation to provide a safe environment in which to learn. This significant policy initiative is designed to ensure the well-being of young people while at school, free of distraction and potentially cyberbullying”.*

The impact of the new government phone policy will be minimal at Foster Primary School for our students as this statewide change is consistent with the policy we have had for several years.

This letter is to remind everyone that our policy states that **students who bring their phone to school must switch it off and hand it to the office before school and collect it again after school.**

As the school policy states:

- Students who bring Personal Portable Electronic Devices (PPEDs) to school MUST hand them into the Office in the morning when they arrive at school, ready for collection at the end of the day.
- The school does not accept responsibility for lost or damaged student PPEDs. (Circular 038/2005 Personal Goods Brought to School at Owner’s Own Risk).
- The above guidelines apply to school camps and excursions and communications will be primarily through the school office to ensure clarity and efficient relay of messages.
- Students misusing PPEDs at school or causing a nuisance will be brought to the attention of the Principal.
- The Principal may revoke a student’s privilege of bringing PPEDs to school as a consequence of misuse.

To view the entire policy, please click [here](#).

In the event of an emergency or if you need to contact your child, I ask that families do not ring or text their child’s phone but contact the staff in the school office who will pass on important messages immediately. Again, this policy has come directly from the Minister for Education, Mr. James Merlino and our school is therefore duty bound to implement and enforce the policy in full.

Government policy is non-negotiable so I would appreciate parents and carers speaking to their child about the ban and reinforcing the benefits of disconnecting from their phone during the school day.

The eSafety Commissioner has many resources for families:

- 7 Tips for Managing Screen Time – tips and advice on how families can balance their time on and offline

- Online Safety: A guide for parents and carers – guide to how to tackle the big online issues
- Screen Smart Parent Tour – advice on social media, screen time, personal information, cyber-bullying, stranger contact and inappropriate content.
- The Department of Education and Training’s ‘Bully Stoppers’ webpage

I have also attached a summary of research which prompted the government’s introduction of its phone policy. The staff at the Foster Primary School share the concerns highlighted in this research and support the government’s policy. We are committed to ensuring school is a safe place where students can learn without distraction and achieve their full potential.

Thanking you in anticipation of receiving your support.

Mobile phone use in the classroom

[Mobile phones in the classroom: A helpful or harmful hindrance?](#) outlines recent research. Phones can be a distraction and their removal from the classroom can see an improvement in student performance. Students who did not use smartphones in a lecture wrote 62 per cent more information in their notes and recalled more information than peers who were using their phones.

Cognition and smartphone use

[Smartphones and Cognition: A Review of Research Exploring the Links between Mobile Technology Habits and Cognitive Functioning](#) is a review of academic research on mobile phones. The review looked for evidence of effects of smartphone use on cognition. It reported that habitual smartphone use may have a negative and lasting impact on users’ ability to:

- think
- focus and remember
- regulate emotion.

[The Mere Presence of Your Smartphone Reduces Brain Power, Study Shows](#)

The research finds it doesn’t matter whether a smartphone is on or off or lying face up or face down on a desk - having a smartphone within sight or within easy reach reduces a person’s ability to focus and perform tasks, because part of their brain is actively working to not pick up or use the phone.

Smartphones use by children and young people and wellbeing

[Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time](#) shows that, on average, teenagers are:

- spending six hours per day using the internet, texting friends and using social media.

The surveys explores the links between the use of smartphones, particularly social media, and increases in depression, anxiety and reduced happiness.

[Dopamine, Smartphones & You: A battle for your time](#), a Harvard University blog discusses our desire to connect and seek validation through technologies and how this can lead to anxiety, poor sleep and unsuccessful social interactions. The blog explains how mobile phone content can influence our ‘dopamine pathways’ and lead to a battle for more and more of the users’ time.