



The Astley Cooper School

Part of the East Dacorum Co-operative Learning Trust

21 April 2021

St Agnells Lane, Hemel Hempstead HP2 7HL

Tel: 01442 394 141

Fax: 01442 401 407

Email: admin@astleycooper.herts.sch.uk

Web: www.astleycooper.herts.sch.uk

Dear Parent/Carer

Headteacher: Edward Gaynor

Consultation on change to mobile device policy

Further to my letter dated February 2020 (pre Covid-19), I am writing to inform you of the proposed changes to our mobile phone and personal devices policy. We are currently consulting on these changes and if agreed they will come into effect from September 2021 at the beginning of the new academic year.

Our current policy

Currently we allow students to have phones, mobile devices and headphones on them in school and to use them before school, at break and lunchtime. In classrooms students are not allowed to use phones. If they are misused or used at times other than these, they are confiscated. Phones are allowed on all trips unless the trip organiser states differently.

Proposed policy from September 2021

If agreed, our policy will change so that if phones, headphones or devices are **seen** or **heard** between 8.15am to 3.15pm, they will be confiscated. This will mean that students are not to use them from the moment they walk in to school until they are dismissed at the end of the day. This includes all break and lunchtimes. Phones are still permitted on site but must be kept in bags or lockers, switched off.

It will be down to the organiser of any school trip to decide if mobile devices are allowed on the trip and how they can be used while on the trip or visit.

The canteen will become a device free zone for all students and staff at break and lunchtimes, except the member of staff who is on duty in the canteen at this time.

If a device is confiscated the following tariff of arrangements for the return of the item will be established:

- First confiscation – returned to the student at the end of the day
- Second confiscation – returned to the student after a period of one week (5 school days)
- Third confiscation – returned to the student after a period of two weeks (10 school days)
- Fourth confiscation – returned to the parent at the end of half term
- Fifth confiscation – returned to the parent at the end of term

Any confiscated items will be placed in labelled envelopes in the school office until they are collected.





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Rationale for the proposed change

As stated in my previous letter, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the amount of staff time that is being taken away from teaching and learning to resolve and settle disagreements that have occurred on social media. Often, these arguments have been initiated over weekends and outside of school but are sadly spilling into school and parental expectation is that we resolve them. This level of input is not sustainable and takes up time that is then not available to improve teaching or address learning behaviours that impact on the entire school.

A knock on effect of this, is the impact on student self-esteem and mental health. There is widespread research available that highlights the negative role of social media on young people's confidence and self and social awareness. There are documented cases of students self-harming or sadly taking their own lives due to abuse received on line. At Astley Cooper, we are seeing more and more students presenting with issues around their mental health, self-esteem and social awareness that are strongly linked to on line abuse and misuse of technology.

I am also saddened to report that some of the abuse on line has also been directed against staff and the school itself. This academic year we have had incidents where images of staff have been posted on line for comment from other students and adults. We have also had parents misrepresenting the school on social media and using media platforms to resolve issues relating to school, rather than contacting the school directly as outlined in the Home School Agreement. We are also seeing an increase in phone confiscations caused by parents contacting students at school during lessons. These parents have then arrived at school demanding that an incident be resolved or wanting to take their child home. While it is understandable that parents will want the school to intervene in any issues involving their child, and to offer guidance and support, it places the school, the student and the parent in a difficult position if the process is reactive rather than constructive.

We do not believe these changes will compromise the health and safety of your child at school. Indeed, we believe it will enhance it, as if there is any need for us to contact you about a school issues it will be done centrally through the school office or pastoral system.

Post 16 students and mobile devices

Arrangements for Post 16 students will be different to the rest of the school. This is in light of the evidence at Astley Cooper that these students do use the devices responsibly and sensibly to aid learning rather than for social interaction. Post 16 students will be permitted to use their devices in the study and communal areas of the sixth form and in lessons under the instruction of a teacher. Post 16 students are not to have any devices or headphones visible or heard in any other areas.





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What happens next?

As this is such a major change in our approach to mobile technology and devices, I have attached a sheet of 'frequently asked questions'. Should you have any further points to make relating to this consultation please do not hesitate to contact the school via admin@astleycooper.herts.sch.uk and title your e-mail 'mobile devices policy'. Responses need to be received in school by Friday 30 April. Governors are also discussing the policy and will make a final decision by May half term. We will then communicate the new arrangements to students via assemblies, form time and to you via letter.

Yours Sincerely

Mr Daddow
Senior Assistant Headteacher
Astley Cooper School





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Frequently Asked Questions

Can my child still bring their phone to school?

Of course. Many of us are parents and we appreciate why you would want your child to have a phone on the way to or from school. They just need to be kept off and out of sight – for example in bags or lockers – and not used between the hours of school, usually 8.15am- 3.15pm.

What if I need to contact them at school?

In an emergency, simply phone the school office on 01442 394141 and the message will be passed to them. In fact, this is actually quicker than trying to contact them directly.

What if my child feels that they urgently need to contact me? They might need me to drop something in that they have forgotten?

Realistically, these occasions occur very rarely, if at all. Our staff are trained and equipped to handle the vast majority of issues that can arise on any school day. However, if they desperately need to contact you between 8.15am and 3.15pm, they can speak to their Head of Year or school reception

I am concerned about my child's phone being confiscated. How can I help them to avoid this?

The easiest way to avoid any problems is to encourage your child to get into a strict routine of turning their phone off as they approach the school. It should then be placed out of sight.

My child has left their phone on and needs to turn it off. What should they do?

Any member of staff can be approached about this. The student should be prompt and honest and ask the member of staff if they can turn their phone off. Speaking to a member of staff first will avoid any potential conflicts.





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You are supposed to be preparing children for the world of work. Doesn't possession of a phone prepare them for the real world?

As a society, we are only now becoming aware of the full scope of what young people have been accessing online over the last few years. There is no wider place in the working world for toxic comments, threats, access to explicit material and inappropriate filming. We have been moved to a position where we feel that our students have to be protected from these issues, as have many other secondary schools across the UK. Our existing ICT resources give us all of the real-world applications that we need. We also note that many workplaces are introducing phone restrictions of their own, so in this respect, we are preparing our young people in a realistic way.

Won't this be detrimental to their learning in certain lessons?

No. Astley Cooper has more than sufficient ICT capacity. Every main teaching block has a suite of computers and the school also has a large number of laptops which can be booked by any teacher and used in lessons.

As the restriction ends at 3.15pm, can phones be used on site after that time?

Yes, although we will take the necessary steps if we feel that they are being used to promote negative interaction between students

What if my child needs to tell the time?

There are clocks in every room. If a child has difficulty reading a clock face, they could always ask either other children or staff. Cheap digital watches are also readily available.

Does this restriction also apply to i-watches?

Yes

How will I find out if my child is in detention?

If this is the case, you will always be contacted via the details you have given to us. If in any doubt, do call the school and we will verify for you.

What if school needs my child to do something after school?

We will always contact you if this is the case





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Doesn't this inhibit access to Google classroom and other learning apps?

There should not be any need to access learning apps through mobile devices during the school day. Access should be part of an established routine at home.

What about access to my child's timetable?

This should be checked at home, when the student is preparing for the school day ahead. Students should have stuck their timetable into a diary or folder, or at least made a note of it in a safe place. If this is a change for your child, we would recommend that you have one timetable on display at home, one kept in a safe place at home and one in the student's bag. They can then make a note of what they need for the day ahead.

