



THURSO HIGH SCHOOL MOBILE PHONE POLICY INFORMATION FOR PUPILS & FAMILIES

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: IMPACT OF MOBILE PHONES

Impact on School Life

67%

Negatively
distracted

67% of surveyed teachers observed students being negatively distracted by mobile devices.

90%

Challenges
increased

90% of surveyed teachers stated the number of students with emotional challenges increased.

47%

of parents think their child is addicted to their smartphone



47% of parents surveyed believe their child is addicted to their smartphone.

43%

**OF UK TEENS
USE THEIR
PHONES
DURING LESSONS**

50%+

of kids get
**237 NOTIFICATIONS
PER DAY**

Some receive as many as

**4,500
EVERY DAY!**

23% occur during school

Common Sense Media

STEEP DROP IN BULLYING

46%
of girls

& 43%
of boys

experienced a reduction of bullying after smartphone bans were enacted.

Smartphone Bans, Student Outcomes and Mental Health

3+ HOURS



PER DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

doubles the risk of poor mental health including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety

Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

70%

of teens admit to hiding their online behaviour from their parents

while only

19%

of parents implement parental controls on Internet devices



Digital Deception - McAfee Software Security

51%

Reduced sleep

Teens that spend 5 hours a day on electronic devices are 51% more likely to get under 7 hours sleep when compared to 1 hours use



teenagers spend about six hours a day online, while parents think they spend only four hours a day

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41% of teenagers feel overwhelmed by the quantity of notifications they receive on a daily basis.

RATES OF SCHOOL

**LONELINESS
HAS DOUBLED**

SINCE 2012

Worldwide Increases in Adolescent Loneliness

THE WHY

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

At Thurso High School, we are committed to creating a positive learning environment that reflects our core values of Teamwork, Respect, Achievement, Commitment and Kindness for all our pupils. In line with recent Scottish Government recommendations, our mobile phone policy aims to support consistent educational experiences and safeguard the well-being of our school community.

We recognise the importance of technology in students' lives. However, research suggests that the presence of mobile phones in school creates a distraction from learning. By reducing this distraction, we aim to enhance learning, prioritise social interaction and promote safety and wellbeing.

“To support focused learning and promote positive relationships, the use of mobile phones is not permitted in school grounds”**

In the UK in 2023, smartphone ownership was near-universal (98%) by the age of 12, (Ofcom 2023) accelerated by the transition from primary to secondary school. (DfE 2019). Data from Ofcom shows that the amount of time those aged 5–15 years old spent online rose from an average of 9 hours per week in 2009, to 15 hours per week in 2018. More recently extended screen time has become increasingly normal for young children and teenagers, with a recent research review identifying a 52% increase in children's screen time between 2020 and 2022 (NRICH 2023).

A meta-analysis of 39 studies from 14 countries showed that smartphone use by students has a negative impact on educational outcomes, such as test scores, grade point average, laboratory test performance, and self-rated academic performance (Kates, et al 2018). NASUWT, The Teachers' Union, argues that smartphones and computers disrupt pupils' learning both at home and in the classroom. They indicate that it could take up to 20 minutes for pupils to refocus on what they were learning after engaging in a non-academic activity such as browsing the internet or noticing a notification on their phone. Children between the ages of 8 and 11 years who are exposed to longer than two hours a day of recreational screen time on smart phones had worse working memory, processing speed, attention levels, language skills and executive function compared with those who did not. (Dr Sina Joneidy 2023)

According to Ryff and Singer (2006) social well-being is a critical aspect of psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of positive social relationships and social support in maintaining mental health and overall well-being. Wang et al. 2011, found that social well-being can be negatively affected by cyberbullying. Smartphones in particular and their functions, such as instant messaging and social media apps, are often misused by pupils (Olweus & Limber 2018). Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that one in five children (19%) aged 10–15 experienced at least one type of bullying behaviour online, and out of them, around three-quarters (72%) said they experienced at least some of it at school or during school time. ONS (2020). Apart from cyberbullying, smartphones can also lead to other social problems in schools. Studies suggest that smartphone-enabled social media use by minors is associated with depression. Studies have shown that high smartphone use is associated with increased loneliness and social isolation in young people. Young people who spend a lot of time on their smartphones often have fewer direct social interactions, which can affect their sense of connection and social well-being (Twenge & Campbell 2018)

****Our Mobile Phone policy also applies to other smart devices used for communication and social media such as watches used for calling and messaging, smart glasses, games consoles and tablets.**

ENHANCE LEARNING

Mobile phones can be a significant source of distraction for pupils during lessons; this leads to decreased concentration and lower academic performance.

By implementing a 'no phones in school' policy we are removing the distraction of mobile phones encouraging pupils to focus and fully engage in lessons and enabling staff to maintain a productive and engaging learning environment.

PRIORITISE SOCIAL INTERACTION

Research suggests that mobile phone use frequently reduces the enjoyment, quality, and depth of face-to-face conversations by causing distraction and fostering feelings of neglect. While phones can connect people globally, excessive use in social settings can damage relationships and decrease social satisfaction.

By implementing a 'no phones in school' policy we are creating opportunities for students to communicate and build positive relationships face-to-face, so they can foster stronger peer relationships, improve social skills and feel a greater sense of the school community and belonging.

PROMOTE SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Excessive phone use is linked to increased anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and feelings of inadequacy. Mobile phones can also facilitate bullying, especially during school hours, increasing opportunities for online harassment which can severely impact a student's mental health.

By implementing a 'no phones in school' policy we are reducing potential risks from inappropriate comments, contacts and images, encouraging healthier routines helping to ensure pupils feel safe and respected at school.

PARENT/CARER

FAQs – THE HOW

▶ **My child needs their phone for travelling to and from school. What do I do?**

We are recommending that pupils do not bring devices to school, however, a pupil may bring phones, or other smart devices but these must be switched off and in bags at all times on the school grounds. Pupils can have their phones on the way from and to home should they require this.

▶ **My child needs their phone during lunchtime if they go out of school. What do I do?**

Pupils who go out of school grounds at lunchtime can have their phones while off school grounds should they require this.

▶ **My child uses their smart watch for texting and calling, can they use that instead?**

The policy applies to any smart watches, smart glasses, tablets and consoles which can be used for communications such as social media messaging and calls.

▶ **My child needs a phone for their timetable. What if they have forgotten it?**

All pupils will be given an opportunity to make a pocket version of their timetable at registration. We will also put spare copies of all timetables into registration folders so pupils can check at the start of the day. Pupils can also go to reception and ask. Staff are always happy to help.

▶ **How do I contact my child if I have an urgent message?**

Any parent or carer can call the school as is current policy. Staff can relay messages to pupils immediately where required. Where difficult news needs to be passed on to a young person, we can ensure the support of guidance staff.

▶ **What will happen to my child's phone if they use it in class and it is confiscated?**

Staff will take any confiscated devices to the top office. These are stored in labelled envelopes in the safe and are returned at the end of the school day. Parents will be contacted by text or email to notify them of a device being confiscated. Pupils will be required to collect the device at the end of the day. If this happens repeatedly parents may be invited to a meeting to discuss with PTPS or SMT.

While the utmost care will be taken of every device Thurso High School does not accept any responsibility for lost, stolen or damaged mobile phones, and reminds parents that if they choose to allow their child to bring a mobile device to school they do so at their own risk.

▶ My child has a medical condition and needs access to their phone. What do I do?

Please contact your child's guidance teacher. Exceptions will be made where mobile phones or smart devices are used for the management of documented medical conditions.

▶ How can I support my child in using social media responsibly?

Social media can be a complex platform to navigate safely. Regularly checking your child's phone or using a mirroring app to give access to devices can be helpful in supporting young people encountering challenging content or messages. There are also excellent resources online:

Social media guides - UK Safer Internet Centre Keeping children

safe online | NSPCC

Social media guide for parents to support teens | Internet Matters

It is also helpful to remember that as a bill payer and contract holder for your young person's device, a parent carer has a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate usage.

▶ I'd like more information about the policy and to talk through some of the points.

Please email any questions or queries you may have about the new policy to thursohigh@highland.gov.uk

▶ How can I prepare for the new policy implementation in January 2026?

There are key steps parent carers can take to help young people prepare for January.

- Make sure accurate contact details are provided to the school in case we need to get in touch
- Ensure your child has a paper copy of their timetable
- Make sure your child has money on their cashless catering account for canteen food or cash for unforeseen circumstances
- Please ensure your child has a wallet or purse for money for school rather than be stored in phone cases
- Encourage pupils to take responsibility for organising equipment and resources, journeys and plans

We would appreciate your support by ensuring your mobiles and devices are out of sight whilst on school grounds.

PUPIL FAQs

I need my phone for my timetable. What do I do if I have forgotten my timetable?

All pupils will be given an opportunity to make a pocket version of their timetable at registration. We will also put spare copies of all timetables into registration folders so you can check at the start of the day. You can also go to reception and ask. Staff are always happy to help.

How do I contact parent/carers if I need to go home or have an urgent message?

Any pupil feeling unwell should report to Reception. Staff can contact parent carers. We can also do this if there are urgent or emergency situations where you need to pass an essential message home.

What will happen to my phone if I use it in class and it is taken off me?

You will be asked to give your phone to staff who will take this to reception. Phones will be put in labelled envelopes in the safe. You will then need to collect your phone at the end of the school day after 3.35pm

Will I get my phone back at lunch to go down the street if it is taken off me?

No. You will need to stick to the policy and not use your phone on school grounds. Your phone will be returned at the end of the day.

I have a medical condition, and I need access to my phone. What do I do?

Speak to your guidance teacher. Where there are exceptional circumstances, such as this, pupils can carry phones as long as these remain out of sight and are used appropriately.

PUPIL FAQs

I sometimes use my phone to search for information in class. What will I use instead?

All pupils have Chromebooks, which you should take to school fully charged. You will be able to use your Chromebook to search for any further information you need for your learning, such as sources, quotes, data, images etc.

My teacher has their phone on! It's unfair!

Some staff need to use mobiles as part of their jobs, such as SQA, and in case of emergency such as fire evacuation and first aid, etc., however these will be kept out of sight where possible and used for essential purposes only.

A NEW YEAR A RENEWED FOCUS

Our new policy will begin on 7th January 2026.

1. Storage of Phones/ Devices: Students will leave their phones at home or store them in their lockers or bags, switched off, while on school grounds.
2. Emergency Contact: In case of emergencies, parent carers should contact the school office, and we will ensure that students receive important messages promptly. We can arrange for pupils to speak to parent carers where necessary and appropriate.

REFUSAL TO FOLLOW THE POLICY

Pupils seen using their phones/ devices on school grounds will hand these to staff to store in the safe at the top office for the remainder of the day. Parent carers will be notified by text or email, and the pupil can collect the phone/ device at the end of the school day from the top office.

Continued usage will lead to discussion with parent carers. Where pupils refuse to hand phones over, we will contact parent carers to meet with us at their earliest possible convenience to seek a resolution.

We understand that adjusting to this policy may take time, and we encourage open dialogue between pupils, parents, and staff. Our goal is to work together to create an environment where everyone can thrive academically and socially, free from the pressures and negative impacts of devices in a space of learning.

Other schools across the Highlands and Scotland have already implemented similar policies and noted improved focus in learners, more social interaction at break and lunches, improved collaboration and happier young people

We appreciate your cooperation and support in our efforts to fulfil our school's vision, values and aims.

Vision

For every pupil to achieve their potential in a safe, happy and caring environment in which all pupils feel valued and accepted.

Values

Teamwork, **R**espect, **A**chievement, **C**ommitment and **K**indness (**TRACK**)

Aims

- To create an ethos of kindness and respect so all pupils feel included, supported, resilient and valued
- To set high expectations for attainment, achievement, behaviour, attendance and punctuality
- To provide quality learning and teaching experiences for all
- To provide an engaging, challenging and creative curriculum for all learners
- To ensure all pupils leave Thurso High School to a positive and sustained destination