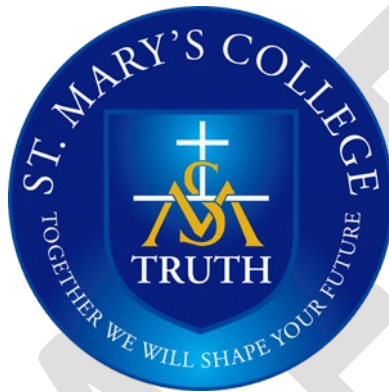


Mobile Phone Policy

St Mary's College



Approved	July 2025
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Author	Senior Leadership Team
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Chair of Board of Governors	Sarah Kelly

Introduction and Context

Department of Education Guidance Circular 2024/14

- The Department advises post primary schools that the personal use of pupil mobile phones and other similar devices should be restricted during the school day for the vast majority of pupils. This includes during lunch and recreational periods.
- There is growing evidence to indicate that restricting the use of mobile phones during the school day can have a positive impact on academic engagement and achievement.
- Research has found correlations between mobile phone restriction in schools and a range of positive outcomes, including reduced bullying, an overall reduction in social media usage, increased social interactions, reduced distraction and improved academic attainment. Overall, the academic evidence of the positive impact of prohibited use is increasing.
- Policies and procedures on pupils' use of personal mobile devices within schools falls within the wider legal responsibilities of Boards of Governors and principals in relation to pupil behaviour and discipline (Articles 3-6 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998).
- The Department's Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools - A Guide for Schools advises that all school policies should be inclusive of mobile learning. The guidance emphasises that online safety and mobile learning policies should also be integrated into existing safeguarding, behaviour, code of practice and antibullying policies.
- UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, Technology in education: a tool on whose terms? advises that "some education technology can improve some types of learning in some contexts" but "it should focus on learning outcomes" and that "mere proximity to a mobile device was found to distract students and to have a negative impact on learning".

Please note

It is important that ways to communicate may not be confined to mobile phones and therefore this policy will apply to smart watches, smart glasses and any personal device that may be deemed applicable. Furthermore, the use of mobile phone and equivalencies are strictly prohibited in all formal examinations. Further detail can be access at CCEA website or in our relevant examination policies.

Purpose and Rationale

This policy aims to promote a focused and respectful learning environment by managing the use of mobile phones during school hours. The policy has been shaped and influenced by a comprehensive survey and workshops undertaken with parents/guardians, staff and pupils in term 2 and term 3 (2025). The outworkings of all of this have resulted in this new school policy and the following observations made by our key stakeholders was taken into consideration:

- Strong consensus amongst staff, pupils and parents for change in the form of mobile phone restrictions
- The results of the survey showed that the majority of respondents did not want a total ban on mobile phones. Department of Education guidance outlines that this approach is more suitable for a primary school setting
- DE has a pilot in place for 9 schools to test out the pouches in 2025-26. In terms of exploring this as an option, the school has decided to wait until this pilot is complete to assess the findings and funding options
- Vast majority of parents and pupils would like some access to phones and the school has taken this into consideration
- There was a strong consensus to address specifically concerns around concentration and distractions during lessons.
- The ability to use mobile phone within lessons to support teaching and learning remains under strict teacher supervision
- The school recognises that mobile phones can be managed if all within the school adhere to the expectations and requirements

Expectations

- Phones must be switched off (not just on silent or airplane mode) throughout the day with the exception of PM registration.
- All pupils must surrender their mobile phones at the beginning of each lesson as directed by staff. Pupils will be able to collect them at the end of each lesson.
- Surrendered phones will be stored in a clearly identifiable container/holder within sight of the pupils.
- Pupils are not permitted to access phones at any stage on the corridors or at lunchtime. Mobile phones must be stored away out of sight. However, pupils will be able to access their mobile phones during afternoon registration.

What A Typical Day Looks Like

Time of Day	Requirements
Morning Assembly / Registration (8.45 – 9am)	Pupils will be required to switch off their phones during registration. However, pupils may discreetly check their phones for messages up until 8.45am
Lessons 1 – 4	Pupils will surrender their phones on entry to class. There will be a clearly labelled and visible storage area for the mobile phones. No phone use is permitted except with the explicit permission of the teacher to support teaching and learning.
Breaktime	Pupils will not have access to their mobile phones during this time. They will be supervised by the teacher and mobile phones returned at the end of break.
Lunchtime	Mobile phone use is not permitted during lunchtime.
Junior School (11.40 – 12.25) Senior School (11.55 – 12.40)	On entry to toilets, pupils will be required to surrender mobile phones to lunchtime supervisors on duty.
Afternoon Registration	Pupils will be able to access their mobile phones during registration to check for messages from home.
Junior School (12.25 – 12.40) Senior School (11.40 – 11.55)	Pupils are then required to switch off their phones for the remainder of the afternoon. Assemblies will take place at least once a week at this time.
Lessons 5 – 8	Pupils will surrender their mobile phones on entry to class. There will a clearly labelled and visible storage area for the mobile phones. No mobile phone use is permitted except with the explicit permission of the teacher to support teaching and learning.

Toilets

It is important for pupils to note that mobile phone usage in any toilet in the school is strictly prohibited. Any breach of this rule may be considered a child protection matter.

There may be occasions when a pastoral response is needed to support a child who is using a mobile phone for exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the parents/guardians will be invited in to address these matters in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Punctuality

If a child is late to class on a regular basis due to the misuse of a mobile phone, the school will follow the school's code of conduct and recommended sanctions below. All lates will be officially recorded on SIMs and where necessary dates & timings produced as part of meeting of concerns with parents/guardians.

Sanctions

Examples of breaking the school's mobile policy (this is not an exhaustive list):

*Pupil using the phone between classes / on the corridors
Pupil has a phone in a toilet
Pupil brings 2 phones to school
Pupil's mobile phone is not switched off during the lesson
Pupil is continually late to class due to accessing phone between classes
*Photos /Videos / Recording conversations / Recording classroom activities
Pupil using another pupil's mobile phone

*The school will determine the severity of its misuse. For instance, if a child takes a photo or a video within the school premises, this will be classified as a serious breach of the code of conduct.

Normally, and as determined by the relevant staff, if pupil does not observe the requirements of this mobile phone policy, the school will follow the guidance outlined.

Stage One

- **First Offence:** the child's mobile phone will be confiscated. Collection of the mobile phone will take place at the school foyer at 3.05pm. This will be formally recorded as a first offence
- **Second Offence:** the child's mobile phone will be confiscated and held until end of day and collected by the pupil at 3.05pm. The school will inform a parent/guardian by telephone of the second offence and that a third offence will necessitate an in-school meeting. The school's policy will be reviewed in partnership with the parent/guardian and they will be asked to address the matter with the child at home.
- **Third Offence:** The mobile phone will be confiscated and returned to the pupil at end of the day. The pupil in question will not be permitted to bring a mobile phone to school (or surrenders all day) until a formal meeting has been arranged between the child's tutor/head of year and parent/guardian. An after school formal school detention will be issued.

Formal school detention will be focused on how best to support the child when using the mobile phone and the use of educational literature (see appendix 2) will form part of this.

Concerning Behaviour with Mobile Phones

In the event a child continues to contravene the rules of this school policy, the child will move to the next stage, stage 2.

Stage Two

- **Fourth offence and beyond:** The school's code of conduct will be implemented, and the next courses of action will be observed:
 1. A defined ban on taking a mobile phone to school will be implemented. This will usually be for a minimum of 2 weeks. An agreement between the school and home may be reached whereby the child will not bring a mobile phone to school for a defined time or the child surrenders the mobile phone during morning registration and collects it again at 3.05pm from the designated senior teacher
 2. A period of internal reflection as directed by a Senior Teacher in consultation with the child's Head of Year. A 4 week ban will be recommended
 3. Formal suspension – to be decided by the Principal in consultation with the Vice Principal(s)
 4. Matter referred to the Board of Governors Disciplinary Committee. This may involve a multiple period suspension(s)

At stages 2-4 the child may be prohibited from bringing a mobile phone to school or equivalent for an increasingly extended period.

Child Protection (refers to GDPR and Data Protection Compliance also)

St Mary's College works hard to ensure the school is a safe and trusting environment for our pupils and staff. Therefore, the use of mobile phones or equivalent to take photographs and/or videos may constitute a child protection issue for the school and as a result this use of the mobile phone is strictly prohibited and will be defined as a serious breach of the school's code of conduct.

The posting of photos and/or videos onto social media platform is also considered a serious breach of the school's code of conduct and may also be considered under the Addressing Bullying Policy. Exemptions may be made at an official leavers' event e.g. Year 12 and 14 where the parents/guardians, staff and pupils are present and there is a level of agreement, respect and understanding in the use of the mobile phone.

The school takes seriously any form of online behaviour that brings the school's reputation into disrepute or tarnishes the reputation of a pupil or staff member. This may become a matter for the Board of Governors.

Exceptions

- A pupil with a documented medical or special educational need that requires phone access may be granted after consultation and agreement with the Vice Principal(s)/Principal
- Use of phones for specific learning activities may be allowed under direct teacher supervision.

Role of the Pupil

- To support and uphold the expectations and requirements of this policy
- To understand that this policy is designed to protect everyone at St Mary's College and support teaching and learning in the classroom
- To contact any staff member if they have a concern regarding the use of their own or another pupils' mobile phone
- To be aware that the school will provide support and advice should a child have any concerns about mobile phones
- To be assured that the school will provide on-going formal guidance at assemblies/workshops on how best to use mobile phones responsibly.

Role of the Parental / Guardian

- A parent/guardian plays a crucial role in helping the school to regulate their child's use of mobile phones
- We ask that every parent/guardian ensures that their child understands and supports with this policy
- In emergencies, we ask that parents contact the school office rather than the pupil directly. Pupils are asked not to communicate home first if there is an issue in school. Parents/guardian are asked to follow the school's procedure on appointments and collection from school
- The school will always be available to advise parents/guardians in this area and will provide guidance and literature
- We remind parents/guardians that the school does not grant them permission to record the audios of face to face meetings or phone calls. Furthermore, the school does not grant permission for parents/guardians to reproduce such recording.

Role of the Staff Member (teaching & non teaching)

- To fully support and implement this policy
- To act as a role model to pupils and follow the expectations of mobile phone usage during the school day
- To bring to the attention of the Senior Leadership Team any concerns they have about the use of mobile phones in their class
- To ensure that the use of mobile phones in lessons to support teaching and learning is actively supervised

Refusal to hand over a mobile phone

If a pupil contravenes the expectations/requirements of this policy and refuses to hand over a mobile phone, the child's name will be noted (along with the rule break) and passed on to either the Head of Year or a Senior Teacher.

A second and final attempt will be made by the Head of Year/Senior Teacher on the same day to allow the child to reconsider the decision and if a resolution is not arrived at, the relevant parent/guardian will be contacted and a formal meeting arranged.

Both attempts will be managed calmly and respectfully and there will be consideration given to extenuating circumstances that may be giving rise to the refusal(s).

Fundamentally, this policy is in place to protect the learning environment, respect all pupils, staff and parents/guardians, and prevent distractions, misuse, and potential breaches of privacy or safety.

It will be kept under review and where necessary the school will consider alternative approaches to mobile phone usage at St Mary's College should pupils not adhere to the expectations/requirements of this policy.

Mobile Phone Education

As part of our preventative curriculum, pupils will receive on a regular basis advice and guidance on how to remain safe when using a mobile phone. This will include

1. Guidance on how to manage mobile phones within school and at home
2. Dangers and risks associated with mobile phones and apps
3. Sign posts for pupils and parents/guardians
4. Websites to support Parents/Carers, Pupils and Staff:

Internet Matters

<https://www.internetmatters.org/>

Childnet

<https://www.childnet.com/>

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

Safer Internet

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/>

Appendix One: Workshop/Survey Results

Pupils: (The Principal met with representatives from each class – 7 meetings - amounting to 72 pupils)

1. Students present agreed there needed to be a change to how phones were managed in schools and accepted this meant restricting access in some capacity to phones during the school day
2. All groups understood and accepted the views and concerns of the staff
3. Every participant felt there was an issue with phones being a distraction in class. All agreed this was a fair observation and agreed with the research on this
4. All understood that the phone could become a safeguarding issue when misused and acknowledged the seriousness of such situations.
5. A number of year groups mentioned attachment issues with their phones. They wanted some control or access during the day
6. The use of pouches and the surrender of phones at the start of class were options they favoured and felt this would go a long way to improving focus and concentration in the class but were against a total ban
7. Some year groups expressed concerns that only KS3 & KS4 could be the subject of a phone ban and not KS5. They argued that this could create tensions when imposing a phone ban
8. There was an argument put forward that the school was thinking in terms of key stages but should really be thinking in terms of year groups. Some felt that phone usage was most prevalent in Yrs 8 – 11 and that Yr 12 – 14 pupils were much better at managing their phones
9. Most pupils liked the graduated approach – acknowledging the age of the pupil with the lightening of the school's control of the phone as they got older.

Parents / 238 Respondents: a summary of the responses

- Mobile phones can be a distraction in terms of focus and concentration in the classroom.

83% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

- Pupil access to mobile phones can lead to an increase in the frequency of bullying type behaviour, less chat and engagement with friends and contribute to a less safe teaching and learning environment for all.

90% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

- What do you consider to be the benefits of your child having a mobile phone in school?

1. Useful for when my child is travelling to/from school and can remain in contact: **93%**
2. Your child can contact home: **80%**

- What in your opinion are the benefits of restricting mobile phone usage in schools?

1. Less bullying and inappropriate use of mobile phones: **73.1%**
2. Greater focus and concentration leading to improved marks/grade: **69.3%**
3. Pupils will have greater opportunities to chat and interact face to face: **63.5%**

- Rate how you feel if the school introduced a total ban i.e. no phones were allowed to be brought to school.

59.2% of parents were neutral or did not support/strongly support a total ban

- Rate how you would feel if pupils were allowed to bring phones to school but the school introduced restrictions.

87.8% of parents were neutral or did support/strongly support restrictions

- Rate how you would feel if St Mary's College introduced restrictions based on age i.e. an easing of restrictions as the pupils get older.

77.3% of parents were neutral or did support/strongly support easing of restrictions

Staff (80 respondents): A summary of responses

1. **43%** use mobile phones at least sometimes in the classroom
2. **78.3%** felt mobile phones caused disruptions to focus and engagement
3. **91%** felt a ban in the classroom would improve focus and engagement

Rank	Preferred Model (ranked)
1	KS3 and KS4 ban only (KS5 no ban)
2	Whole school ban
3	KS3 ban - KS4 - surrender & collect phones each lesson - KS5 no ban
4	KS3 ban only (KS4 & 5 no ban)
5	No ban (no change to current school's approach)

Appendix 2: Educational Support Material on Mobile Phones



12 Smartphone Online Safety Tips

FOR CHILDREN WITH NEW DEVICES

The Christmas season has finally arrived and soon many of you will be opening your presents in the hope that Santa has listened to your request for the latest mobile phone or smart device. Owning a mobile phone can be fun, but it's important to use it safely and responsibly. By following our safety tips below, you can make sure that you set up your phone securely, keep your personal information private and enjoy using your phone in the healthiest way possible.

1 ALWAYS SECURE YOUR PHONE WITH A PASSWORD

This will help to keep your private information safe and won't allow others to access your phone without your permission. Make sure your password is memorable and personal to you but something which other people can't guess, and always share it with your parents just in case you forget it.

2 DISABLE LOCATION SETTINGS

This can usually be done from the device's privacy control settings. Disabling location settings means that your phone can't be tracked by others and strangers can't tell where you are when you're using it. It also helps to save battery.

3 ALWAYS USE A SECURE WIFI NETWORK

When you use your WIFI at home usually it is a secure network that only you and your family know the password to. Public networks, like those in coffee shops, can be accessed by anyone which means that people could potentially hack into your device and access your personal information without you realising.

4 ONLY PAIR WITH BLUETOOTH DEVICES YOU KNOW

A Bluetooth connection with another device means that you can send and receive data wirelessly. For example, you could listen to music wirelessly or receive pictures and videos from your friends. However, pairing your phone with a device you don't know means that you could be sharing personal information with a stranger or could leave your device open to receiving viruses.

5 ONLY USE APPS WHICH YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO USE

Before downloading any new apps, always check the age-rating of the app. If you need help, ask your parent or carer to make sure that the app is safe for you to use and never download anything which you are too young for as it may contain things that aren't safe for you to see.

6 BEWARE OF BECOMING ADDICTED TO YOUR PHONE

Your phone can be fun to use and it's easy to become too attached, whether it's keeping in touch with friends, discovering new features or downloading the latest apps. Remember it's always good to talk in person, go out and have fun and get regular exercise. This will keep you fit and healthy and make you appreciate there's more to life than just your mobile phone.

12 DON'T SHARE YOUR NUMBER OR YOUR DEVICE WITH PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW.

Never feel pressured into sharing your phone number with people you don't know and don't lend your phone to strangers or keep it where others could get hold of it. Look after your device and always keep it hidden from sight to avoid it being stolen or broken into.

7 LIMIT YOUR SCREEN TIME

Using your phone for too long, particularly in the evenings, can make you feel tired at school, affect your concentration and make you lose interest in other things in life. Only use your phone at certain times of the day and don't use it close to bedtime. You can set a 'screen time limit' via the settings on your phone. This will help you stay fit and healthy and means that you will still be able to focus and perform well at school.

8 THINK OF OTHERS WHEN TAKING PHOTOS

Don't take embarrassing photos of other people on your phone. If other people get access to the photo and share it with more people, it could make that person really upset and treated as a form of bullying. Always be mindful of the photos you take using your camera and who you share them with.

9 MAKE SURE YOUR PARENTS SET UP 'PARENTAL CONTROLS'

This means that you will be able to use your phone safely and securely and won't accidentally do things you shouldn't do. The best time to do this is when you get a new phone or device so that you're protected from the very beginning.

10 ALWAYS TALK TO YOUR PARENTS IF YOU DON'T FEEL SAFE

Sometimes, even though your phone is really secure, you might see something you don't like, or someone might contact you who you don't know. If this happens, always tell your trusted adult like your parents, carers, other adult family members or a teacher, all of whom will be able to support you and advise you on what you should do next.

11 DON'T TEXT AND WALK

This might seem like a strange thing to say but it can be dangerous to stare at your mobile phone whilst walking outside alongside busy roads or bicycle paths. In some cases, children have been knocked over by cars or cyclists because they haven't been aware of their surroundings whilst texting or playing games on their mobile devices.



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At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving, by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert: potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat. Instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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Risk Identifier

Taken from the Safer Schools NI CPD Teacher Targeted Bullying course.



Use our risk identifier to assess and take appropriate action if a staff member is facing a potential online bullying incident.

Immediate Danger

Examples: Threat of violence or serious harm, risk to staff or pupil safety, or life-threatening concern for someone's mental state.

Steps: Call 999.

Criminal or Serious Safeguarding Concern

Examples: Communication of any kind (this includes messages, comments, images or video) that are grossly offensive, harassing, indecent, obscene or constitute a hate crime (motivated by hostility around race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, transgender status, or pregnancy).

Steps: Report the incident to the police. Use 101 or 999 depending on the severity of the situation.

Legal Action Required

Examples: Defamatory communication of any kind that could cause serious harm to reputation (this includes messages, comments, images or video) or copyright issues or harassment (e.g. online trolling or cyber-bullying).

Steps: Discuss potential options for redress with your Board of Governors and, if appropriate, Managing Authority. Staff member concerned may wish to consult their union as well.

Ethical, Policy or Reputational Breach

Examples: Receiving friend requests from pupils or parents, students complaining about teachers online in a vague or mild manner, or the discovery of an 11 year old child using a platform that is aged 13+.

Steps: Follow the relevant school policy regarding online safety.

Low Risk

Examples: A private year group Facebook group used to discuss a school project.

Steps: Occasional monitoring/no action required.