



28th August 2024.

Dear Principal and Chair of the Board of Management,

I write to express my gratitude to you and your staff and the entire school community for the work you are doing and also to wish you every success in the year ahead.

As you will be aware, I recently announced my intention to instruct schools to implement a ban on the use of mobile phones during the school day, both in primary and post-primary schools.

This policy approach is based on the growing concerns expressed about the impact of the use of mobile phones during the school day, including the potential for distraction during class time, the risk of accessing inappropriate content and cyberbullying, and the potential for decreased social interaction with peers.

It is recognised that many schools already have well-developed and managed policies in place in this area currently and this initiative will build on that foundation. I commend schools for the time and attention given to this in recent years. In some schools, there will be no material change, whereas for other schools this ban provides a supportive framework to enable them to implement more stringent policies.

This initiative will build on the “Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free” policy which is aimed at children in primary school. There has already been a strong take-up of the voluntary agreements among parents not to buy smartphones for their children while they are in primary school. The “Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free” policy has also been supported by all of Ireland’s leading mobile phone network operators.

Schools are best placed to determine the specific approach and policy required to achieve a school day that is free from mobile phone use by students. I am asking that schools consult with their students and parents in developing the approach that is best suited to their own circumstances. This may include consideration of the use of lockers, cubbies, or allowing phones to be stored in the students’ bags switched off during the school day or whatever the school may deem appropriate.

The policy ultimately developed should advise that parents and guardians can continue to contact or leave messages for their children through the school office in the usual manner for specific circumstances such as family emergencies or medical appointments. Parents and guardians can also permit their children to carry and access their phones during travel to and from school.

The policy should provide for those who need access to their mobile phone for specific reasons and in accordance with existing policy, for example, students with diabetes might use continuous glucose monitoring with a sensor linked to their mobile phone to monitor blood sugar levels.

It is important to note that the use of tablets, computers and laptops will still be supported and indeed encouraged, provided they are used under the direct guidance



of a staff member in the context of teaching and learning and in line with the school's Acceptable Use Policy and Digital Learning Plan.

Webwise, the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre funded by the Department of Education and co-funded by the European Commission will continue to provide supports to schools to help educate students about online safety, including:

- Acceptable Use policy information, including an Acceptable Use Policy Generator which is free for all schools to use. The easy to use tool allows schools to customise an Acceptable Use Policy based on your school needs.
- Advice for teachers including classroom videos, a parent's hub including app explainers, and a youth hub including information videos.

A suite of professional learning resources will also be made available to schools to support them in their work to prevent and address bullying behaviour.

Further guidance will issue in due course to support school communities in implementing this new policy during the 2024/2025 school year.

The conversation that has been started about the use of mobile phones in schools will also, I hope, stimulate national discourse that will support parents to examine related matters with their children and to agree an approach that is appropriate for their unique family and home circumstances.

With gratitude and good wishes for the school year ahead,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norma Foley', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education