

Thursday, 7th November 2024

Dear Parents / Carers,

Following my video message last half term, regarding Ormiston Academies Trust moving towards phone free schools, I wanted to update you on our progress and what the next steps will be for OHA.

Over recent months Mrs Somerfield and I have worked with four different schools who have all successfully implemented a phone free school policy. We have worked to ensure that we have appropriate knowledge and understanding of a successful implementation process and how to navigate through any potential pitfalls.

We are now able to inform you that we will be implementing a phone free school at OHA from January 2025, when students return from their Christmas holidays.

As an academy, we wholeheartedly support this initiative, as we believe it will support our students across a range of areas such as behaviour and attainment but, most importantly, the mental health of your child.

We have spent a significant amount of time, understanding the depth of research that has been developed on the impact of smartphones on young people. The evidence falls into two key areas:

- 1) Learning and Academic Performance
- 2) Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Learning and Academic Performance

"Mobile phones risk unnecessary distraction, disruption, and diversion. One in three secondary school pupils report that mobile phones are used in most lessons without permission. This not only distracts the single pupil using the phone, but disrupts the lesson for a whole class, and diverts teachers' efforts away from learning."

A study (Beland and Murphy, 2015) which surveyed schools in four English cities (Birmingham, Leicester, London, and Manchester) found that 'student performance in high stakes exams significantly increases post ban'. Specifically, introducing a mobile phone ban in schools increased students' GCSE scores. The impact of the ban was especially positive for lower-achieving students.

Mental Health

"Three in ten pupils cite making and maintaining friendships and their mental health as a cause of worry, anxiety, or depression. By removing mobile phones, children and young people can spend more time staying active and socialising face to face with their peers, activities which have a positive impact on wellbeing."

One study by Jean Twenge found that moderate use of mobile phones (4 hours per day) was associated with lower psychological well-being. Individuals who spent more than 7 hours per day were less; curious, self-controlled, and emotionally stable and more than twice as likely to:

- Have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety.
- Have been treated by a mental health professional.
- Have taken medication for behavioural issues in the last 12 months.

After fully understanding this significant evidence, we feel that we owe it to our students to do what we can to remove distractions, help with their mental health and keep them safe.

Academy Process

From January, students will switch off and hand in mobile phones at the beginning of Personal Tutor time each morning. Each student will have an allocated number in their secure phone box in their PT room. Each phone box will then be collected by the Senior Leadership Team, Raising Standards Leaders and Head of Years and moved to a locked, secure location.

Students will have the phones returned to them at the end of the school day during Personal Tutor time.

Students who arrive late to school and therefore miss morning Personal Tutor time will hand in their phones at Reception. Their phones will be stored in a separate phone box for which will also be locked in the secure location. Students will collect their phones at the end of the detention session that they will complete at the end of the day.

Next Steps

I have included a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document that will answer many of the questions that you may have after reading this letter.

Should any questions remain unanswered, please follow the link, and submit your question via the form. A member of staff involved in leading the initiative will respond to your query.

<https://forms.office.com/e/qampiTw13B>

We will host a Parent/Carer Information Evening on Monday, 18th November, at 6.00pm. You are encouraged to join us if you require any further information on the process.

We will be speaking to all students in year group assemblies next week to ensure they are fully aware of our rationale and the different logistics involved in the process.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Mr Fitzgibbon

Principal