



## Community Services: Education

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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

### **Misuse of mobile phones in schools**

Concern has been growing in the recent past over reported instances of mobile phone misuse. These include text bullying, filming violent incidents, downloading inappropriate material and harassment. There is a broad consensus that this needs to be tackled in schools with Scottish Government and local authority support.

The majority of indiscipline and negative behaviour in schools is low level, and this will also be the case for misuse of mobile phones. Bullying, harassment and general misbehaviour, including more serious and occasional incidents of assault are not new. However, mobile phones have emerged as a tool in these forms of behaviour and it is timely to introduce a culture of appropriate and responsible use.

Imposing an outright ban on bringing mobile phones into schools would not be appropriate. Most local authorities acknowledge that mobile phones have a part to play in securing children and young peoples' personal safety before and after school and on journeys to and from school. Moreover, a ban would be difficult to enforce and would not be consistent with the aim of developing a culture of responsible mobile phone use by children and young people.

It is also recognised that the potential of all forms of modern electronic communications, including mobile phones, in supporting learning and teaching is currently being explored by many teachers. School policies should therefore reflect the positive uses of developing technologies.

This guidance has been discussed in a range of forums and has been agreed by the teacher unions. All schools are required to develop a policy on the use of mobile phones and this

guidance should be either adopted as your school policy or used as a basis for a school policy.

If not used directly, your policy should contain all of the guidance in this education management circular.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

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## **Argyll and Bute Council**

### **Community Services - Education**

#### **Policy on the Use of Mobile Phones in Schools**

A policy which simply prohibits children and young people from taking mobile phones to school would be regarded as unreasonable. Many parents/carers would be concerned for health and safety reasons if their child were not allowed to carry a phone and might therefore be unable to contact them in respect of any situation that might arise.

However, mobile phones present a number of problems:

- they are valuable items that may be stolen;
- their use can render children and young people subject to potential bullying;
- even when in silent mode texts can undermine classroom discipline;
- mobile phones with integrated cameras could lead to child protection and data protection issues with regard to inappropriate capture, use or distribution of images.

While accepting the value of mobile phone technology, it is essential that child and young person use of mobile phones does not impede teaching, learning and good order in classrooms. For this reason the following guidance will be incorporated into school policies on the use of mobile phones in schools.

#### **Guidance**

Mobile phones are not to be used within the school building, ie they are to be switched off as soon as the child or young person enters the school building and may only be switched on when leaving. This means that children and young people can only use mobile phones outside the school at break and lunch times. The only exception to this would be in an emergency with the approval of a member of school staff. Head Teachers may, at their discretion, allow any member of staff to approve such requests or may nominate a specific person to consider such requests.

If a member of staff is aware that a child or young person is using a mobile phone in the school building then the phone will be confiscated until the end of the school day when the child or young person may retrieve it from the school office.

If another offence is committed by the same child or young person then the phone will be confiscated and only returned to that child or young person's parent or carer in person.

Phones that are confiscated will require to be held in a secure place in the school office. The school cannot take responsibility for phones that are stolen or damaged while at school.

If there is a further infringement, parents/carers will be informed that the child or young person will no longer be permitted to take a phone to school for a specified period to be determined by the Head Teacher in line with guidance on periods of time set out in education management circular 3.08 on exclusions from school.

Emergency contact to and from parents/carers must always be made through the school office.

Children and young people who feel unwell must always contact home via the school office and not use their mobile phone. This allows the office staff to monitor the sick person while they wait to be collected. It also avoids children and young people leaving the school without a record being made.

If a child or young person uses a phone to bully another, e.g. to send threatening and/or abusive texts, the phone will be confiscated and the parents/carers informed of the matter. It may also be reported to the police. The phone will be returned to the parents/carers and the child and young person will not be permitted to be in possession of a phone on school premises again.

If such threatening or bullying incidents involving children and young people occur outwith school then the parents/carers of the victim will be advised to contact the police.

Under no circumstances can a camera phone be used in the school grounds to take a photograph or video of a fellow child or young person or member of staff.

Schools will include a statement of this policy in the school handbook which is issued annually to parents/carers.