

23 October 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

We understand that whilst mobile phones are an important part of modern life, especially for communication before and after school, they can be a significant distraction during the school day. As such, as part of our ongoing commitment to creating a focused and distraction-free learning environment, we want to remind you that River Academy has been phone free since September 2024 when it opened.

As a Trust, we are constantly reviewing our approach to supporting our young people's mental health and the removal of phones during the school day is one way we can support our students to live happy, healthy, and successful lives. Evidence from studies recognises that mobile phone use can cause significant problems for student mental health and wellbeing. Such evidence includes;

- **Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing concerns:** High social media usage often causes anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and depression due to comparing lives to curated online images (compass-uk.org).
- **Online Safety & Content:** Many teenagers have seen inappropriate, violent, or sexual content (nspcc.org)
- **Sleep Disruption:** Late-night phone usage affects sleep quality, directly impacting academic performance and emotional regulation (parentshield.co.uk).
- **Addiction & Physical Health:** Phone addiction can cause reduced concentration and a sedentary lifestyle, leading to reduced physical activity and health problems (compass-uk.org).
- **Cyberbullying:** The inability to "escape" peers' online leads to persistent, high-stress situations (parentshield.co.uk).

Removing mobiles phones from the school day provides our young people with a safe, distraction free environment every day during term time which we hope will have a positive impact on their emotional and mental wellbeing, and their academic achievements.

One mobile phone pouch provider recently surveyed over 900 of their school partners to measure the impact that creating a phone-free educational environments had on their students. The outcomes demonstrated notable progress in multiple areas:

- 65% of schools saw an improvement in academic performance
- 74% of schools saw an improvement in student behaviour



- 83% of schools saw an improvement in student engagement in the classroom
- 86% of schools saw a positive impact on student safety and wellness

In February 2026 the Department for Education (DfE) released updated legislation relating to mobile phone use in schools. This legislation states that *“all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default and that schools should develop a mobile phone policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones and other smart technology with similar functionality to mobile phones throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.”*

The DfE expects schools to implement a policy whereby pupils do not have access to their mobile phone throughout the school day including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

With your support, we are confident that our approach can be maintained to support our students to learn in a phone free environment. Across the Maiden Erlegh Trust all other secondary schools are using pouches, however for now we will maintain our current procedures which have been successful so far. However recently, I have been disappointed by one or two older students who have not followed procedures and if necessary, our current system could be changed in the future.

However, due to the importance of this legislation, the DfE states that *“schools should feel confident to use their power to confiscate mobile phones or similar devices as a disciplinary penalty where their policy is clearly breached”* and that *“the law protects staff from liability in any proceedings brought against them for any loss or damage to items they have confiscated as a sanction”*. *“Headteachers are backed by DfE to confiscate mobile phones and similar devices for whatever length of time they deem proportionate”*. Therefore, to bolster our processes, and in line with all the other Maiden Erlegh Schools we will be adopting the following sanctions from Tuesday November 3rd 2026.

What happens if a student's phone is seen by a member of staff during the school day?

	Sanction	Consequence for refusing
1 st offence in the year	<p>The phone is taken from the student at the time of the offence.</p> <p>The student is sent to the Reflection room</p> <p>A message is sent home to alert the parents of the confiscation.</p>	<p>The student is placed into the Reflection room until the phone is handed in.</p> <p>If the student refuses Reflection they will be suspended for defiance for the remainder of the day.</p> <p>When the parent collects their child in order to serve the suspension,</p>



	<p>The phone is kept for five days in the school office.</p> <p>The student attends a same day after-school detention and is given their phone back at the end of the five days.</p>	<p>the phone must be handed to a member of staff.</p> <p>The phone is kept in the school office for five days and is handed back to the student at the end of the fifth day.</p>
2 nd offence in the year (and all further offences)	<p>The phone is taken from the student at the time of the offence.</p> <p>A message is sent home to alert the parents of the confiscation.</p> <p>The phone is kept in the school office until the end of the half term.</p> <p>The student sits a same day detention on the day of the confiscation.</p> <p>The parent must collect the phone from the school office at the end of the last day of the half term.</p>	<p>The student is placed into Reflection until the phone is handed in.</p> <p>If the student refuses to go to the Reflection room they will be suspended for defiance for the remainder of the day.</p> <p>When the parent collects their child, in order to serve the suspension, the phone must be handed to a member of staff.</p> <p>The phone is kept in the school office until the last day of the term and is handed back to the parent.</p>

NB: In line with other schools within the Trust, if a phone is confiscated for the second time in the final week of a half term, it will be kept until the end of the next half term.

We have been so fortunate that in the 26 months since River Academy opened phones have been handed in and the community has benefitted from a safe, distraction free environment and I hope it can remain so and these sanctions are never used.

Thank you for your continued support in helping us create the very best learning environment for your children.

Yours sincerely

Andy Hartley
Headteacher

Steve Jump
Director of Secondary

Jon Peck
CEO

