



Policy on the use of Personal Digital Devices During the School Day

Introduction

Citywest & Saggart Community National School is committed to providing a safe, calm and focused learning environment. In line with Department of Education and Youth Circular 0044/2025, this policy restricts the use of personal digital devices for the duration of the school day, including break times, lunchtime and school-related activities on or off site.

The school recognises the educational value of technology; however, all digital devices used for teaching and learning are school-owned, managed and supervised under the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

Summary

General Rule	Pupils are not permitted to use personal digital devices during the school day or during school activities. Devices must not be switched on, accessed or removed from school bags while pupils are in the care of the school, including during school outings/events. The use of "school mode", "class mode" or similar restricted settings on personal devices is not permitted as an alternative to switching devices off during the school day.
Mobile Phones P.3	Pupils are strongly encouraged to leave mobile phones at home. If deemed absolutely necessary, pupils in 3rd–6th Class may bring a mobile phone, solely for safety on the journey to and from school. It must be <u>turned off</u> and left in their bag during school. Pupils from Junior Infants to 2nd Class are not permitted to bring mobile phones to school.
Smart Watches P.3	Pupils are strongly encouraged to leave smart watches at home. Simple watches or fitness trackers that do not connect to the internet or allow communication, gaming or recording are permitted. Smart watches capable of calling, texting, taking photos, recording or gaming are treated as mobile phones regardless of whether those functions are enabled or not. If brought to school it must be <u>turned off</u> and left in their bag.
Exemptions P.3-4	A parent/guardian should apply to school management for consideration for an exemption using the application form in Appendix 1. Reasons for an exemption may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical or health-related needs • Wellbeing or mental health reasons • Special educational needs or assistive technology
Breaches P.4	Any use of a device will be dealt with in accordance with our Code of Positive Behaviour.
Loss, theft or damage	The school accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of personal devices brought onto the school premises. Personal digital devices are not covered under the school's insurance policy.

Rationale

While personal digital devices can offer benefits, their use during the school day presents risks including distraction from learning, social difficulties, cyberbullying, viewing inappropriate material, data protection and safeguarding concerns. The presence of personal recording devices presents safeguarding risks, particularly in relation to child protection, data protection and the unauthorized sharing of images. This policy supports pupil wellbeing, concentration, face-to-face social interaction and positive behaviour.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Protect the welfare, wellbeing and safety of pupils and staff
- Reduce distraction and support effective teaching and learning
- Promote positive social interaction during the school day
- Provide clear expectations for pupils, parents and staff regarding personal devices

Scope and Definitions

Personal digital devices includes any device that can connect to the internet or record sound, images or video. These include mobile phones, smartphones, tablets, gaming devices and smart watches which are capable of communication, gaming and/or recording.

This policy applies during:

- The full school day
- Break and lunch times
- School trips, tours and off-site activities
- After-school activities organised by the school. External providers operating independently are responsible for their own device policies, which must align with safeguarding requirements.

Links to Other Policies

This policy operates in conjunction with:

- Acceptable Use Policy
- Code of Positive Behaviour
- Bí Cineálta (Anti-Bullying) Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Data Protection Policies

Specific Guidelines on Use of Devices

General Rule

Pupils are not permitted to use personal digital devices during the school day or during school activities. Devices must **not** be switched on, accessed or removed from school bags while pupils are in the care of the school.

Mobile Phones & Smart Watches

- Pupils are strongly encouraged to leave mobile phones and smart watches at home.
- Mobile Phones:
 - If deemed absolutely necessary, pupils in **3rd–6th Class** may bring a mobile phone, solely for safety on the journey to and from school.
 - Pupils from **Junior Infants to 2nd Class** are not permitted to bring mobile phones to school.
- Smart Watches:
 - Simple watches or fitness trackers that do not connect to the internet or allow communication, gaming or recording are permitted.
 - Smart watches capable of **calling, texting, taking photos, recording or gaming** are treated as mobile phones regardless of whether those functions are enabled or not.
- If bringing a mobile or smart watch to school:
 - The device must be switched off before entering the school building.
 - The device must remain switched off and stored in the pupil's school bag for the entire school day.
 - Phones may not be used for any purpose on school premises or during school activities.
 - The school accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of personal devices brought onto the school premises. Personal digital devices are not covered under the school's insurance policy.

Use of "School Mode" on Personal Devices

The use of "school mode", "class mode" or similar restricted settings on personal devices is not permitted as an alternative to switching devices off during the school day.

While such modes may limit certain functions, they do not provide sufficient assurance that a device is fully inactive. School mode settings can vary by device, may still allow connectivity, notifications, tracking or background data use, and can often be disabled or altered by the user.

The switching off and storage of personal devices ensures clarity for pupils, staff and parents and avoids misunderstandings or inconsistent enforcement.

This approach supports a clear, fair and transparent implementation of the school's Personal Digital Devices Policy and aligns with Department of Education guidance on restricting access to personal devices during the school day.

Exemptions

In exceptional circumstances, prior permission may be granted for a pupil, on a case-by-case basis, to use a personal device such as a phone, tablet, iPad or laptop during the school day. A parent/guardian should apply to school management for consideration for an exemption using the application form in Appendix 1.

Reasons for an exemption may include:

- Medical or health-related needs
- Wellbeing or mental health reasons
- Special educational needs or assistive technology

Where permission is granted, the following conditions apply:

- The device may only be used for the specific purpose approved and not for general or recreational use.
- Where internet access is required, the device must connect exclusively to the school's approved network to ensure safe and appropriate use.
- Access to applications, programmes or content should be restricted to those approved for the agreed purpose. Where applicable (e.g. iPads), features such as *Guided Access* must be enabled.
- Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring the device is protected by a suitable safety case, where possible.

- Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that the device is appropriately configured prior to use, including restrictions on applications, content and notifications.
- Personal devices brought to school must be clearly labelled with the pupil's name and class.
- Permission to use a personal device may be reviewed or withdrawn at any time if the agreed conditions are not adhered to or if the device use is no longer required.
- The school accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of personal devices brought onto the school premises. Personal digital devices are not covered under the school's insurance policy.

School Trips and Activities

- Personal digital devices are not permitted on school trips, tours or extracurricular activities unless explicitly authorised by the school for safeguarding or logistical reasons. In such cases strict expectations around their use will be in place.

Breaches and Sanctions

- Any use of a device will be dealt with in accordance with our Code of Positive Behaviour.
- A device may need to be confiscated if the health, safety, wellbeing or privacy of a child or other person is at ongoing risk. Parents/guardians will be informed in such circumstances and will be required to collect the device from the school office. The device will be retained securely until it is collected.
- In cases involving serious breaches, including the recording or sharing of images, audio or video, further action may be taken in line with the Code of Positive Behaviour, Bí Cineálta Policy and Child Safeguarding procedures. Where appropriate, the matter may be referred to external agencies.

Responsibilities

Pupils

- Meet all expectations regarding storage and non-use of devices
- Never take photographs, videos or audio recordings in school or on school outings
- Hand over devices immediately if requested by staff
- Pupils will not use personal devices to manage emergency situations during the school day.

Parents/Guardians

- Apply in writing for exemptions where required
- Ensure devices are clearly labelled
- Reinforce school expectations at home
- Use the school office as the only point of contact during the school day, and in the event of an emergency.

Staff

- Use personal devices responsibly and discreetly
- Use school devices for photographing or recording pupils
- Follow school procedures outlined in this policy, the AUP and code of behaviour.

ICT Co-Ordinator/ICT Committee

- Support consistent implementation of the Personal Digital Devices Policy.
- Provide guidance on safe configuration and appropriate use of devices.
- Promote safeguarding and online safety in relation to personal devices.
- Support monitoring and periodic review of the policy.
- Co-ordinate age-appropriate education on responsible technology use, online safety and digital wellbeing.

Principal

- Manage and review the approval of exceptional use.

Consultation, Ratification and Review

Parental Consultation and Support

The school consulted with parents/guardians through a whole-school survey conducted in February 2026. The survey demonstrated strong parental support for a phone-free school day in line with Circular 0044/2025.

Key findings included:

- **93% of parents who responded supported** a school-wide ban on pupils using or accessing mobile phones during the school day.
- Parents identified the main benefits of a phone-free school day as:
 - Reduced distraction (**89%**)
 - Improved concentration and learning (**89%**)
 - Improved social interaction during break times (**86%**)
 - Reduced risk of cyberbullying (**81%**)
 - Improved pupil wellbeing (**77%**)

Where concerns were expressed, these primarily related to children's safety when travelling to and from school and the need for clear, limited exemptions. These concerns are addressed through the policy's provision for:

- permission-based mobile phone use for pupils in 3rd–6th Class for travel to and from school only
- case-by-case exemptions for medical, wellbeing and special educational needs
- the school office remaining the primary point of contact during the school day

The findings of the parental consultation informed the development of this policy and confirm strong alignment between parental views, school practice and national guidance.

Student Consultation and Support

The school consulted pupils through the Student Council during the development of this policy. The council members also conducted a further survey of their classmates from 3rd to 6th class.

Key findings included:

- 78 of the 158 children surveyed owned a mobile phone
- 34 had watches that could make or receive calls
- 39 had watches that could take photos or videos
- 31 had watches on which they could play games
- 7 out of 8 classes agreed that phones can distract from learning
- 6 out of 8 classes agreed that smart watches can distract from learning
- Benefits of not having access to phones and smart watches included: break from technology, fewer distractions, reduced temptation, improved learning, increased privacy.
- Concerns included: not being able to inform parents when they arrived at school or returned home, not knowing who was collecting them, difficulty contacting parents or being informed of a family emergency, and not knowing the time.

Student representatives shared their views on the benefits, concerns and fair implementation of a personal device-free school day. Their feedback informed the school's approach to communication and implementation. It was agreed that the benefits and concerns should be communicated to all students during a formal introduction to the policy, particularly those in 3rd to 6th class.

Ratification and Implementation



This plan was formally ratified by the Board of management in March 2026.

Implementation will include:

- Communication of policy through school email to all parents.
- Publication of policy on school website.
- All pupils will be informed through age-appropriate discussion
- All staff will be informed through a staff meeting

Timetable for Review

To ensure this policy remains up to date in line with changes in technology/internet and the needs of the school community, this policy should undergo revision by the ICT coordinator/ICT committee annually, with a review involving all parties in the year 2029/2030.

This policy was ratified by the school's Board of Management	
Signed:  Chairperson	Signed:  Principal
Date: 23.4.26	Date: 23.4.26



Application for Exceptional Use of a Personal Digital Device

Pupil Details

Name: _____

Class: _____

Device Details

Device Type: Tablet iPad Laptop Other: _____

Make / Model: _____

Reason for Exceptional Use

(Medical, wellbeing, assistive or specific educational need – documentation may be requested)

Duration of Permission

Short-term (dates): _____

Ongoing (subject to review)

Conditions of Use – Agreement

By signing below, the parent(s)/guardian(s) and pupil agree that:

- The device will be used **only for the specific purpose approved** by the school.
- The device will remain **under staff supervision** while in use and stored when not in use.
- Internet access, where required, will be via the **school's approved network only**.
- Access will be limited to **approved apps/programmes only** (e.g. *Guided Access* enabled where applicable).
- The device will **not be used to record or share audio, images or video** unless explicitly authorised.
- Parents/guardians are responsible for **device configuration, restrictions and protective casing**.
- The device will be **clearly labelled** with the pupil's name and class.
- The school accepts **no responsibility** for loss, theft or damage to personal devices.
- Use of the device is subject to the school's **Acceptable Use Policy, Code of Behaviour, Child Protection and Data Protection policies**.
- Permission may be **reviewed or withdrawn** if conditions are not met or the need no longer applies.

Declarations

Parent / Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Pupil Signature: _____ Date: _____

School Use Only

Approved: Yes No

Approved By: _____

Approval Date: _____

Review Date: _____

This approval applies only to the device and purpose outlined above and does not permit general use of personal digital devices in school.