

MERE SCHOOL

Mobile Phone Policy for Educational Visits

1. Legal Basis and Background

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 placed the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance on mobile phones in schools on a statutory footing from 29 June 2026. Headteachers are legally required to have regard to this guidance.

During the school day, including lessons, time between lessons, break and lunch, all schools must be mobile phone-free environments by default. This is a statutory requirement.

However, the DfE guidance takes a deliberately different approach to educational visits. For trips outside the normal school day and for residential visits, schools must determine their own approach. The blanket school-day ban does not automatically transfer to off-site visits.

This document sets out how Mere School will manage mobile phone use across all visit types.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all pupils of Mere School participating in educational visits, including:

- day visits that take place during the normal school day;
- day visits that take place wholly or partly outside the normal school day;
- residential visits (overnight or multi-night).

It applies to all staff leading or accompanying visits, whether employed by the school or engaged as external instructors or providers.

References to "mobile phones" in this policy also apply to smart watches and other devices with equivalent functionality (such as the ability to send/receive messages or record audio/video), unless the context makes clear otherwise.

3. General Principles

All decisions about mobile phone use on educational visits must be:

- made actively and documented, phone policy must be stated in the visit risk assessment or visit information pack; it must not be left undefined;
- proportionate to the nature, age group and purpose of the visit;
- consistent with the school's safeguarding duties and online safety responsibilities;
- communicated clearly to pupils, parents and accompanying staff before departure.

Visit Leaders should weigh both the risks and the **legitimate benefits** of mobile phone access when determining the approach for each visit. A blanket prohibition may be appropriate for some visits and inappropriate for others.

4. Day Visits During the School Day

4.1 Default Position

Where a day visit takes place during the normal school day (i.e., within the hours the school is ordinarily open), the school's standard in-school Mobile Phone Policy applies as the starting point (phones are collected at the start of the day and returned at the end). Pupils should not have access to their mobile phones during the visit.

4.2 Determining the Approach

The Visit Leader, in consultation with the Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC), will determine whether the standard in-school position is appropriate for the specific visit, or whether a different approach is warranted. Factors to consider include:

- whether pupils are unsupervised at any point (e.g. downtime in a town centre, independent navigation exercises) and whether phone access aids safety,
- whether the visit involves activities where phone use poses a distraction or physical safety risk.
- whether photography or specific apps (navigation, museum guides, wildlife identification, augmented reality tools, translation apps etc.) form part of the planned educational experience.
- whether any pupil has a medical, disability-related or other identified need that requires phone access.

4.3 Permitted Approaches

The Visit Leader may select from the following approaches and must document the chosen approach in the visit risk assessment:

- phones prohibited for the duration of the visit, consistent with the school day default.
- phones permitted for those with a medical need.

4.4 Emergency Communications

Regardless of the approach taken to general phone use, the Visit Leader must establish and brief pupils and staff on the protocol for communications in an emergency. Uncontrolled phone use by pupils during an incident can cause serious harm by alarming parents with incomplete information or spreading inaccurate details.

The emergency communications protocol must be documented in the visit risk assessment.

5. Day Visits Outside the Normal School Day

5.1 Default Position

Where a day visit takes place wholly or partly outside the normal school hours (including early morning departures before school starts, evening activities, visits that extend beyond the end of the school day, or visits at weekends and during holidays), the school's standard in-school mobile phone policy applies as the starting point (phones are collected at the start of the day and returned at the end).

5.2 Determining the Approach

The Visit Leader must make a deliberate and documented decision for each visit. The same factors listed in section 4.2 apply. In addition, for visits outside school hours, Visit Leaders should consider:

- the likelihood that pupils will have travelled independently to a meeting point and may need their phone to contact parents about logistics.
- whether the activity takes place in a public setting where phone use by others is unrestricted.

5.3 Permitted Approaches

The same range of approaches set out in section 4.3 is available. The chosen approach must be documented in the visit risk assessment and communicated to parents in the visit information/consent documentation.

5.4 Parent Communication

Parents should be given a contact number for the school in case they need to reach their child, and pupils should know to contact parents via staff if needed.

6. Residential and Overseas Visits

6.1 Safeguarding

Safeguarding must shape the phone policy for all residential and overseas visits. Pupils must always be able to raise concerns with a trusted adult, including concerns arising online.

Pupils must also retain access to their phone where required for medical purposes (e.g. continuous glucose monitoring linked to a phone) or where a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 requires it.

6.2 Default Position

For residential visits, pupils are not permitted to bring their mobile phones unless it is required for medical reasons.

6.3 Daytime Use on Residential and Overseas Visits

During educational activities and visits that take place as part of the residential/overseas programme, the Visit Leader will determine and communicate the phone approach using the same framework as for day visits (see sections 4 and 5 above). The chosen approach will be stated in the daily programme or activity brief.

6.4 Evening and Overnight Use

The Visit Leader will set and communicate the school's Mobile Phone Policy of no mobile phones on visits (unless required for medical reasons).

7. Breach of Policy and Sanctions

Any breach of this policy during a visit will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Behaviour Policy. Sanctions may include confiscation of the device for the remainder of the visit, restriction of future visit participation and, where the behaviour is serious, the matter will be reported to a senior leader on return to school.

Serious online safety incidents identified during a visit, including cyberbullying, the sharing of inappropriate images, or contact from unknown adults, must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL on return to school (or immediately if the incident is ongoing or urgent).

8. Roles and responsibilities

Headteacher	Has overall responsibility for this policy and for ensuring it is implemented consistently.
Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC)	Ensures all Visit Leaders are aware of this policy; reviews visit risk assessments to confirm phone approach is documented; advises Visit Leaders on any queries.
Visit Leader	Makes and documents the phone approach decision for each visit; briefs pupils and staff; implements the policy during the visit.
Parents	Read and support the phone approach for each visit; ensure their child is aware of expectations before departure.
Pupils	Follow the phone policy communicated before the visit; comply with instructions from Visit Leaders during the visit.

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if there is a significant change in the DfE statutory guidance or other relevant legislation. Any updates to Mer School's mobile phone policy will prompt a review of this document.

References

- DfE Statutory Guidance: Mobile phones in schools (updated 29 June 2026) — gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, section 36
- OEAP National Guidance 6w FAQs: Mobile Phones On Visits — oeapng.info
- DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education (current edition)
- DfE: Behaviour in Schools guidance (current edition)

