



Bristol Free School
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Headteacher: Mrs S. King

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Dear Parents/Carers

Re: Phone-Free School - Action Required

As mentioned in last week's newsletter, during Term 6, BFS is implementing a phone-free policy for students in Years 7 to 11 using Yondr lockable pouches. The newsletter and accompanying video explained why the school is adopting this policy and how we decided on this strategy.

To support this initiative, we are asking all families to pay for the cost of their child's phone pouch (£15) and kindly request that payments be made through ParentPay by **22 June 2025** in readiness for the introduction of the pouches soon after.

Pouches will be provided free of charge for students who are eligible for Free School Meals. Any other families requesting financial support for this, should complete a hardship application form. Forms should be returned to admin@bristolfreeschool.org.uk by 15 June 2025.

Please see the Frequently Asked Questions for more information about the details of the policy.

Thank you for your support with this which will help the safeguarding, mental well-being and focus of all our students.

Yours sincerely

Mr D East
Deputy Headteacher

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A phone-free school: What is the point of the school implementing this approach?

Increasingly, schools and society are recognising the downsides of young people being constantly contactable and having access to mobile technology with very few restrictions. There is now a well-documented and growing body of evidence about the negative impact on young people's social, emotional and academic development. In the worst cases some young people are addicted to devices and there are real safeguarding issues. In addition, phones take a considerable amount of staff time to manage, they can cause conflict and distract all parties from the core purpose of learning.

Who are Yondr?

Yondr is a company that creates phone-free spaces for a variety of organisations including schools. They provide a simple solution that allows people to retain possession of their device whilst removing the distraction of it.

What are phone pouches?

Lockable phone pouches are a simple system whereby phones and smart watches are placed into a pouch, locked and then reopened by magnets. Schools have portable and fixed-point magnetic unlocking stations. Pouches are now used in over 3,500 schools.

STUDENT POUCH

- Durable neoprene fabric
- Tamper-resistant lock
- Fits all phone sizes



How do they work?

Students will turn off their phones and smart watches (any watch able to receive calls or connect to the internet) and place them in their pouch as they enter the school site. They will lock the pouch by closing the flaps and pushing the lock button. Pouches will remain in the students' bags until the end of the school day. At the end of the day, students will simply tap their pouch against an unlocking magnet and press the button on the pouch to unlock it. Unlocking stations will be available across the school site.



How much do they cost?

The pouches will cost £15 - this is a one-off cost and will be payable through ParentPay. The school recognises that this is an additional cost for families but, given the requests we have received from students and parents to ensure that our 'No Phone' policy is consistently adhered to, we believe this is a change that parents and carers will welcome. The pouches will be added to the list of essential school equipment.

Financial assistance – will there be any help to pay for the pouch?

The school will provide one pouch free-of-charge to each student in receipt of Free School Meals. If a replacement is required due to the pouch being lost or damaged, a charge of £15 will be made. Additionally, if families are not in receipt of Free School Meals, but need additional financial assistance, a hardship application can be made.

What happens if I do not want to purchase a pouch – can my child still bring a phone to school?

No. All phones at school must be kept in a pouch. Where families do not support this approach, students will be expected to keep phones at home. The school will maintain records of students who have decided they will keep their phones at home.

My child has a basic phone (not a smartphone) - will this be covered by the policy?

Yes. The policy applies to all devices and smart watches – the intention is to limit distractions from all phones and linked devices. At this point in time the policy does not cover earbuds/headphones etc.



What happens if a student is found with a phone outside of the pouch during the school day?

The first time a student breaches the rules they will be placed in the internal Behaviour Support Room and their phone will be confiscated. It will be locked in the school office and the student will be able to collect it at the end of the day. The confiscation will be recorded.

On the second, or subsequent, occasions a student breaches the rules, the school will retain the device until parents are able to collect it. Where there are repeated incidents or refusal to hand in phones, further sanctions will apply. This is likely to result in fixed term suspension. This includes situations where we have been told that students will not be bringing phones into school.

How will you ensure pupils are locking the phones in the pouches each day?

Students will show staff upon entry to school that they have opened and placed phones into pouches before locking the pouch. Students will then show their locked pouch to tutors as part of the normal everyday checking of essential equipment.

In the early stages of the new policy, students will be regularly reminded by staff, to enable them to become accustomed to the new routine. Following this, there will be spot checks throughout the school day to ensure compliance.

My child needs their phone during the day – how will they access it?

If students have an underlying medical need where use of a mobile phone is required for monitoring software/apps (e.g. for diabetes regulation), the school will provide adapted medical pouches. These come with a velcro fastener. If students misuse this medical adjustment, the above process for confiscation and sanctions will apply.

If my child needs to leave before the end of the school day for a medical appointment or similar, how do they access their phone?

As per current policy, families need to contact the school office and attendance teams to communicate any non-standard arrival or departure times. Students will be able to lock and unlock devices at reception in addition to the normal times at the start and end of the day.

What if I need to contact my child during the day or they need to contact me?

We want our students to be engaged in their learning. If you need to contact your child during the school day, contact the main office - 0117 959 7200. If a student needs to contact home, they should go to Student Services.

Will children have to queue at the start and end of the day to lock and unlock their pouches?

The locking and unlocking process is very quick and there will be enough unlocking stations around the site to enable students to do this quickly with minimal disruption at the end of their day. The school will review whether any further action is required (e.g. a staggered finish to the day to allow for efficient unlocking).

What happens if the pouch is damaged or lost - will I have to pay for another one?

Unless confiscated, students are in possession of their phone (in the pouch) for the entire school day. We advise students to store the pouch safely in their bags. The school accepts no responsibility for phones or pouches being damaged. Families will need to purchase replacement pouches at cost, or the child's phone will need to remain at home.

I have heard students can break into pouches - what happens if they do?

No system is 100% foolproof against deliberate damage or hack. Where a student deliberately breaches the policy, this will be treated in the same way other forms of defiance or non-compliance would be through the school behaviour policy.

What if there is a school emergency?

School emergency procedures would be activated as normal and, as part of this, school leaders prioritise student and staff safety. Restrictions to accessing devices can ensure families are not unduly worried or given incorrect information.

How will students unlock their phones at the end of the day if they are offsite?

If students are offsite at the end of the school day, they will have the opportunity to unlock pouches before leaving site.

What about residential trips?

Trip leaders will review mobile device usage for all trips as part of their standard risk assessments and a decision will be made on whether pouches are to be used.



Why Yondr?

- 83% of schools saw an improvement in student engagement in the classroom
- 74% of schools saw an improvement in student behaviour
- 65% of schools saw an improvement in academic performance