

## Acceptable Use of Screens Policy (2025-26)

### Introduction

#### *A distinctive culture*

At Heritage School we are seeking to create a distinctive culture with respect to screens – one which intentionally limits screen use in order to prioritise deeper knowledge, reading, handwriting, face-to-face relationships, and real-world activities. This introduction explains why, and clarifies the scope and purposes of this policy.

A central objective of this policy is to establish an effective partnership between home and school. Given the fundamental threats posed by excessive screen use, a common approach is essential if the school is to achieve its aims for its pupils. The school can regulate screen time and screen content during school hours. If parents want their child(ren) to flourish, they must regulate screen time and screen content outside of school hours. For this reason, we expect all parents to read this policy annually and sign the Screen Use Agreement with Parents at the start of each academic year.

#### *The purpose of education*

Ultimately, the goal toward which the work of Heritage School is orientated is the enjoyment of rightly-ordered, ever-deeper relations with others, with God and with the natural world. This all-embracing, collective vision of flourishing is fullness of life. Towards that ultimate end, our more immediate goal is the healthiest possible development of children and young people in every area – intellectually, physically, morally, spiritually, emotionally, and socially – so that they can direct their own lives wisely toward that which is best and contribute to the flourishing of others. We can help them get started, and our hope is that they will keep moving in this direction.

Healthy childhood development depends upon numerous fundamentals being in place such as physical safety and well-being, warm, secure relationships both inside and outside the home, and a plausible framework of meaning and value to help make sense of the world. Acquiring foundational intellectual skills such as reading, writing, and maths is also a precondition for the most expansive development of potential. Such skills make it possible to grow more deeply in knowledge.

Knowledge is what our curriculum is designed to facilitate. In contrast with the all-too-prevalent thin view of knowledge as mere information or data, we see knowing as something richer and more life-giving. Knowledge properly understood is a relation. It implies a genuine getting in touch of the self with others, with God, and with the natural world. Knowing in this sense cannot be done for you; it can only be done by you; it demands attentive engagement.

As we reach outward in this way, we find that we receive something back. Real knowing feeds the mind, the immaterial core of who we are, and the effect is that we become, as Charlotte Mason would say, larger, more expansive people. "By knowledge one grows, becomes more of a person, and that is all there is to show for it."<sup>1</sup> Within this overall understanding of the nature and purpose of education, we can summarise the goal of our lessons day by day as follows: attentive engagement with a knowledge-rich curriculum.

This overall vision for education provides the theoretical basis for this policy. You can learn more about the work of Heritage School on the [Our Vision](#), [Our Priorities](#), and [Our Ethos](#) pages of our website.

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<sup>1</sup> Mason, Charlotte, *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education* (1925), p.325.

### *The place of technology*

Human creativity has always included devising tools and techniques to make life better. This is part of what it means to be human and is to be celebrated. We are the beneficiaries of thousands of years of innovation. Over recent decades, developments in computers and communications technology have changed our lives significantly, and they have brought countless benefits.

Giving pupils the underlying and specific skills to engage creatively with technology is an important goal of our curriculum. Toward that end, we deliver Computer Science lessons in Years 6-8 and we offer a Computer Science IGCSE. Through Computer Science, Maths, Biology, Chemistry and Physics the necessary foundations are laid for pupils to study STEM subjects at A Level and beyond. Many of our former pupils have gone on to do so.

If technology in general has an important role to play in human flourishing, it is also true that not every technology, or every use of technology, is good for us, for our communities, or for the environment. It can be challenging to determine where the boundaries should be drawn in relation to each technology.

### *The focus of this policy: overuse and misuse*

This policy is not addressing technology in general. Rather, in using the term 'screens' its focus is upon particular types of overuse and misuse, particularly with respect to:

- the internet (including chat rooms, message boards, blogs, etc.),
- watching video content (including YouTube, Netflix, television, etc.),
- social media (including apps such as Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp), and
- gaming.

Hardware such as smartphones, smartwatches, laptops, tablets, televisions and other personal electronic devices also fall within the scope of this policy.

### *The problem of excessive screen time*

Statistics tell us that screen use has come to dominate our waking hours.<sup>2</sup> The market saturation of the smartphone from about 2012 has had a particularly profound social impact, creating a new cultural norm of incessant digital connection. From a historical perspective, the way that screens have become so deeply embedded into our lives in such a short space of time is a social revolution of the highest order, and it should raise far reaching questions, including about its impact upon healthy childhood development.

In the light of our understanding of the purpose and nature of education, the overwhelming dominance of screens in our free time poses a serious threat to human flourishing for at least four reasons:

1. **Shallow knowledge.** Screen-based forms of communication and entertainment are different in nature to real-world relationships and activities. The medium and characteristics of the screen itself narrows the experience. In many important respects screens get in the way and disconnect us. They offer at best a thin form of knowledge, a partial relation.
2. **Opportunity cost.** Screen overuse is displacing wholesome real-world, embodied, knowledge-forming growth opportunities, such as face-to-face time with friends, sport, music, reading, art, playing with toys, cooking, being outdoors, gardening, etc. Jonathan Haidt identifies the loss of face-to-face socialising due to screen time as one of the 'foundational harms' caused by smartphones and urges a return to a play-based childhood.<sup>3</sup>
3. **Undermining attentive engagement.** Social media and other apps, video games, and streaming platforms are designed with a sophisticated awareness of how to capture and hold our attention. The reason is clear: so that tech companies can maximise profit through

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<sup>2</sup> The average UK teenager spends 35 hours per week on a smartphone, not including other forms of screen use such as gaming. See the [Smartphone Free Childhood](#) website for more information. See also the [Media Nations: UK 2024](#) report and the [Online Nation 2024](#) report for additional up-to-date statistics.

<sup>3</sup> See [The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness](#), by Jonathan Haidt (2024)

subscriptions or advertising.<sup>4</sup> The incessant demands and addictive power of screens are making us more distracted and unable to sustain attention for longer periods of time. They are also making us more passive and more easily led, with weaker powers of agency. Screen activities can dominate our imaginative life. We can become impatient with silence, slowness, boredom, and effort – the necessary conditions for insight, creativity and deeper knowledge.

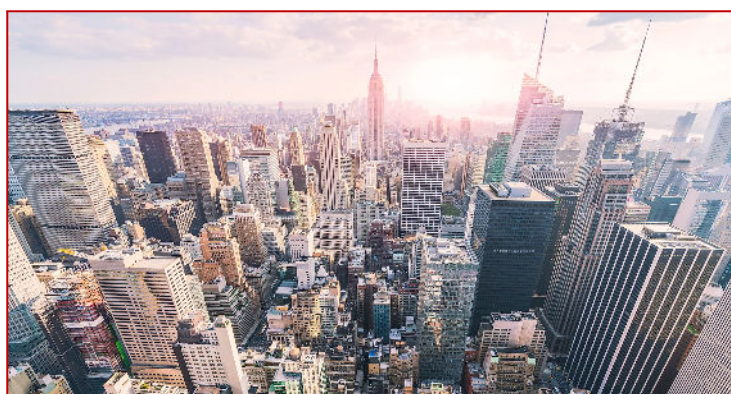
4. **Rise in anxiety and depression.** Linked to these factors, excessive smartphone use from about 2012 is correlated to a sharp rise across the developed world in rates of teenage anxiety, depression, suicide and self-harm. Among the contributing factors are incessant digital stimulation, constant exposure to one's peer group through social media, destructive online content and behaviour, and loss of sleep.<sup>5</sup>

### ***The problem of destructive online content***

Failure by schools or parents to install content filters on all devices children have access to, including smartphones, is a serious safeguarding concern because it exposes them to significant harm. The evidence is clear that, according to the Children's Commissioner, 'Children are frequently exposed to a wide range of inappropriate and harmful content online, including sexualised and violent imagery, anonymous trolling, and material promoting suicide, self-harm and eating disorders.'<sup>6</sup> Of particular concern is online pornography and the prevalence of sexual imagery depicting coercion, humiliation and physical aggression.<sup>7</sup> Due to incessant access to the internet through smartphones, the consumption of online pornography is having a devastating impact upon individuals, relationships, and society as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

The online world could be likened to a megacity. It contains much that is valuable and stimulating.

However, a megacity will also contain dark places and dangerous people. No responsible adult would consider sending a child into a megacity alone. Parents and schools must ensure, through robust content filters, that children and young people cannot access destructive content.



See the Appendix to this policy for more information about online risks, including forms of exploitation and cyber-bullying.

### ***Purposes***

The purposes of this policy are to:

- Explain the convictions which guide the approach of the school to screen use (see above),
- Explain what the school does to promote the acceptable use of screens,
- Explain our expectations for pupils with respect to screen use,
- Explain the school's policy regarding phones and other personal electronic devices,
- Encourage partnership between home and school with respect to acceptable screen use,
- Encourage pupils and families to participate in our annual Screen Free Week,
- Outline (in the Appendix) specific risks associated with screen use and identify resources to help parents.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, [The Sirens' Call: How Attention Became the World's Most Endangered Resource](#) by Chris Hays (2025); [Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again](#) by Johan Hari (2022); [The Techwise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in its Proper Place](#) by Andy Crouch (2017); the Netflix documentary 'The Social Dilemma' (2020).

<sup>5</sup> To learn more, see Jonathan Haidt's book, referred to above, or [his webinar with Smartphone Free Childhood](#) (March 2024).  
<sup>6</sup> See [Digital childhoods: a survey of children and parents](#) (September 2022), p.4.

<sup>7</sup> See [Evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children](#) (May 2023).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/get-the-facts/> to learn more.

## **Role of the School**

The school plays an important role in the acceptable use of screens by establishing and promoting a culture that is oriented toward deeper knowledge, reading, handwriting, face-to-face relationships, and real-world activities. We recognise that habits established in childhood and teen years are particularly important as they can shape patterns for life.

The school promotes the acceptable use of screens through its own limited use of screens during routine teaching, through PSHE lessons which raise awareness of online risks and promote effective self-management of screen use, through the Screen Use Agreement with Pupils, through its policy regarding personal devices, through the partnership that the school seeks to establish with parents, including the Screen Use Agreement with Parents, and through encouraging parents and pupils to participate in Screen Free Week.

## **Screens in the curriculum**

As explained in the introduction, the school places the highest priority upon attentive engagement as the necessary pre-condition for real knowing. Our approach to routine classroom learning is, therefore, intentionally low-tech. We do not supply pupils with ipads or tablets and we do not make use of interactive whiteboards. We make use of numerous other methods and strategies to help pupils develop a strong habit of attention.<sup>9</sup>

The school actively encourages pupils to creatively engage with technology, particularly through its Computer Science curriculum, which commences in Year 6, and through the Computer Science IGCSE. Pupils are encouraged to be skillful users of online resources and systems. Independent research projects and other homework assignments provide opportunities to train pupils in how to conduct online research and find reliable sources of information. From Year 7, the school makes use of Google Classroom. All Senior pupils are given password protected Heritage School Google email accounts. Pupils receive guidance on how to access their school email and make use of Google Classroom.

The school recognises the growing and serious threat from generative artificial intelligence (AI) to developing a strong habit of attentive engagement and, therefore, to cognitive development. In keeping with our vision for healthy development, we do not permit pupils to use generative AI for any school work, and we ensure that work is done by handwriting in exercise books.

## **PSHE**

Through its PSHE curriculum the school teaches pupils about the general and specific risks associated with it. Pupils are educated in an age appropriate manner about the importance of safe and responsible use of screens, including the school's expectations for online behaviour by its pupils (see Expectations of Pupils below). The main areas of risk covered in our PSHE curriculum are identified in the Appendix to this policy.

## **Content filtering and monitoring**

In keeping with the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education, the school has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place to protect pupils from accessing or creating inappropriate or harmful content while working on school owned and managed devices connected to the school's network (e.g. Chromebooks connected to the pupil network). The monitoring we do is carried out using tools provided by Smoothwall which automatically notify the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads if there is a concern. For more information about the school's approach to filtering and monitoring see our Safeguarding Policy.

## **Personal Electronic Devices**

### ***General rule: no personal electronic devices for pupils***

Pupils are not permitted to bring personal electronic devices to the school or on school trips, apart from specific exceptions identified below. This general prohibition applies, but is not limited to, basic phones, smartphones, laptop computers, tablet computers, smartwatches, fitness trackers, Kindles, cameras and ipods. See our Uniform Policy for more information about wearable technology.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://heritageschool.org.uk/about-heritage/school-priorities/> for more information.

Specific exceptions may be agreed to this general prohibition where there are learning needs that necessitate the use of, for example, a laptop. Specific permission may be given for stand alone cameras on residential trips.

***Exception: basic phones for Seniors on days they travel independently***

Our preference is that Senior pupils do not bring phones to school. However, we recognise that only if a pupil travels independently to/from school, parents may prefer their child to have a phone for safety reasons. We assume that Senior pupils will travel independently. If a pupil in Year 5 or Year 6 is to travel independently specific arrangements need to be agreed with the school in advance.

If parents feel that a pupil who travels independently needs a phone for safety reasons, the pupil is only permitted to bring a 'basic phone' to school. A basic phone is a phone that can make calls and send SMS messages only. It cannot access the internet and, therefore, it is unable to operate any internet-based apps, including cross-platform messaging apps such as WhatsApp. (An exception to this rule during 2025-26 only applies to Year 11 pupils, who may bring in and hand in a smartphone.)

Pupils who bring a phone to school can only do so in keeping with our Phones Procedure described below. When pupils bring phones to school, they must be kept in their bags prior to being handed in at registration time or after 4pm. Pupils attending after-school activities who have already collected their phones at the end of the day, must leave their phones in their bags for the duration of the activity. Phones are never permitted on school trips.

***Phones Procedure (Seniors Only)***

The following Phones Procedure must be adhered to for phones brought to school:

- Prior parental notification is required before a pupil brings a phone to school (see below).
- If a pupil brings a phone to school it must be a basic phone (not internet enabled), with the exception of Year 11 during 2025-26.
- Phones must be placed in a container during registration time.
- Their name should be on the phone (using e.g. a small sticker).
- The phone container will be taken to the School Office after registration time.
- It will be stored during the day in the School Office.
- The phone containers will be placed in the main entrance hall at 4pm, at the formal end of the school day.
- Pupils will collect their phones from the relevant container.
- A phone must not be taken out of bags prior to registration or after 4pm without prior permission from a teacher for a legitimate purpose (e.g. contacting parents about collection arrangements).

Please note that this procedure applies to Seniors only. If parents of pupils in Year 5 or Year 6 agree with the school for their child to travel independently, arrangements for bringing and storing a basic phone during the day will be made on a case by case basis.

***ACTION: Phone Notification Form for Parents of Seniors***

If a Senior pupil is to bring a basic phone to school we require parents to inform the school in advance that their child will be doing so using this Phone Notification Form for Parents of Seniors (2025-26). Please click on the link to access the form.

**Phone Notification Form for Parents of Seniors**

In order for a pupil to bring a basic phone to school, a parent must agree to the following:

- ☐ I confirm that I have read the Acceptable Use of Screens Policy.
- ☐ I believe it is **necessary** for my child to bring a basic phone to school on days when he/she travels to/from school independently for safety reasons.
- ☐ My child will bring the following type of phone to school:
  - (1) Basic phone
  - (2) Smartphone (permissible for Y11 pupils during 2025-26 only)



- ☐ My child travels independently to school and, therefore, needs a phone:
  - (1) Every day of the week
  - (2) On certain days of the week
  - (3) Occasionally, when he/she travels independently
- ☐ I release the school from liability for any loss or damage to my child's phone that may result from the storage of phones in keeping with the Acceptable Use of Screens Policy.
- ☐ I have discussed the Phones Procedure in the Acceptable Use of Screens Policy with my child. He/she agrees to hand in his/her phone at registration time and not take it out of his/her bag on site before registration time or during an afterschool activity.

After you submit the form you will see an automatic confirmation message. It is then acceptable for your child to bring a phone to school in keeping with the Phones Procedure above.

### ***Enforcement – two week confiscation***

We expect pupils to act in good faith and in keeping with this policy by handing in their phone each day, and we expect parents to support this policy by ensuring that smartphones or other personal electronic devices are never brought to school.

Any phones or other electronic devices that are discovered will be confiscated for two weeks and parents will be notified. We reserve the right periodically to perform searches in keeping with the school's protocols. Further infringements of this policy will lead to an escalation of sanctions in accordance with our Behaviour Policy.

### **Expectations of Pupils**

#### ***Pupil responsibility for their online behaviour***

What pupils do and the way in which they relate to one another online can have a significant impact upon their well-being and that of others. As noted above, through our PSHE curriculum pupils are taught about general and specific risks associated with screen use and about appropriate online behaviour. We expect pupils, at all times, to assume responsibility for themselves and their behaviour, including their online behaviour.

#### ***Screen Use Agreement with Senior Pupils***

Our expectation for how pupils should behave online is encouraged through our Screen Use Agreement with Pupils. It is for Senior School pupils only and is presented to them annually in September. They are asked to read it and tick all statements with which they agree, and then sign a hard copy.

### **Screen Use Agreement with Senior Pupils**

Senior pupils are asked to complete this agreement each year in September. They are asked to tick all statements with which they agree, and then sign a hard copy.

#### **Integrity**

- ☐ I recognise that people tend to be less restrained in what they say or do online than they are in person.
- ☐ I will do my best to avoid saying anything online, either to or about others, that I would not be prepared to say to that person face-to-face.
- ☐ In keeping with the School's policy, I will not bring a phone to school unless my parents have completed the Phone Notification Form, I will hand my phone in at registration time, and I will never bring a phone on a school trip.

#### **Inclusion**

- ☐ I will do all that I can, both in-person and online, to make Heritage School an inclusive and friendly community (e.g. by including others in an online group).

- ☐ I understand that not all pupils will want or be allowed to participate in the screen-based activities that I participate in (such as gaming or using social media). I understand that talking too much about such activities can make those who do not participate feel excluded.

### **Balance**

- ☐ I will do my best to limit my screen use and prioritise reading and real world relationships and activities.
- ☐ I understand that too much screen time can have a severe impact upon my ability to focus my attention and, therefore, upon the quality of my school work.
- ☐ I understand that too much screen time can negatively affect sleep and physical activity/fitness, and that it can displace in-person socialising with friends and other wholesome activities.

### **Safety**

#### *Harmful content*

- ☐ I acknowledge that there is harmful content online that children and young people should not have access to.
- ☐ I will not search for, download, upload or forward to others material that is harmful to me or to others.
- ☐ I will not generate content that is harmful to others.

#### *Harmful people*

- ☐ I understand that there are harmful people who are active online and who try to take advantage of others (e.g. financially or sexually).
- ☐ I understand what 'grooming' is. (It is appearing to befriend someone in order to persuade or entice that person to act in a way they would otherwise not want to.)
- ☐ I will never arrange to meet someone in person that I have only ever met online without the agreement of my parents.
- ☐ I understand that there are risks with giving my personal information online (e.g. contact details or bank account information).

#### *Filtering and Monitoring*

- ☐ I understand that the school's filtering software will block access on school computers to certain websites that may be unsafe.
- ☐ I understand that the school's monitoring software is able to track all of my activity on school computers and that it will alert the school if any of my activity raises safeguarding concerns.

### **Misbehaviour online**

If a pupil is aware of inappropriate online behaviour by other Heritage pupils they should talk to their parents about it immediately. Parents may be able to clarify or resolve the matter, including by talking with other parents. Where this is not possible parents and pupils should inform the school immediately. Misbehaviour between Heritage pupils online is a legitimate concern of the school and will be dealt with in keeping with our Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and our Safeguarding Policy.

### **Role of Parents**

#### ***Home and school partnership***

A central objective of this policy is to encourage effective partnership between home and school. Parental engagement is essential because screen use takes place almost entirely outside of school. Where families embrace the convictions and recommendations of this policy, it also makes it easier for other families to adhere to it which, in turn, strengthens the culture for the benefit of all.

### ***Establish parental authority at an early age***

It is essential that parents establish their authority over the use of screens at an early age. Exercising parental responsibility over screen time and screen content is a normal part of family life and should be presented as a matter of fact.

Where this principle is established when children are young, it reduces conflict over screens later. As children get older, the reasons for regulating screen time and screen content should be discussed openly, so that children can weigh up for themselves the risks and benefits and, hopefully, internalise core values. For older children, it is appropriate to set screen time limits in discussion with them, while retaining your parental right to make the final decision.

### ***Open communication***

The Appendix to this policy contains information about specific risks associated with screen use and links to helpful websites for additional information. It is essential that parents are familiar with the risks and, even more importantly, cultivate habits of open communication about screen use with their child(ren).

### ***Parent control software***

As noted above, it is imperative that parents safeguard their child(ren) from harm by installing effective content filters covering all devices that their child has access to. This is especially true for smartphones, and it remains true beyond age 16, particularly with respect to pornography.

Parent control software can be an effective way to regulate screen time on smartphones. They enable parents to decide which applications can be accessed and how much time is appropriate on each. Parents can set overall time limits and deactivate a phone at night to protect healthy sleep patterns. Here are some examples of parent control software: [Qustodio](#); [Family Link](#); [NetNanny](#); [Family Time](#).

Smartphone Free Childhood has identified [child-friendly alternative phones](#), including introductory smartphones which offer greater protection.

### ***Smartphone Free Childhood – until at least age 14-16***

The evidence is clear that there are serious risks to healthy childhood development associated with screen use, particularly in connection with smartphones. Given these risks, our strong recommendation is that children not have a smartphone until at least age 14-16. Where parents adopt a common approach it makes it easier for other families.

Toward that end, we encourage all parents to support the [Smartphone Free Childhood](#) movement and learn more about the threat from these devices. You can sign up on their website and receive periodic updates. Collective local action is needed to resist the intense social pressure to conform (given that, currently, 97% of children in the UK own a smartphone by age 12). A Smartphone Free Childhood parents' WhatsApp group has been created for Heritage families to share concerns and work together. To join the Heritage Cambridge Smartphone Free Childhood Group, click on this [invitation link](#).

We recognise that many Heritage parents, in keeping with wider social norms, have already given a smartphone to their child. Where this is the case, parents still have a responsibility to regulate screen time and screen content. We recognise that many proactive parents have helped their teenage children manage smartphones effectively.

### ***ACTION: Screen Use Agreement with Parents***

In order to protect our pupils from the risks associated with screen overuse and misuse, and in order to ensure the maximum possible developmental benefit from all that Heritage School has to offer, we expect all families to sign up to at least the Expected Commitments of our Screen Use Agreement with Parents (2025-26) and to renew this commitment each year in September. Please click on the link to complete the form.



## **Screen Use Agreement with Parents**

*To be renewed annually in September.*

### **Expected Commitments**

#### *Acceptable Use of Screens Policy*

- ☐ We confirm that we have read the Acceptable Use of Screens Policy, including the Appendix: Online Risks & Useful Links.

#### *Limits Upon Screen Time*

- ☐ We have established and will consistently enforce limits on screen time. These time limits have been discussed with our child(ren).

#### *Limits Upon Screen Content*

- ☐ Content filters and parental controls have been installed and operate effectively on all devices our child(ren) might use independently.

### **Strongly Recommended Commitments**

#### *Age for a Smartphone*

- ☐ We commit to not giving our child(ren) a smartphone until at least age 14-16.

#### *Protecting Healthy Sleep*

- ☐ We will not install a fixed screen (e.g. a television or computer) in our child(ren)'s bedroom(s).
- ☐ We will not allow portable screens (e.g. laptops, tablets or smartphones) to be in our child(ren)'s bedroom(s) overnight.
- ☐ We will establish a central charging station, not in a bedroom, where smartphones will be kept at night for all family members.

#### *Screen Free Week Participation*

- ☐ We agree to participate as a family in the Heritage School annual Screen Free Week as an opportunity to prioritise reading and real world relationships and activities and to re-evaluate screen habits. (This takes place in June of each year. It applies to the use of screens for leisure purposes and does not preclude use of screens for work or essential communications.)

## **Screen Free Week**

Families are strongly encouraged to opt into Screen Free Week. Our annual Screen Free Week takes place in June, when the weather is good and the days are long! It lasts seven days, starting at 8am on a Monday morning. It is intended to create additional time for reading and real world relationships and activities, and to provide an opportunity to re-imagine how screen use might be ordered differently.

Those who participate commit to not making use of screens for leisure purposes. Screen free week is not intended to compromise work or essential communications, although you may wish to take the opportunity to behave differently in these areas. It involves saying 'no' to TV, the internet, movies, YouTube, video games, social media (except for essential practical communications), your favourite apps, online shopping, online news, etc. and saying 'yes' to time with family and friends, books, toys, sport, painting, music, climbing trees, walks, bikes, writing a story, cooking, baking, board games, museums, and so on!

Authorised by	J Fletcher, Headmaster
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Circulation	Staff and parents via website

## **Appendix: Online Risks & Useful Links**

The purpose of this Appendix is to summarise risks associated with screen-based activity, and to provide links to useful websites that parents may find helpful.

It is vital that parents:

- take an interest in online activity and be aware of what your child is doing online,
- talk to children about online risks and how to manage them,
- be aware of trends in online activity generally.

The risks identified below are discussed with pupils through our PSHE programme.

### **The 4 Cs**

One helpful way to summarise risks from screen-based activity is the 4 Cs:

#### ***Content***

Being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful content (e.g. pornography, fake news, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, radicalisation and extremism);

#### ***Contact***

Being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users (e.g. peer pressure, commercial advertising, and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom and/or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes);

#### ***Conduct***

A pupil's personal online behaviour that can increase the likelihood of, or cause, harm (e.g. making, sending and receiving explicit images such as consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes and/or pornography), sharing other explicit images, and online bullying;

#### ***Commerce***

Risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and or financial scams.

### **Displacement of more wholesome activities**

One of the most significant risks with screen use – given the exceptional amount of time the average person spends on screens – is the time not spent doing something more life enhancing and constructive. Time is finite, and sleep, exercise and in-person socialising are among those activities commonly displaced by screen use. What is not done can have a significant impact upon well-being.

### **Impact on attention**

Excessive screen use habituates us to a certain type and rate of stimulation. Forms of screen use are recognised to be psychologically addictive. Excessive screen use can make it hard for us to cope with slower and more cognitively demanding tasks that require sustained focus (like reading or other academic tasks). This can have a negative impact upon academic performance.

Habituation to high levels of screen-based stimulation can have wider life implications. Those who are screen-stimulation dependent can enter a state where they are more reactive than proactive. This can compromise the reflective time necessary to make wise choices and achieve longer-term goals.

### **Cyberbullying**

Once children begin using social media, they are at risk of online bullying (cyberbullying). The 'disinhibition effect' means that people tend to be less restrained in what they say or do online than they are in person. In addition, online bullying can readily intrude into spaces that were previously thought of as safe, due to the ease of access to messaging services. The emotional distress caused by online bullying can be severe.

### **Social media age limits**

Parents should be aware of and enforce the age limits for setting up one's own social media account. Here are some examples:

- Facebook: 13 years old
- Instagram: 13 years old
- Tiktok: 13 years old
- Snapchat: 13 years old
- WhatsApp: 13 years old

### **Responding to cyberbullying**

How pupils should respond to online bullying:

- Don't respond
- Don't retaliate
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Save the evidence
- Block the bully
- Don't be a bully
- Be a friend not a bystander

How parents should respond to online bullying

- Listen and take the child seriously
- Make sure the child is safe and feels safe
- Don't overreact
- Encourage the child not to retaliate
- Gather and save the evidence
- Encourage the child to solve the problem
- Teach self-esteem and resilience
- Encourage the child to reach out to friends
- Talk to the school if other children involved also attend the school

See our Anti Bullying Policy for more information.

### **Online sexual harassment and sexual abuse**

Sexting is the sharing of indecent photos intended to make a person appear more grown up or sexually appealing. It is increasingly normal in relationships today. It is important to emphasise that once an image is sent, the sender loses control over it. It is illegal to hold or share indecent photos of anyone under age 18; those who do so can be registered as sex offenders. Upskirting is also illegal. It is taking a sexually intrusive picture taken up a person's skirt or under their clothing.

See our Safeguarding Policy for more information about child-on-child abuse.

### **Reputational damage**

Unguarded online activity such as sexting can cause damage to a young person's reputation and severe emotional distress. Putting any form of inappropriate content online, either text or images, will often resurface later, such as at a future job interview. Young people can also damage the reputation of an institution by posting inappropriate or untrue comments.

### **Pornography**

Access to pornographic images or videos, or to other unsuitable content, has never been easier. The damage this can do to a young person's perception of healthy relationships, or his/her ability to conduct normal sexual relationships in the future, is profound. The number of young people reported to be accessing pornography online suggests this is one of the most serious threats in modern culture to healthy relationships.

### **Sexual exploitation**

One form of online exploitation is grooming. Grooming is persuading or enticing others to act in a way they were not intending to. There can be various motives, including sexual exploitation. Those intent on exploitation will often operate under a false identity. It can take place through social media or

gaming platforms. It can lead to a child sharing too much information, including contact details or location sharing, direct contact via webcams, or agreeing to meet in person.

### **Financial exploitation**

Children and young people need to be alert to various forms of financial exploitation online. A child or young person can be groomed for the purposes of financial exploitation. Phishing is sending emails purporting to be from reputable companies in order to induce individuals to reveal personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers. Another risk is from online games where participants can spend money to acquire an advantage in the game.

### **Extremism and radicalisation**

Extremism has been defined as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. It also includes calls for the death of armed service personnel serving at home or overseas. Radicalisation is the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

See our Preventing Extremism Policy for more information.

### **Cybercrime**

Young people can become involved in cybercrime, that is, criminal activity committed using computers and/or the internet. Examples include unauthorised access to computers ('hacking'), attempts to make a computer, network or website unavailable by overwhelming it, and making, supplying or obtaining malware (malicious software).

### **Computer viruses**

Children and young people need to be aware of the risk from computer viruses to their own devices. Downloading files from all but the most trusted sources carries risk. This can especially be true from widely used illegal sites such as Putlocker (an illegal film distribution website).

### **Useful Links for Parents**

Parent Control Software:

[Qustodio](#)

[Family Link](#)

[NetNanny](#)

[Family Time](#)

Guidance on keeping children safe online:

[Parent Protect](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Safer Internet](#)

[Childnet](#)

[NSPCC](#)

[Thinkuknow](#) (run by CEOP, Child Exploitation and Online Protection)

[Parentzone](#)

[Internet Matters](#)

[Ask About Games](#)

[Fight the new drug](#) (The harms of pornography)