

## Acceptable Use of Screens Policy (2026-27)

### Introduction

#### *A distinctive culture*

Heritage School has been described by the Sunday Times as the UK's only screen free school. We do not make use of EdTech (interactive whiteboards and one-to-one devices), and we do not permit pupils to bring smartphones to school. Routine teaching at Heritage is orientated towards books, reading on paper, writing by hand, face-to-face relationships, and real-world activities. This introduction explains why, and clarifies the scope and purposes of this policy.

#### *A home-school partnership*

A central objective of this policy is to establish an effective partnership between home and school. Given the serious threats to physical health, mental health and cognitive development posed by screen use, the school recognises that a shared approach between home and school is essential, and that parents must regulate screen time and screen content outside of school hours if our shared goals for our pupils are to be realised. Toward that end, we expect all parents to read this policy annually and sign our 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 oriented is the healthiest possible development of our pupils. We aim to support their growth towards maturity in every area: intellectually, physically, morally, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. We want them to live a full and virtuous life, where they direct their own lives wisely and contribute to the common good. We want them to enjoy rightly-ordered, ever-deeper relations with others, with God and with the natural world.

Schools can make a significant contribution towards these developmental goals. This includes the teaching of foundational intellectual skills such as reading and writing, which play a critical role in unlocking potential. Our primary focus day in and day out is the steady delivery of our broad, knowledge-rich curriculum. This is the heart of our work. Why is it so important? Knowledge matters not just because it enables higher-level thinking. Knowledge matters because it is a *necessary condition for growth*. We believe this because, rightly understood, knowledge is not merely information. Rather, it is a relation. Knowing something or someone properly implies a genuine personal connection (a relation), and when these relations are rightly ordered, it leads to growth, a growth that would otherwise not take place. As Charlotte Mason says, 'By knowledge one grows, becomes more of a person, and that is all there is to show for it.'<sup>1</sup> A second critical and related insight of hers is this: attention is the necessary precondition for knowledge. Without a capacity for sustained attentive engagement deeper or real knowledge is impossible.

At Heritage, the link between attention, knowledge, and growth has guided our approach to screens since the school was founded in 2007. Our view is that these insights derived from Charlotte Mason underscore the profound nature of the threat posed by screen time.

#### *The legitimate place of technology in our curriculum*

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Mason, Charlotte, *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education* (1925), p.325. Charlotte Mason (1842-1923) was a Christian educational theorist and reformer who founded the Parents National Education Union (the PNEU) in the late 19th century. Her vision for education continues to inspire the work of Heritage School.

Giving pupils the underlying and specific skills to engage creatively with technology is an important goal of our curriculum. Toward that end, we deliver Computing lessons in Years 6-8 and we offer a Computer Science IGCSE. Through Computing, 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, including at leading universities.

### *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 screen 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 in the past 15 years has had a particularly profound social impact, creating a new cultural norm of incessant digital connection.

In the light of our understanding of the purpose of education and the nature of knowledge, the overwhelming dominance of screens in our free time poses a serious threat 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 addition, reading on paper and writing by hand enhances the quality of engagement, making them superior tools for integrating knowledge into long-term memory and, therefore, for cognitive development more generally.<sup>3</sup> Screens, by contrast, offer a thinner form of knowledge, or what we might call a partial relation.
2. **Opportunity cost.** Screen overuse is displacing wholesome real-world, embodied, knowledge-building 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>4</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 subscriptions or advertising.<sup>5</sup> The incessant demands and addictive power of screens are habituating us to distraction, meaning we are unable to sustain attention for longer periods of time. Unfortunately, however, there are no short-cuts to real learning. The importance of attention to cognitive development cannot be overstated; it is the gateway to learning.
4. **Rise in anxiety and depression.** Linked to these factors, excessive smartphone use by children and young people 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,

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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.

<sup>3</sup> See [The Digital Delusion](#) by Jared Cooney Horvath (2026) for more information.

<sup>4</sup> See [The Anxious Generation](#) by Jonathan Haidt (2024) for more information.

<sup>5</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).

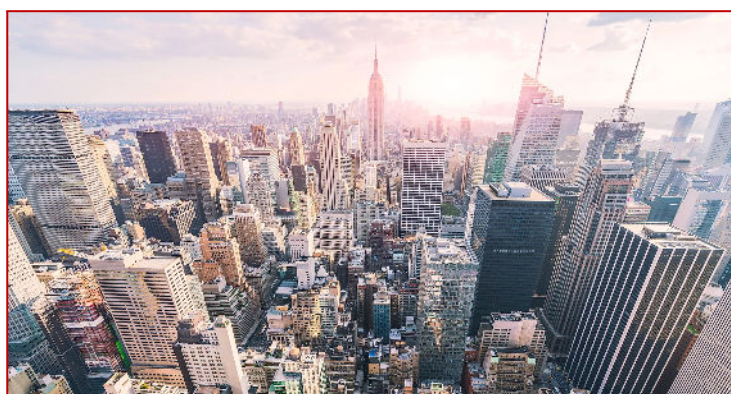
comparing oneself constantly with unrealistic ideals, destructive online content and behaviour, and loss of sleep.<sup>6</sup>

### ***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>7</sup> Of particular concern is online pornography and the prevalence of sexual imagery depicting coercion, humiliation and physical aggression.<sup>8</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>9</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.

### ***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 books, reading on paper, writing by hand, face-to-face relationships, and real-world activities. We recognise that habits established in childhood and teen years are extremely important developmentally because they can shape patterns for life.

The school promotes the acceptable use of screens through our own screen free, book-and-paper based approach to routine teaching, through PSHE lessons which raise awareness of online risks and encourage effective self-management of screen use, through the Screen Use Agreement with Pupils, through our policy regarding smartphones, 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.

<sup>6</sup> To learn more, see Jonathan Haidt's book, referred to above, or [his webinar with Smartphone Free Childhood](#) (March 2024).

<sup>7</sup> See [Digital childhoods: a survey of children and parents](#) (September 2022), p.4.

<sup>8</sup> See [Evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children](#) (May 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/get-the-facts/> to learn more.

### **No EdTech**

As explained in the introduction, we place 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 make use of the EdTech that is so common in schools today, such as interactive whiteboards or personal devices such as ipads, tablets or laptops. In addition to our rejection of EdTech, we make use of numerous methods and strategies to help pupils develop the habit of attention.

### **Limited use of online homework and Google Classroom**

As a screen free school, our general policy is that we avoid sending pupils to screens to do their homework. Up through Year 8, all homework is book-and-paper or real-world project based. Homework tasks are recorded by older pupils in their homework diaries during lessons. They do not need to go online to discover what their homework is.

From Year 9, there is an expectation that pupils will go online to complete homework tasks occasionally in specific subjects, where online resources add value. They are Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Geography. Online homework tasks in these subjects will be explained in a subject-specific Google Classroom, which will be set up for these subjects only. When an online homework is set, pupils record this in their homework diary. GCSE Art will not have a Google Classroom, but will occasionally require online research. Other subject teachers may occasionally draw the attention of pupils to online or video extension materials they may find interesting. In addition, for Seniors, a revision Google Classroom is set up for each year group in Years 7-10, where teachers place revision materials in advance of Senior Progress Tests in May. Revision Google Classrooms are also set up to support Year 11 revision throughout the year.

### **Generative artificial intelligence (AI)**

The school recognises the growing and serious threat from generative artificial intelligence (AI) to intellectual development generally and, particularly, to the development of writing skills and a pupil's capacity to sustain the attention necessary to produce high quality extended writing outcomes. We do not permit pupils to use generative AI for any school work, and all routine classwork and homework is done by hand and written on paper, usually in exercise books.

### **PSHE**

Through its PSHE curriculum the school teaches pupils about the general and specific risks associated with online activity. 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**

#### **No smartphones on site**

In June 2026, the Department for Education made schools legally responsible to ensure that pupils cannot access phones while at school. KCSIE 2026 states: 'Statutory guidance on Mobile phones in schools is clear that the department 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.*' (italics added) We are delighted by this strong stance from the government and agree that it is in the best interests of children and young people.

In keeping with this statutory guidance, Heritage School operates a 'no smartphones on site' policy. In addition, smartphones are not permitted at school events or on school trips. It is recognised by the influential campaign Smartphone Free Childhood, that a total ban on smartphones in schools is the most effective way to protect learning and pupil well being (see [here for more information](#)).

### ***Other electronic devices***

Pupils are not permitted to bring any personal electronic devices to the school, to school events or on school trips, apart from authorised basic phones (see below). This general prohibition applies, but is not limited to, unauthorised basic phones, smartphones, laptop computers, tablet computers, smartwatches, fitness trackers, Kindles, cameras and ipods. See our Uniform Policy for more information about wearable technology. Specific exceptions may be agreed to this general prohibition where there are learning needs that necessitate the use of, e.g. a laptop or where a pupil requires access due to a disability. Specific permission may be given for stand alone cameras on residential trips.

### ***Basic phones for Seniors who travel independently***

We recognise if a pupil travels independently to/from school, parents may prefer their child to have a phone for safety reasons. In such cases, a Senior pupil is only permitted to bring a 'basic phone' to school. A basic phone is one that can make calls and send SMS messages only. It cannot access the internet and, therefore, is unable to operate any internet-based apps, including cross-platform messaging apps such as WhatsApp.

In keeping with the government's legal ban on accessing mobile phones during the school day, pupils who bring a basic phone to school must hand it in, as described in our Phones Procedure below. Pupils who bring phones to school are expected to keep them in their bags prior to being handed in at registration time in the morning or after 4pm (for example, if they are participating in an extra-curricular activity).

### ***Phones Procedure for Seniors who travel independently***

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

- If a pupil brings a phone to school it can only be a basic phone (not internet enabled).
- Prior parental notification is required to authorise a pupil to bring a basic phone to school (see below).
- The basic phone must be placed in the class container during registration time.
- The pupil's 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 basic phones from the relevant container.
- A basic phone must not be taken out of bags prior to registration or after 4pm without prior permission from a teacher.

### ***Phones Procedure for older Juniors approved to travel independently***

The procedure described above 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 the Phone Notification Form for Parents of Seniors (2026-27). A link to this online form can be found at the beginning of this policy.



### **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 understand that Heritage School operates a 'no smartphones on site' policy and that the government has banned pupils from accessing mobile phones during the school day.
- ☐ I would like my child to bring a basic phone to school when he/she travels to/from school independently for safety reasons.
- ☐ In keeping with new government regulations requiring schools to ensure that the school day is phone free, my child will hand in his/her basic phone during registration time every day that he/she brings one to school.
- ☐ If my child has a smartphone, I agree to work in partnership with the school and ensure as far as reasonably possible that my child will not bring his/her smartphone to school.
- ☐ I understand that the school reserves the right to conduct searches in keeping with its protocols and that if a smartphone is found on the school site, at a school event, or on a school trip it will be confiscated for two weeks.
- ☐ 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.

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***

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 smartphone to school, to a school event or on a school trip. If I bring a basic phone to school, I will hand it in at registration time.

### **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 make time for 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.

### **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 not 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 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. In June 2026, the UK government committed to bringing in legislation in 2027 to ban under 16s from accessing major social media platforms. Given the widely recognised and serious risks to children and young people associated with smartphones, our strong recommendation is that children are not permitted to 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 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 right and responsibility to regulate screen time and screen content and to ensure that smartphones are not brought to the



school site, to school events, or on school trips. 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 use, 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 (2026-27), and to renew this commitment each year in September. A link to this online form can be found at the beginning of this policy.

#### **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.

###### *No Smartphone On Site Policy*

- ☐ To comply with the new legal requirement for schools to prevent pupils from being able to access phones throughout the school day, we will ensure as far as reasonably possible that our child will not bring a phone to school, unless it is a basic phone that is handed in in keeping with the school's Phones Procedure.

##### **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 |
| Date          | August 2026            |

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
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## **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)