St. Paul's Secondary School

OUGHTERARD, CO. GALWAY H91 PT86

Tel: (091) 552689 **Email:** admin@stpaulsoughterard.ie

ST PAUL'S SECONDARY SCHOOL POLICY ON MOBILE PHONE POUCHES

This policy is in line with Department of Education Circular 0045/2025 and Circular 0046/2025 and works in conjunction with the following related policies:

- Personal Electronic Devices Policy
- Acceptable Usage Policy
- *Bí Cineálta* Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Code of Behaviour & Code of Discipline
- Child Protection & Safeguarding Policies and procedures

Rationale

The Department of Education requires all post-primary schools to restrict student access to mobile phones and personal devices with internet connectivity during the school day (Circular 0045/2025).

St Paul's Secondary School, Oughterard promotes a 'phone-free' environment.

Students are not required to own or bring a mobile phone to school. Regardless of this, each student at St Paul's is assigned a personal Mobile Phone Pouch for the duration of their time at the school. Students who do not own a mobile phone or who do not bring a mobile phone to school are not required to use the mobile phone pouch. Each student bringing a mobile phone to school must also bring the Pouch with them and they remain responsible for it at all times through the school day and/or during the school activity, and for keeping it in good condition. Any issues with the Pouch should be reported to Ms.deCourcey, Deputy Principal.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- protect the learning environment by reducing distraction.
- safeguard student wellbeing and prevent harmful use.
- ensure fairness, consistency, and compliance with national guidelines.

Scope

This policy applies to all students and covers all mobile phones and personal electronic devices with internet connectivity.

The policy applies from arrival on the school premises in the morning until departure, including breaks, lunchtimes, and extracurricular activities, unless otherwise authorised. As a general

rule students are not permitted to use or access personal mobile phones at any time during the school day.

Upon arrival at school the mobile phone must be in the sealed pouch and remain sealed while on the school premises during the school day. This includes supervised study. This policy also applies to students attending or travelling to/from off-campus school events such as matches, unless at the discretion of the teacher it is felt they require their phones for health and safety or payment purposes.

- Each student will be issued with a lockable pouch when they enrol at St Paul's.
- Any loss or damage to a pouch which renders it unusable will result in the student purchasing a new one at a cost of €20.
- Mobile phones must be placed into the pouch daily and the pouch must be sealed.
- In the event that a student forgets their pouch, they should present at Reception and ask for their Year Head or the Deputy Principal. In this case the student's phone will be stored in the office until the end of the school day.
- Students are responsible for the care of their pouch; replacement costs will be charged to the parents/guardians of any student responsible for damaging a pouch.
- Staff may conduct random checks to ensure compliance.

As per St Paul's Personal Electronic Device Policy students may use their personal electronic devices in class if a teacher requires it. The teacher unlocks the pouch for the duration of a class, and the pouches must be locked again in the presence of the teacher at the end of the class.

Unlocking pouches Pouches may be unlocked at the end of the school day and unlocking stations are available on-site for this purpose. As a general rule students may only unlock their pouches at these unlocking stations when leaving the school premises for lunch (senior students) or at the end of the school day. In the event that students need to access their phones in class to support learning, teachers will have a portable unlocking station to facilitate access to phones. At the end of the class period phones must be switched off and placed back in the pouches.

Exemptions from Mobile Phone Pouch

Exemption Requests must be made using the Exemption Request Form (Appendix A).

Exemptions may be granted only under the following categories:

1. Medical Need (e.g. phone app linked to a medical device or health monitoring smart watch). Documentation on this will be kept in the school file.
2. In exceptional cases a short-term exemption may be granted on Compassionate/Wellbeing Grounds (e.g. serious illness or bereavement)

Breaches of Policy will be dealt with in line with our Personal Electronic Device Policy.

Parent Communication Parents/guardians should not contact students directly on their devices during the school day. All urgent communication must go through the school office (091) 552689. If a student needs to contact home this will be facilitated through the office.

Emergencies: In the event of an emergency the school will facilitate communication between students and parents/guardians through the school office and/or other appropriate school

procedures. Where necessary for health, safety or emergency a member of staff may authorise a student to access the student's mobile phone.

Liability: Students bring mobile phones and other personal electronic devices onto school premises at their own risk. The school will take reasonable care where a device is surrendered to staff for secure storage but cannot accept responsibility for loss, theft or damage except where liability arises under law.

Implementation and Review

This policy will be circulated to all staff, parents/guardians, and students.

It will be reviewed every 2 years by the Board of Management, or earlier if Departmental guidance changes.

Ratified by the Board of Management on 29th September 2026

Signed: Ciara Ní Loinsigh Date : 29/9/26

Chairperson, Board of Management

Appendix A - Mobile Phone Exemption Request Form

Name: _____

Year group: _____

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____ _____

Parent/Guardian Contact Number(s) _____ _____

Mobile Phone Exemption Category Requested (tick one)

☐ Medical Need ☐ Compassionate/Wellbeing

Details of Request: Evidence Attached: ☐ Yes ☐ No

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian Declaration

I/we request that _____ be granted an exemption.

I/we understand this exemption will be withdrawn if misused.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____

For Office Use Only

Decision: ☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

Duration of Exemption: _____ Review Date: _____

Signed (Principal/Deputy): _____ Date: _____

Appendix B – Guidance Note for Parents/guardians

Purpose

Our school restricts mobile phone access to protect learning and wellbeing.

All mobile phones must be sealed in pouches upon arrival on the school premises each morning.

Exemptions are available only in limited cases. Exemptions may be approved for medical or compassionate reasons only. Devices required for exemptions must still be used strictly for the approved purpose and remain in the pouch otherwise. Exemptions will not be granted for convenience, after-school arrangements or social use.

Grounds for Exemption

- Medical Need: Clinically required apps (e.g. diabetes monitoring, seizure alerts). Evidence from a healthcare professional required.
- Compassionate/Wellbeing Grounds: Temporary exceptional circumstances (e.g. serious illness or bereavement).

Not Grounds for Exemption

- General parental preference.
- Contacting your child for convenience.
- After-school arrangements.
- Social or recreational use.

Application Process:

- Complete the Exemption Request Form (Appendix A).
- Submit to the school office with supporting documentation.
- The Principal/Deputy Principal will decide and inform you in writing.

Conditions of Exemptions once granted:

- Exemptions apply only to the approved purpose.
- Phones must remain sealed in the pouch at all other times.
- Misuse may lead to withdrawal of exemption.
- Exemptions will be reviewed regularly.

Parental Communication

Parents/guardians/ must use the school office as the primary contact point for students during school hours.