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Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to you with regards to just one issue on this occasion- Culloden Academy's response to the Scottish Government *Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools* that came out at the end of the summer holidays. There are a wide range of responses from schools across Scotland to this and so I want to explain ours and say a little bit about why we have taken this approach. I have also held assemblies in the last week to ensure all pupils have been advised of the rules that come into force after the October holidays and as far as possible the thinking behind the policy.

At the same time as the Scottish Government authorised me to ban phones from the school estate for the duration of the school day, they asked me to achieve two things:

- Firstly: improve the ability of pupils to learn and teachers to teach by removing the distraction of mobile phones from classrooms
- Secondly: to quote directly, "equip the next generation with the necessary skills and resilience associated with the modern age".

It is my considered opinion- having consulted staff, Pupil Council groups and the Parent Council that the best way to achieve both these aims is to be uncompromising about phones during class time, uncompromising about the misuse of phones for bullying, humiliation or criminality during the school day and alongside that compassionate about pupils using their phones in their free time.

To explain the compassionate bit first- there is no approval for schools banning pupils from having mobile phones on the way to or from school and no approval for schools banning pupils from having phones if they are not on the school grounds. With that in mind, a total ban on phones in the school grounds would mean that any pupil leaving the school grounds at lunchtime would always be entitled to have access to their phone whilst pupils who remain in school- often the less confident pupils- are banned at lunchtime which feels punitive and not the welcoming community feel that we want. Furthermore, the second task I was given is not achieved by pretending phones don't exist for seven hours a day but by offering plenty of opportunities to be busy at lunch, creating phone free areas and respecting the fact that many young people use their phones purely for enjoyment and relaxation. I hope this makes sense but I am happy to discuss it further with any parent who feels disappointed by this approach.

Moving on to the uncompromising bit. I have explained to pupils that the best description I ever heard for the high numbers of pupils and adults who are almost constantly online is that to their community, family and friends they are 'forever elsewhere'. I have explained that I need pupils mentally and physically in the classroom when it is time to learn and for that reason:

- 1) All phones MUST be switched off (to prevent notifications or calls distracting learning) before entering block 1, 4 and 6 classrooms and should remain off and out of sight until break, lunch or end of day. If a pupil does not have a bag, they should hand the phone to their teacher. If a pupil needs to leave the classroom the phone should remain with the teacher or in a bag.
- 2) This also applies to day-time school trips. If a teacher is taking you away on an excursion, they can expect to have your attention, and so phones must remain off unless the teacher gives permission (for example for the duration of a bus journey).
- 3) We believe that teaching you to live with technology means that at break and lunchtime pupils can access their phones if they wish to do so. At break and lunchtime, if you are using your phone, camera and filming functions on phones must not be used without the prior consent of any pupils or staff in shot and with the special permission of school management.
- 4) If pupils wish to bring their phone to school but are concerned about it coming to harm in their bag all day, they can hand the phone in at the pupil office at the start of the school day and collect it at lunchtime or the end of the school day.
- 5) There will be some pupils whose particular needs - social, emotional or medical - require them to have access to their phone during the school day. These situations will be agreed with Guidance - and may be time limited. Details on any pupil allowed to access their phones will be shared with all staff on a weekly basis and pupils may be given a card.
- 6) Pupils who do not comply will have their access to a phone during the school day removed for a period of time which reflects the severity of the incident. This will be at least until the end of the school day but the right to access the phone in school on subsequent days will be suspended if pupils are challenging and belligerent with staff about handing their phone over.
- 7) Pupils found to be using their phone during the school day to mock, bully or threaten other pupils- even at break and lunch- will have their access to a phone during the school day removed indefinitely. This is in addition to other sanctions that may follow from such behaviours.
- 8) If a lengthy suspension of access to mobile phones is decided on, a meeting will be organised with parents to agree a way forward and the conditions under which the phone may be returned.
- 9) For S4-6 SQA policy is that pupils cannot take phones into the exam room and should find an alternative place to store them or hand them over to an invigilator. Pupils should expect the same approaches to be taken in Prelim exams and any other formal assessments.

One aspect of the policy applies to parents and I'm afraid if this is to work, I cannot compromise on this. Parents will need to support this school standard by using our established communication channels- if you need to get a message to your child, ring the main office who will forward it to them very quickly unless there are acute personal circumstances which may be covered in point 5 above. Similarly, we ask parents to emphasise that if their child needs to speak to them during class time, they go to their Guidance teacher or Year Head and not attempt to access their phone.

Not going for a full ban only works if all pupils adhere to these standards which we are implementing to support their learning. Initially we are adopting a policy of universal standard and individualised sanction and we really hope this works. Please emphasise to your young person, however, that if it doesn't work I have literally no choice but to go for a full ban for the duration of the school day for a whole year group or the whole school.

I hope this feels like a genuine attempt to help with your child's learning.

Best wishes,



Dr J Vance  
Rector