Banagher College Coláiste na Sionna

Mobile Phone / Smart Device Policy

May 2026

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Banagher College - Coláiste na Sionna

Mobile Phone/Smart Device Policy

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1. Introduction

Banagher College recognises that mobile phones/personal/smart media devices have become an integral part of the way we communicate today. We recognise the positive aspects regarding the Department of Education and parents' concerns for students' safety and their potential as a powerful tool for teaching and learning going forward.

However, the misuse of mobile phones/personal media devices has a disruptive effect on classroom teaching and learning and can be a distraction, hinder communication and socialisation and can contribute to high levels of anxiety and stress among young people and adults. The use of mobile phones/personal smart media devices in a disruptive manner in a class includes ringing/silent ringing/vibrating, transmitting or receiving messages, alarm signals, listening to music or recording, etc.

There are also inherent dangers associated with the misuse/abuse of camera/picture phones. Staff and students must be protected from any invasion of privacy or harassment associated with the misuse/abuse of mobile phones.

This policy aims to protect the well-being of all within Banagher College and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Code of behaviour
- Bí Cineálta
- Digital and Acceptable use policy.

2. Implementation of Smart Device Restrictions

In line with Department of Education guidance requiring post-primary schools to restrict student access to personal mobile phones and smart devices during the school day (Circular 0045/2025), Banagher College has implemented a secure phone storage system to support teaching and learning, student wellbeing and positive school climate.

Mobile Phone/Smart Watch Procedures

- Banagher College is a mobile phone and smart watch free learning environment for the full school day and during school related activities and trips.
- Every student will receive a mobile phone pouch to keep for the school year.
- Phones/smart watch must be powered off and placed in the pouch before a student enters the school building.
- Phones must be kept in the pouch for the full school day.
- The student keeps the pouch with them in their school bag or in their locker.
- Pouches can be unlocked at the end of the school day at the unlocking stations around the school.
- If a student has to leave school early, the student's phone will be released at the office when signing out.
- If a student forgets their mobile phone pouch, their phone/smart watch must be left in the designated area in the school at the start of the school day.
- If a student uses digital payment for the vending machines, the student must bring their physical card, as phones cannot be accessed throughout the school day.
- If a student uses the phone cover to store their money/cards these need to be removed before placing the phone in the pouch.
- Phones may only be used during the school day when a teacher gives permission.

Lost, missing, damaged pouches

- Mobile phone pouches are the property of Banagher College.
- Students are expected to use their assigned phone pouch responsibly and to always take reasonable care of it.

- Any lost, missing or damaged pouch must be reported immediately to the tutor or year head or a member of staff.
- If a pouch is lost or damaged, the cost of replacement at the current market value will be the responsibility of the student.
- If a pouch is unavailable due to loss or damage, the student will be required to leave their mobile phone/smart watch in the designated area in the school office at the start of each school day until the matter is resolved.
- Intentional damage, misuse, or repeated loss of a phone pouch may be treated as a breach of this policy and addressed in line with the school's Code of Behaviour.
- Students must return the mobile phone pouch they were assigned at the end of the school year.
- Students who fail to return pouch at the end of the year will be required to pay for a replacement.

Parental Communication

- Students needing to contact home during school hours must go through the main office.
- Parents/guardians who need to contact their child during the day should phone the school office.

3. **Management of Smart Device Exemptions**

Medical and Special Exemptions

Students with a diagnosed and documented medical condition that requires access to a smart device for health monitoring (for example, real-time glucose monitoring for diabetes) may be granted an exemption from the standard mobile phone restrictions.

Eligibility

- Exemptions are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- A medical exemption may be granted where access to a phone or smart device is essential for health, safety, or disability-related needs.
- Examples include, but are not limited to:
    - Real-time glucose monitoring
    - Insulin pump management
    - Other medically prescribed digital health supports

Documentation and Approval

- Parents/guardians must provide written medical documentation (e.g. a doctor's letter or medical report) confirming the need for phone access.
- All exemptions must be approved by the Principal or Deputy Principal in consultation with the SEN team where appropriate.

Use of phone Medical Exemption Pouch

- Approved students will be issued with:
    - A Velcro phone pouch, allowing controlled access
    - A medical sticker for their school journal.
- The phone must remain in the phone pouch when not in medical use.

Conditions of Use

- Phone use is strictly limited to the documented medical purpose.
- General phone use (e.g. messaging, social media, browsing) is not permitted under this exemption.
- Misuse of the exemption may result in the exemption being reviewed or withdrawn.

Review

- Medical exemptions will be reviewed annually or sooner if circumstances change.
- Parents/guardians are responsible for informing the school of any changes to the student's medical needs.

4. **<u>Smart Device Use during Off-Site/After School Activities Procedures</u>**

Day Trips

- Smartphones and personal mobile devices must not be accessed or used during any school-organised off-site or after-school activity, including trips, tours, sporting events, and extracurricular programmes.
- Prior to departure, all students are required to place their smartphones into securely locked pouches, in line with the school's mobile phone policy.
- Students will not have access to their phones for the duration of the activity to ensure safety, minimise distractions, and promote full engagement.
- The phone and pouch remain the responsibility of the student and the school will not be responsible for lost or stolen phones/pouches.
- The supervising teacher will retain a magnet/key for the duration of the trip or activity.

- Pouches will be unlocked by the supervising teacher at the end of the activity, once students are ready to return to their guardians or conclude the event.
- These procedures ensure consistent, safe, and supervised management of smartphones while students are in the care of school staff outside normal school hours or premises.

Overnight Trips and Foreign Tours

- To support responsible phone use, all students will be required to bring their lockable phone pouch for the duration of the tour.
- Phones must be placed in the locked pouch at designated times as instructed by tour leaders.
- Phones can be charged by the student while the phone is locked in the pouch.
- Pouches remain in the student's possession while locked.
- The phone and pouch remain the responsibility of the student and the school will not be responsible for lost or stolen phones/pouches.
- Students will be provided with designated times each day to access their phones, typically:
    - After evening activities
    - During supervised free time
    - At other times determined by staff
- These periods allow students to:
    - Contact parents/guardians
    - Check messages
    - Take photographs
    - Use approved travel-related applications
- Emergency Access
    - Parents/guardians will be provided with emergency contact details for tour leaders.
    - Parents/guardians requiring urgent contact with a student should contact the tour leader through the emergency number provided before departure.
    - Staff will carry unlocking devices and can provide immediate phone access if required.
    - Students may request access to their phone at any time for genuine emergencies.
- Staff Discretion - Tour leaders may adjust phone access arrangements where necessary to:
    - Respond to safety concerns.
    - Facilitate educational activities.
    - Address individual student needs.

- Accommodate exceptional circumstances.

5. **Sanctions for Breaches of the Smart Device Policy**
   - Any student found with a mobile phone or smart device outside of their designated pouch, or using it without authorisation during school hours, will be required to voluntarily hand it up to the staff member.
   - Students who refuse to hand up their phone when requested by any staff member may face sanctions, up to and including suspension(s). A meeting must occur with either Year Head/Deputy Principal/Principal and the Parent/Guardian of the student involved prior to the student returning to school.
   - Sanctions Include: -
     - 1st Offence – Phone or Smart Device handed over to staff member and stored in the principal's office. Device will be returned to the student at the end of the school day. Student will receive an evening detention.
     - 2nd Offence – Phone or Smart Device handed up to the principal/deputy principal every morning for a period determined by the principal. Phone or device will be returned to the student at the end of each school day. Student will receive two evening detentions.
     - 3rd Offence - Phone or Smart Device handed up to the principal/deputy principal every morning for a period determined by the principal. Phone or device will be returned to the student at the end of each school day. Student will receive a suspension.
     - Continuous Offences will result in long-term suspensions and/or including expulsion.
   - Students in breach of this policy by bringing multiple phones/smart devices into school may face sanctions up to and including suspension(s).
   - Students who claim not to have brought a phone/smart device to school but are subsequently found in possession of one may face sanctions, up to and including suspension(s).

6. **Promoting New Smart Device Procedures**
   - Posters around the school
   - Signs at school entrances
   - Notices near phone locking and unlocking stations
   - Assembly announcements
   - Student journal reminder
   - School website notice

- Email/text message to parents
- Parent information evening
- Staff briefing reminders
- Student Council announcements
- Daily reminders during first week
- Senior staff visible at entrances
- Classroom reminder signs