



Thursday 11th September 2025

Dear parents & carers,

This is a long letter, so thank you in advance for reading it. We really need your thoughts on an important issue, and want to work with families to come up with the best solution for our students.

Making your children even safer at school – going properly “phone-free” at Wootton

We constantly think about how we can make your children safer, happier, and smarter. We know that we can't do this alone and are grateful that so many of you work so closely with us.

There is no doubt that Wootton is a much safer and happier place than it has been for a long time. Lessons are buzzy, and breaktimes are a joy. Thanks to the changes we have made, for the first time in years we are not just fully staffed but have been able to actually recruit more teachers than we need!

However, there is more that we can and must do better, so that your children can learn, teachers can teach, and everyone can get on and have a great time.

Why Wootton is “phone-free”

Wootton has been “phone free” for a few years now, in that we do not allow students to access or use their devices at all during the day.

[There are only two exceptions to this: if they are directed to hand over their phone to staff as part of an investigation, or if it's needed for a specific medical purpose such as diabetes monitoring ¹.]

We do this because we care, and smartphones create serious problems for students and schools:

1. **They damage learning** through distraction. They do this even if not in use. Research shows that having a smartphone on you or nearby reduces the ability to concentrate and learn.
2. **They damage wellbeing**, preventing students from “switching off”. Having an extended break from the pressures of social media and messages is vital to remain healthy and happy.
3. **They put students and staff at risk**, through exposure to bullying, paedophiles, pornography, grooming, sexual or violent images, and a whole lot more.

Why we need to go further

In spite of our best efforts, it has become clear that it is still too easy for students to break the rules, because it is not physically possible for staff to be everywhere all the time.



Students tell us that many check their phones in toilet cubicles or less-visible spots during breaktimes. They've also told us that because others are on their phones sending messages, they feel pressured to access their phones to respond. Some have even told us that their parents message them during the day and expect replies, which is really disappointing.

Last year, thanks to alert colleagues, we uncovered some absolutely horrific instances of students using phones to share and show the most awful things with others *whilst in school* – the kinds of things that once seen can't be unseen.

We know we're not alone in this – every secondary school in the country is grappling with the same challenge. [This blog by an experienced teacher describes exactly the kind of things that your children are exposed to by having a smartphone](#), whether they are in school or at home – it is worth a read.

Keeping your child even safer

We have therefore decided that we must become even more "phone-free" than we have been to date. We need to get to a point where your children's phones are completely inaccessible to them from when they enter the school site until they leave at the end of the day.

Lots of other brilliant schools have already adopted this "hard ban". They report that students are happier and more focused as a result, and that there are fewer disruptions during lessons and elsewhere.

Some schools have done this [with special phone pouches which are locked](#) as students enter school and stay locked all day. Others collect in [phones first thing, lock them away somewhere specific](#) for the day, and hand them back at the end of the day. There are pros and cons to each approach, and both need lots of careful planning to keep them running smoothly.

I would be interested in your thoughts on these or other solutions – please email me on mlehain@wootton.beds.sch.uk and let me know.

We are going to take our time to choose the best approach and will keep you notified once we've decided how to do things.

That said, we can't wait to reduce the existing risks. As this is such a serious issue, we have decided that the best and fairest way to do this is to:

- Make our rules around phones and connected devices even clearer, and
- Have more severe consequences for breaking the rules.

The new rules for smartphones and connected devices:

1. *Before* coming through the school gate or into reception, students must switch off all devices and place them in the bottom of their bag; they must not be kept anywhere else ².
2. Leave them there until *after* they have crossed the school threshold when leaving.



Consequences for breaking the rules:

1 st breach of rule	Device will be confiscated for the rest of the day. A 30-minute after-school correction will be issued.
2 nd breach of rule	Device will be confiscated for 1 school week i.e. 5 student days. A 60-minute after-school correction will be set. Parents must attend a meeting before the device is returned.
3 rd breach of rule	Device will be confiscated for 4 school weeks i.e. 20 student days. A full day in the LRC, until 4pm. Parents must attend a meeting before the device is returned
Further breaches	Device will be confiscated for 8 school weeks i.e. 40 student days. The student will receive a fixed-term suspension. Parents must attend a meeting to discuss next steps.

Confiscations will run through weekends and holidays where they overlap, and we will keep hold of the device for the entire period.

We completely appreciate that phone confiscation could be inconvenient, but we will not make any exceptions on this. After all, confiscation is completely avoidable as no student ever needs to access their phone without permission whilst at school. Where parents need to get a message to their child at school, or a child needs to get a message home, this can of course be done through reception in the usual way. (Just like we all used to do when we were at school ourselves back in the day!)

It is essential that you discuss with your child why it is so important that they never, ever break these rules, and also what they should do if they ever find themselves without their phone in terms of getting home and so on.

Thank you again for taking the time to read this, and for working with us on what is such an important issue for everyone.

As I said right at the start, I would really value your thoughts and comments, so please feel free to email me on mlehain@wootton.beds.sch.uk. We all want the same thing – for every child here to be even safer, happier, and smarter. Our students are brilliant, and the vast majority already follow our rules and keep themselves safe. By working together on this we can make everyone even safer, happier, and smarter.

Regards,

Mark Lehair
Executive Headteacher, Wootton Academy Trust