



SUTTON VALENCE SCHOOL
SINCE 1576

Mobile Phone Policy

(Senior School)

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1. Rationale

Sutton Valence School is committed to creating a mobile phone free school day to create a calm, safe, and focused learning environment. Mobile phones can be useful for travel and family contact but may also be a source of distraction, online harm, safeguarding concerns and social pressures. This policy aligns with DfE guidance to prohibit phone use throughout the school day and reflects Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 that supports the School's wider safeguarding responsibilities, including the prevention of bullying, child-on-child abuse, online harm and harmful use of technology.

Given that some pupils travel long distances via coach or public transport, this policy is designed to also consider the impact of pupils needing a phone to mitigate risks around travelling to and from school.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all pupils during the school day (08.25am – 4.50pm), including lessons, breaks, and transitions. It covers smartphones, smartwatches with messaging/data, smart glasses and any other wearable device capable of recording, storing or transmitting audio, video or images. The use of smart glasses or other wearable recording devices is not permitted during the School day unless specifically authorised by the School for educational or medical purposes.

3. Aims

- To reduce distraction and promote focus during the School day
- To support healthy digital habits and self-regulation
- To promote fairness, consistency, and transparency across all year groups
- To balance the need for structure with family communication and safeguarding
- To provide clear expectations for families and staff
- To minimise safeguarding risks associated with mobile technology, including cyberbullying, online harassment, harmful content, the sharing of inappropriate images and AI-generated content.

4. Year Group Requirements

All First to Fifth Forms will be required to have their mobile phones, should they choose to bring one to School, turned off and away (and entirely out of sight) from 8.25am to the end of the School day. They may not be used at break or lunch times.

Pupils in First to Fifth Form must adhere to one of three approved options for mobile phone use. This approach ensures consistent expectations while giving families flexibility.

1. No phone – the School’s strongly preferred option.
 - Pupils may leave their phone at home
2. A basic ‘brick’ phone.
 - Pupils may bring a simple handset that allows only calls and SMS messaging, with no/limited camera and internet function.
 - Devices must be switched off and stored in bags during the day.
3. A smartphone with the Blackout App
 - The Blackout app must be installed on a pupil’s device by parents and activated during School hours.
 - The phone must be switched off and stored in bags during the day.
 - The app restricts access to third-party apps (e.g. social media, games, camera) but allows essential functions like:
 - i. Phone calls
 - ii. Text messages
 - iii. Navigation (e.g. Maps)
 - If the app is disabled, this will be logged on the School’s centralised dashboard and visible to pastoral and administrative staff.

Families will confirm their chosen option with the School at the start of each academic year, with full details and permissions for the use of Blackout sent to parents and set-up support offered by Tutors within the first half term.

Spot checks, based on families’ chosen options for mobile phone restrictions, will be completed throughout the year by Form Tutors and other pastoral staff.

It is important that pupils recognise that if the Blackout app is disabled during the School day without a good reason, or the app is deleted so that a phone’s status does not appear on the School’s dashboard, this will likely result in a higher-level sanction.

In the Sixth Form limited use of mobile phones is only permitted in TC’s and the Sixth Form Study Area during break and lunchtime, and in the Boarding Houses for those it applies to. Sixth formers must not use mobile phones outside of these times or locations.

Boarding pupils will have access to mobile phones at appropriate times to allow them to contact family at home and in international time zones, in line with statutory requirements for boarding schools.

Staff will confiscate mobile phones that are being used outside these guidelines during the School day and appropriate sanctions will be applied.

5. Artificial Intelligence and Digital Manipulation

The School recognises the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digitally manipulated content. Pupils must not create, possess, share or distribute AI-generated images, deepfakes or digitally manipulated material that causes harm, distress, humiliation or reputational damage to another person.

Any use of technology to create, alter or distribute nude or semi-nude images, whether real or AI-generated, will be treated as a serious safeguarding matter and managed in accordance with statutory guidance and the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The School reserves the right to investigate incidents involving AI-generated content where there are concerns regarding bullying, harassment, abuse or safeguarding.

6. Breaches of Policy

All pupils are expected to adhere to the policy. Staff will confiscate mobile phones that are being used outside of these guidelines during the School day and appropriate sanctions will be applied.

The School recognises that misuse of mobile phones may constitute a safeguarding concern. Incidents involving cyberbullying, online abuse, child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment, harmful sexual behaviour, the making or sharing of nude or semi-nude images, AI-generated imagery or deepfakes will be managed in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy and referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead where appropriate. Where there is reasonable suspicion that a device contains evidence of a safeguarding concern, staff may search, examine or confiscate devices in accordance with DfE guidance on *Searching, Screening and Confiscation*.

7. Reasonable adjustments

Medical or SEND needs (e.g. diabetes monitoring, AAC apps) will have individual plans approved by Deputy Head (Pastoral), Medical staff and Learning Support.

8. Support and Parental Involvement

Parents are strongly encouraged to support their child in choosing the most appropriate phone management option, to have open discussions at home about screen use, and to contact the School if they have questions or need guidance.

9. Fixtures, Events & Trips

Normal School rules will apply around mobile phones. Residential trips may include specific arrangements for supervised mobile phone use. Any arrangements will be communicated to pupils and parents before departure and will take account of safeguarding considerations.

10. Staff & Visitors

Staff should use mobile phones in accordance with the Staff Code of Conduct, Safeguarding Policy and any guidance relating to the use of personal devices. Visitors should be asked to keep mobile phones out of sight when interacting with pupils unless required for authorised purposes.

11. Reporting Concerns

Pupils, parents and staff are encouraged to report concerns regarding the misuse of mobile devices, cyberbullying, online abuse, inappropriate digital content or the misuse of artificial intelligence. Safeguarding concerns arising from mobile phone use should be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Deputy DSL or member of the Senior Management Team in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Policy.

12. Review

The policy is reviewed annually with feedback from pupils, parents and staff and is published on the School website.

Appendix

About the Blackout App

Blackout is a mobile phone management system designed for schools, offering a trust-based approach to phone restriction. It enables pupils to activate co-ordinated Screen Time restrictions during the School day, supporting focus and wellbeing without removing control of their devices or the function of essential apps.

What the Blackout App Does:

- Restricts access to third-party apps (e.g. social media, YouTube, games, camera) during School hours
- Allows essential functions to remain available: Phone calls, SMS and iMessage, Maps/navigation
- Encourages digital self-regulation
- Displays a simple status (active/inactive) to School staff on a secure dashboard
- Can be paused manually if necessary, but this is logged for review
- Only pupil name and School email address is shared with Blackout as part of set-up for the app. (On request, a parental email can be used instead of a pupil's School email.)

What the App Does Not Do:

- It does not track GPS location
- It does not access, view, or store content such as messages, photos, browsing history or files
- It does not monitor app usage, screen time or personal data
- It does not lock the device or take remote control
- It does not share data with third parties
- It does not drain Mobile Data (less than 25MB per 3-month period)
- It does not drain a phone's battery, rather improves it due to other app restrictions

Device Compatibility – Minimum Technical Requirements

In order to function properly, the Blackout app relies on built-in operating system features such as Apple Screen Time or Android's Digital Wellbeing system. Devices must meet the following minimum criteria:

Compatible Devices

Apple (iPhone)

- Minimum iOS version: iOS 16 or later
- Must support Apple Screen Time features (and parents must set a Screen Time passcode or manage the device through 'Family' settings).
- Must have access to the App Store
- Device must not be jailbroken

Typically, compatible iPhone models:

- iPhone 8 and newer
- Devices older than iPhone 7 are not supported

Android

- Minimum Android version: Android 11 or later
- Must have access to the Google Play Store
- Must support Digital Wellbeing & Parental Controls
- Must not be rooted

Typically, compatible Android models:

- Google Pixel 2 and later
- Samsung Galaxy A, S, and Note series (2020 models and later)
- Nokia, OnePlus, Motorola, Xiaomi, and other brands with Android 11+ capability

What If My Child's Phone Is Non-Compatible?

If your child's smartphone does not meet these requirements, it will be classified as non-compatible, and they must choose either option 1 or 2.