



Orange Tree School

Mobile Phones, Personal Electronic Devices and Digital Safety Policy

Orange Tree School (Main Site) and Ridgeway Hospital Provision



DOCUMENT DETAILS	
Applies To:	• All Staff • External suppliers or visitors • Regulatory / Legal bodies/LEAs • Other (e.g. Parents) • Hospital Staff
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Policy Summary

Purpose

Orange Tree School is committed to providing a safe, calm and therapeutic learning environment in which pupils can engage fully in education, develop positive relationships and access specialist support without unnecessary distraction or risk.

The school operates a **phone-free environment**. Pupils are required to hand in mobile phones and other personal electronic devices on arrival at school in accordance with this policy. This approach forms part of the school's wider commitment to safeguarding, promoting emotional wellbeing, reducing opportunities for online harm and supporting positive engagement in learning and therapeutic practice.

The school recognises that digital technology plays an important role in modern life. Rather than discouraging the responsible use of technology, this policy seeks to promote healthy digital habits, responsible online behaviour and an understanding of the risks associated with personal electronic devices, social media and emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Orange Tree School Main Site;
- Ridgeway Hospital Provision;
- all pupils;
- parents and carers;
- all employees;
- agency staff;
- volunteers;
- contractors; and
- visitors where appropriate.

Whilst operational arrangements may differ between the Main Site and Ridgeway Hospital Provision, the principles of safeguarding, responsible technology use and professional expectations apply across both settings.

Our Principles

Orange Tree School believes that:

- safeguarding is everyone's responsibility;

- pupils have the right to learn in an environment free from unnecessary digital distraction;
- healthy relationships are strengthened through face-to-face interaction and communication;
- technology should support learning and wellbeing rather than compromise them;
- online behaviour can have significant real-world consequences for individuals and the school community;
- digital behaviour should reflect the same standards of respect, dignity and responsibility expected offline;
- parents and the school achieve the best outcomes by working in partnership; and
- staff should model safe, professional and responsible use of technology at all times.

Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

- maintain a safe and phone-free school environment;
- safeguard pupils from online risks and digital harm;
- promote responsible use of personal electronic devices;
- support positive mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- reduce opportunities for bullying, child-on-child abuse and inappropriate online behaviour during the school day;
- provide clear expectations for pupils, parents and staff;
- ensure compliance with statutory safeguarding responsibilities; and
- support pupils in developing healthy and balanced relationships with technology.

Key Expectations

At Orange Tree School:

- pupils hand in personal electronic devices on arrival each day unless alternative arrangements have been agreed by the school;
- mobile phones and personal electronic devices must not be used during the school day without authorisation;
- the school may respond to online behaviour occurring outside school where it gives rise to safeguarding concerns or significantly affects the wellbeing of pupils or the safe and orderly running of the school;
- misuse of technology, including social media or AI, will be addressed in accordance with the school's safeguarding, behaviour and anti-bullying procedures; and
- all members of the school community are expected to contribute to a respectful, safe and inclusive digital culture.

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1. Introduction

Orange Tree School recognises that mobile phones and other personal electronic devices are an important part of modern life. Used responsibly, technology can support communication, learning and independence. However, it can also present significant risks to safeguarding, wellbeing, relationships and engagement in education.

As a specialist therapeutic school, Orange Tree School is committed to providing a calm, safe and nurturing environment in which pupils can develop positive relationships, regulate their emotions and engage fully in education and therapeutic support. To help achieve this, the school operates a phone-free environment during the school day.

Many pupils attending Orange Tree School experience difficulties with social communication, developing and maintaining friendships, emotional regulation and managing their use of technology. Some pupils spend significant amounts of time online or become overly reliant on their personal electronic devices, which can affect their wellbeing, relationships and engagement in learning.

The school's phone-free environment is therefore an intentional part of its therapeutic approach. It provides pupils with regular opportunities to develop face-to-face communication skills, build meaningful relationships, participate fully in learning and therapeutic activities, and experience time away from the pressures of constant online connectivity.

Pupils are expected to hand in mobile phones and other personal electronic devices on arrival at school. This expectation forms part of the school's wider therapeutic approach and supports safeguarding, positive relationships, emotional wellbeing and uninterrupted learning.

Where pupils require access to music or other sensory regulation strategies, the school provides appropriate alternatives, such as MP3 players, so that these needs can be met without unrestricted access to personal mobile phones during the school day. Where a pupil requires access to specialist technology as part of their EHCP, medical needs or reasonable adjustments, individual arrangements will be agreed by the school.

The school recognises that many online issues occur outside the school day but may significantly affect pupils' safety, wellbeing, relationships and education. This policy therefore addresses both the management of personal electronic devices within school and the school's response to online behaviour where it impacts safeguarding or the school community.

This policy should be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Relationship and Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, AI Policy, Staff Code of Conduct, Acceptable Use Agreements and other relevant School policies.

2. Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy has been developed with regard to:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (current edition);
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- Department for Education, Mobile phones in schools: statutory guidance (current edition);
- Independent School Standards Regulations;
- Education Act 2002;
- Education and Inspections Act 2006;
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance (Department for Education);
- Equality Act 2010;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR (where applicable);
- Online Safety Act 2023 (where relevant to the school's safeguarding responsibilities); and
- other relevant statutory guidance.

In accordance with the Department for Education's statutory guidance on mobile phones in schools, Orange Tree School prohibits pupils' use of mobile phones and other designated personal communication devices throughout the school day, including lessons, transitions, breaktimes and lunchtimes, subject only to individually agreed exceptions and reasonable adjustments.

The school recognises that safeguarding extends beyond the physical school environment. Online behaviour, digital communication and the misuse of personal electronic devices may give rise to safeguarding concerns, child-on-child abuse, bullying, discrimination or criminal behaviour and will be managed in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

3. Orange Tree's Phone-Free Environment

Orange Tree School operates a phone-free environment across both the Main Site and Ridgeway Hospital Provision (subject to any agreed site-specific arrangements).

This approach is a deliberate part of the school's therapeutic model and reflects its commitment to safeguarding, emotional wellbeing, positive relationships and high-quality education.

The school believes that pupils achieve the best outcomes when they are fully engaged with learning, therapeutic support and face-to-face interactions without the distraction or pressures associated with personal electronic devices.

3.1 Why Orange Tree Operates a Phone-Free Environment

The school's phone-free approach is intended to support pupils to:

- develop social communication and conversation skills;
- build and maintain meaningful friendships;
- strengthen positive peer relationships;
- improve concentration and engagement in learning;
- participate fully in therapeutic interventions;
- develop emotional regulation strategies without reliance on personal devices;
- reduce anxiety associated with constant online communication and social media;
- minimise opportunities for online conflict during the school day;
- develop healthy and balanced digital habits; and
- experience regular periods away from personal technology as part of promoting overall wellbeing.

Orange Tree School recognises that many pupils have experienced disrupted relationships, social isolation or difficulties developing and maintaining friendships. A phone-free environment enables pupils to practise communication, collaboration and relationship-building in a safe and supportive setting.

3.2 Handing in Personal Electronic Devices

Pupils are expected to hand in all mobile phones and personal electronic devices immediately upon arrival at school unless alternative arrangements have been agreed in advance by the school.

Devices will be securely stored during the school day and returned to pupils at the end of the school day in accordance with School procedures.

Failure to hand in a personal electronic device may be managed in accordance with this policy and the Relationship and Behaviour Policy.

Where appropriate, staff will work therapeutically with pupils to support compliance whilst maintaining the school's consistent expectations.

Orange Tree School's phone-free arrangements form part of the conditions and expectations of a placement at the school. By accepting and taking up a place at Orange Tree School, pupils and parents/carers agree to comply with this policy and to support the requirement for personal electronic devices to be handed in on arrival.

Pupils and parents/carers will normally be asked to sign the Personal Electronic Device Agreement to confirm that the policy has been explained and understood. The policy applies to all pupils as part of their placement at Orange Tree School, regardless of whether the agreement is signed.

3.3 Supporting Individual Needs

Orange Tree School recognises that some pupils use music or other sensory strategies to support emotional regulation, concentration or wellbeing.

Where appropriate, the school will provide suitable alternatives, such as MP3 players or other approved devices, enabling pupils to access music without retaining personal mobile phones during the school day.

Where access to personal technology is required as part of a pupil's EHCP, medical needs, therapeutic programme or reasonable adjustment, individual arrangements will be agreed by the school and reviewed regularly.

The school seeks to balance individual needs with its responsibility to safeguard pupils and maintain a consistent phone-free environment.

3.4 Healthy Digital Habits

Orange Tree School aims to help pupils develop a healthy relationship with technology.

The purpose of this policy is not to discourage the responsible use of digital technology, but to support pupils in understanding when technology is helpful and when time away from personal devices can promote wellbeing, learning, relationships and emotional regulation.

Through education, therapeutic support and positive role modelling, pupils are encouraged to develop the skills needed to use technology safely, responsibly and in a balanced way beyond the school environment.

4. Personal Electronic Devices

Orange Tree School expects all members of the school community to use personal electronic devices responsibly and in accordance with this policy.

For the purposes of this policy, personal electronic devices include, but are not limited to:

- mobile phones;
- smart watches with communication or internet capability;
- tablets;
- personal gaming devices with communication functions;
- headphones or earbuds connected to personal devices;
- wearable technology capable of recording, photographing or communicating; and
- any other device capable of accessing the internet, recording images or audio, or communicating electronically.

The school recognises that technology has an important place in modern life. However, during the school day, personal electronic devices must not interfere with learning, therapeutic provision, safeguarding or the development of positive relationships.

4.1 Pupils

Pupils must:

- hand in all personal electronic devices immediately upon arrival at school unless alternative arrangements have been agreed by the school;
- ensure devices are switched off or placed in flight mode where requested before being handed in;
- not attempt to access, retrieve or use personal devices during the school day without staff permission;
- not bring additional undeclared devices onto the school site;
- follow staff instructions regarding the safe management of personal electronic devices; and
- use technology responsibly before and after the school day in accordance with this policy and the school's expectations for online behaviour.

The school recognises that trust forms an important part of positive relationships. Pupils are expected to be honest about any personal electronic devices they bring onto the school site.

Where a pupil does not hand in a personal electronic device, attempts to conceal a device or brings an undeclared device into school, this will be managed in accordance with the Relationship and Behaviour Policy and may be treated as a safeguarding concern where appropriate.

4.2 Photography, Video, Audio Recording and Live Streaming

Orange Tree School is committed to protecting the privacy, dignity and safety of all members of the school community.

Pupils must not use personal electronic devices to:

- photograph, film, live stream or audio record pupils, staff, visitors or contractors without the explicit permission of a member of staff;
- record meetings, conversations or interactions without the knowledge and permission of those involved;
- share or distribute images, videos or recordings taken on the school site without authorisation;
- use photographs, videos or recordings to bully, harass, intimidate or embarrass others;
- create, store or distribute inappropriate, offensive or discriminatory content; or
- use personal electronic devices in any way that compromises the privacy, dignity, safety or wellbeing of others.

This includes classrooms, therapeutic sessions, meetings, offices, communal areas and all other parts of the school unless authorised by the Headteacher or an appropriate member of staff for a legitimate educational, safeguarding or operational purpose.

The unauthorised recording or sharing of images, videos or audio may constitute a safeguarding concern, a breach of privacy or, in some circumstances, a criminal offence. Such incidents will be managed in accordance with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Relationship and Behaviour Policy and other relevant School procedures.

4.3 Staff

Staff are expected to model the safe, professional and responsible use of technology.

Personal mobile phones and electronic devices should not be used whilst supervising pupils unless there is a legitimate professional reason or an emergency.

Staff must only use School-approved devices to photograph or record pupils for legitimate educational, safeguarding or operational purposes and in accordance with the School's Data Protection, Photography, Acceptable Use and Staff Code of Conduct policies.

School devices should be used for professional communication wherever possible.

4.4 Parents and Carers

Parents and carers play an important role in supporting the school's phone-free environment.

Parents and carers are asked to:

- encourage their child to comply with this policy;
- avoid contacting pupils directly during the school day except in exceptional circumstances;
- contact the school office where messages need to be passed to pupils;
- support the school's decisions regarding the management of personal electronic devices; and
- work in partnership with the school to promote safe and responsible use of technology outside school.
- respect the school's phone-free environment and not ask staff to make exceptions other than those agreed as part of a pupil's individual needs or reasonable adjustments.

4.5 Visitors and Contractors

Visitors and contractors are expected to use personal electronic devices responsibly whilst on the school site.

The use of mobile phones, cameras or recording devices in areas where pupils are present should be limited to legitimate purposes and only where authorised.

Visitors must comply with the school's safeguarding procedures and any instructions provided by School staff regarding the use of personal electronic devices.

5. Online Safety and Responsible Digital Behaviour

Orange Tree School recognises that digital technology and online communication form an important part of many pupils' daily lives. The school is committed to helping pupils develop the knowledge, skills and judgement needed to use technology safely, responsibly and respectfully.

The expectations for behaviour outlined in the Relationship and Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and Code of Conduct apply equally to online behaviour. Pupils are expected to demonstrate respect, kindness and responsibility whether communicating in person or through digital platforms.

5.1 Online Behaviour Outside School

The school recognises that many online incidents occur outside the school day. Whilst these incidents may take place away from the school site, they can have a significant impact on pupils' safety, wellbeing, relationships and education.

Where online behaviour occurring outside school:

- gives rise to safeguarding concerns;
- constitutes child-on-child abuse;
- involves bullying or cyberbullying;
- involves discriminatory behaviour, including racism, antisemitism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia or disability-related abuse;
- involves the sharing of inappropriate images or content;
- may constitute criminal behaviour; or
- significantly affects the wellbeing of pupils or the safe and orderly running of the school,

Orange Tree School may investigate and take appropriate action in accordance with its Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Relationship and Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and other relevant procedures.

The school will always seek to act proportionately, taking account of the individual circumstances, available evidence and the respective responsibilities of parents, carers and external agencies.

5.2 Responsible Digital Behaviour

Pupils are expected to:

- communicate respectfully online;
- consider the impact of their words and actions on others;

- protect their own personal information and that of others;
- report concerns or harmful online content to a trusted adult;
- avoid sharing rumours, inappropriate images or confidential information; and
- use digital technology in a lawful, safe and responsible manner.

The school recognises that some pupils may require additional support to develop safe online behaviours due to their age, SEND, communication needs or social understanding. Staff will provide education, guidance and support appropriate to individual needs, whilst ensuring that safeguarding concerns are responded to appropriately.

5.3 Supporting Families

Orange Tree School recognises that parents and carers have primary responsibility for supervising their child's use of personal technology outside school.

The school will work in partnership with families by:

- providing advice and guidance where appropriate;
- sharing concerns where online behaviour affects safeguarding or school life;
- signposting families to sources of support and online safety information; and
- working collaboratively to promote safe, responsible and balanced use of technology.

The school recognises that many online concerns are complex and may arise from a combination of SEND, vulnerability, social misunderstanding and poor decision-making. Responses will therefore be proportionate, educational and safeguarding-focused, whilst ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of all pupils remain the priority.

6. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Orange Tree School recognises that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly accessible through mobile phones, tablets, computers and other personal electronic devices.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to support learning and creativity when used appropriately. However, it can also be misused in ways that place pupils, staff and others at risk.

Pupils must not use AI or AI-enabled applications to:

- create, access or distribute harmful, abusive, discriminatory or inappropriate content;
- generate or share images, videos or audio intended to bully, harass or intimidate others;
- impersonate another person or create false communications;
- spread misinformation or deliberately mislead others;
- facilitate cheating or academic dishonesty; or
- engage in any activity that compromises the safety, dignity or wellbeing of others.

Where the misuse of AI gives rise to safeguarding concerns, child-on-child abuse, bullying, discrimination or other serious concerns, the school will respond in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Relationship and Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and AI Policy.

The school recognises that AI technologies will continue to evolve. Pupils will therefore be supported to develop critical thinking, digital literacy and an understanding of the ethical and responsible use of emerging technologies.

The school will adopt an educational approach wherever appropriate, helping pupils to understand the opportunities, limitations and risks associated with AI whilst responding robustly to misuse that places others at risk.

7. Searching, Screening and Confiscation

Orange Tree School will manage the searching, screening and confiscation of personal electronic devices in accordance with current statutory guidance and its safeguarding responsibilities.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a pupil has failed to hand in a personal electronic device, is using an undeclared device or that a device contains material which may present a safeguarding, behavioural or criminal concern, the school may take appropriate action.

Any search or confiscation will be:

- lawful;
- proportionate;
- carried out respectfully;
- undertaken by appropriately authorised members of staff; and
- recorded where appropriate.

Where devices contain, or are suspected to contain, evidence of:

- safeguarding concerns;
- child-on-child abuse;
- bullying or cyberbullying;
- inappropriate images;
- discriminatory or extremist material;
- criminal offences; or
- any other material placing a child or others at risk,

The school will act in accordance with its Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and may involve parents, carers, Children's Social Care, the Police or other relevant agencies where appropriate.

For the purposes of the school's rules, mobile phones and other personal electronic devices that have not been handed in as required are items for which the Headteacher, or an authorised member of staff, may undertake a search where the lawful criteria are met.

The school will not routinely search pupils' personal devices. Searches will only take place where there are lawful grounds, safeguarding concerns or other serious reasons to do so.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Effective implementation of this policy is a shared responsibility.

8.1 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- ensuring this policy is implemented consistently;
- promoting a safe digital culture;
- ensuring appropriate staff training;
- responding to significant breaches of the policy;
- ensuring safeguarding concerns are managed appropriately; and
- reviewing the effectiveness of the policy.

8.2 Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- modelling safe and professional use of technology;
- implementing this policy consistently;
- promoting positive digital behaviour;
- responding appropriately to concerns;
- reporting safeguarding issues promptly;
- supporting pupils to develop healthy digital habits; and
- exercising professional judgement when responding to incidents.

8.3 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- comply with this policy;
- hand in personal electronic devices on arrival;
- use technology responsibly;
- report online concerns;
- respect the privacy of others; and
- contribute to a safe and respectful school community.

8.4 Parents and Carers

Parents and carers are expected to:

- support the school's phone-free environment;
- reinforce safe online behaviour at home;
- work collaboratively with the school where concerns arise;
- inform the school of significant online concerns affecting their child where appropriate; and
- support the school's decisions relating to safeguarding and digital safety.

9. Monitoring, Review and Related Policies

9.1 Monitoring

The school will monitor the effectiveness of this policy through:

- safeguarding monitoring;
- behaviour and bullying records;
- online safety concerns;
- feedback from pupils, staff and parents;
- policy review; and
- quality assurance activities.

Monitoring will be used to identify emerging risks, improve practice and ensure that the policy continues to reflect developments in technology and safeguarding.

9.2 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner where:

- legislation changes;
- statutory guidance is updated;
- emerging technologies create new risks;
- safeguarding learning identifies improvements; or
- operational experience indicates that amendments are required.

9.3 Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Relationship and Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- AI Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy
- Acceptable Use Agreements

- Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance
- Online Safety curriculum and procedures
- Complaints Policy

Appendix A – Why We're a Phone-Free School (Pupil Guide)

Orange Tree School

Why We're a Phone-Free School

At Orange Tree School, we want everyone to feel safe, calm and ready to learn.

Many of our pupils tell us that phones, social media and group chats can sometimes make them feel:

- stressed;
- distracted;
- worried;
- left out; or
- overwhelmed.

That's why we ask everyone to hand in their phones when they arrive at school.

Being phone-free helps us to:

- make real friendships;
- talk to each other face to face;
- enjoy learning;
- take part in therapy;
- have a break from social media;
- feel calmer;
- concentrate better; and
- keep everyone safe.

We know that music can help some people regulate their emotions. If this is something that helps you, we'll work with you and may provide an MP3 player or another suitable alternative.

I Agree To:

- ☒ Hand in my phone and any other personal electronic devices when I arrive at school.
- ☒ Respect other people's privacy.
- ☒ Never secretly photograph, film, live stream or record anyone.
- ☒ Be kind and respectful online as well as in school.
- ☒ Tell an adult if something online worries me or makes me feel unsafe.
- ☒ Help keep Orange Tree a safe, calm and friendly place.

Appendix B - Personal Electronic Device Agreement

Orange Tree School provides a phone-free learning environment because it believes this supports safeguarding, learning, therapeutic practice, emotional wellbeing and the development of positive relationships.

By signing this agreement, we confirm that we understand and will support the school's expectations regarding personal electronic devices.

Pupil Agreement

I understand that:

- I must hand in my mobile phone and any other personal electronic devices when I arrive at school.
- I will not bring undeclared devices into school.
- I will respect the privacy of others and will not photograph, film, live stream, audio record or share images, videos or recordings without permission.
- I will behave responsibly online both in and outside school.
- I understand that my online behaviour may be addressed by the school where it affects safeguarding, other pupils or the school community.
- I understand why Orange Tree is a phone-free school and will support this approach.

This agreement records that the School's expectations have been explained and understood. The Mobile Phones, Personal Electronic Devices and Digital Safety Policy forms part of the expectations and conditions of a pupil's placement at Orange Tree School. It applies to all pupils and parents/carers, whether or not this agreement is signed.

Pupil Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C - Parent/Carer Agreement

I understand that:

- Orange Tree School operates a phone-free environment as part of its therapeutic approach.
- I will support my child in complying with this policy.
- I will contact the school office if I need to communicate with my child during the school day.
- I will work in partnership with the school to promote safe and responsible use of technology.
- I understand that safeguarding concerns relating to online behaviour may require the school to take appropriate action.

This agreement records that the school's expectations have been explained and understood. The Mobile Phones, Personal Electronic Devices and Digital Safety Policy forms part of the expectations and conditions of a pupil's placement at Orange Tree School. It applies to all pupils and parents/carers, whether or not this agreement is signed.

Parent/Carer Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____