



Wednesday 25th February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Smartphone-Free and Smartwatch-Free Schools

Following our parental survey, which showed overwhelming support for a move to become a smartphone-free site, I wanted to let you know that smartphones and watches will no longer be allowed in school from Tuesday 14th April 2026. This means children should not bring any devices that can access the internet, take photos, record videos, or send messages onto the school site, even if the device is switched off and kept in a bag or handed into the school office.

This decision follows careful review, growing evidence around the impact of smartphones on children's wellbeing, and strong parental support for collective action. Our aim is to protect our children's mental health and support positive behaviour.

Further details, including more detailed results of our survey and allowed alternatives for older children, can be found overleaf.

We will be arranging follow up meetings for parents and assemblies for children in the coming term, so that we can explain more about this approach – the dates of these events will follow shortly.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Daniel Carter
Headteacher
Archbishop Wake CE PS



Mrs Rosaleen Beaver
Headteacher
Blandford St Mary CE PS



Mrs Emma Richardson
Headteacher
Dunbury CE Academy



Mrs Jennifer McMullen
Headteacher
Durweston CE PS



Mr James Law
Headteacher
Milldown CE Academy



Mr Andrew Brown
Headteacher
Spetisbury CE PS



Smartphone-Free and Smartwatch-Free Schools

Why make this change?

Over the past few years, we have been carefully reviewing our expectations around the use of smart phones, smart watches, and similar devices in school. This work has been shaped by the increasing evidence of the risks linked not only to social media, but to the wider impact of smartphone use on children and young people.

To avoid any confusion, when we refer to smart phones, smart watches, or comparable devices, we mean any item that can access the internet, record audio or video, take photographs, or enable group messaging (for example via WhatsApp). This also includes devices that may appear to be simplified or “locked down”, as well as those which look like smartphones even if marketed differently.

Throughout this term, the DSAT Blandford schools, have continued to review our policy as we prepare to introduce a full ban on smart phones and smart watches being brought onto the school site at any time, and the reasons behind this move are explained below.

Context

For more than a decade, schools have invested considerable time in teaching children how to navigate the online world safely. The belief has long been that strong education alone could mitigate or prevent the negative effects of device use. However, this expectation is becoming increasingly unrealistic. Protecting children online is a shared responsibility, and the scale of the challenge reaches far beyond what schools and parents can manage through education alone.

Families and educators are trying to keep up with rapid technological developments, while major technology companies and online influencers continuously shape children’s behaviour in ways that are difficult to predict or regulate. Devices and apps have advanced quickly, but legislation and protective measures have not kept pace.

No amount of teaching can fully prepare a developing brain to process the vast quantity of information children encounter online. Nor can we expect them to consistently make wise decisions when digital environments normalise unkindness, encourage impulsive behaviour, or promote unhealthy comparison. Children simply are not developmentally ready for many of the judgements these platforms demand—particularly when adults themselves often struggle with the same challenges. Given the increased concerns around wellbeing and mental health, we support steps that help shield children from unnecessary risks.

Survey results

Our most recent parent survey showed that over 93% of respondents support collective action to address the concerns with smartphones, and 97% agreed that smartphones pose a risk to children. This support has grown since past surveys, and we now believe there is sufficient agreement to move forward confidently.

As a result, smartphones and smart devices will not be allowed on the school site from Tuesday 14th April 2026.

The only exceptions will be for children whose medical needs require the use of such a device—for example, those who rely on technology to monitor diabetes. In these situations, the arrangement must be agreed between the school and parents or carers and clearly set out in the pupil’s individual medical plan.

The DSAT Blandford Forum schools—Archbishop Wake, Blandford St Mary, Dunbury, Durweston, Milldown and Spetisbury—are taking the same approach, meaning our children will not be singled out or disadvantaged. Aligning with the growing national shift provides clarity and consistency for families, preventing a situation in which expectations differ from one school to the next.

Alternative Solutions

During the rest of this academic year, parents will be invited to take part in information events held centrally between the DSAT schools in Blandford. These sessions will offer further information about online safety and suggest practical alternatives to smart devices.

One option we will highlight is the use of basic “brick” phones. These are inexpensive, allow essential communication, for example, if a child needs to contact home on the way to or from school.

Devices That Resemble Smartphones or Smartwatches

Under this revised approach, children will not be permitted to bring any device that looks or functions like a smartphone or smartwatch, even if marketed as “restricted” or “locked down.” This decision is based on two key considerations:

1. Addressing the root issue

Allowing children to carry a device that visually or functionally mimics a smartphone does not address the core concern. Doing so risks sending a mixed message—similar to permitting smoking-related items on the condition that they are not used. These devices encourage the same habits and behaviours associated with smartphone use, which we are intentionally seeking to reduce.

2. Practicality and fairness

The school cannot reasonably be expected to verify the internal settings of each device or determine whether it is genuinely restricted. For the sake of consistency and fairness, any device outside our expectations will be removed and held for collection by a parent or carer. This is the only workable approach that ensures the policy is applied evenly to all children. Please see our Smartphone Policy for further details.

For children in Years 5 and 6, the current procedure requiring phones to be handed in remains unchanged; *any non smartphone will need to be handed into staff at the start of the day.*

Children in Years R–4 must not bring any type of phone to school.

To support a consistent message, we will also be encouraging parents to avoid using smartphones while on the school site.

Further Information

Research into the effects of smartphones and social media continues to grow. The challenges are not only about inappropriate content; they are also rooted in the way these platforms shape behaviour, communication, and children’s understanding of the world. Features such as WhatsApp groups, for instance, can unintentionally enable exclusion or unkind interactions, while also facilitating the spread of misinformation or creating anxiety.

The constant availability of cameras and image-sharing tools also affects how children view themselves. These pressures often emerge at the very time they are forming their identity and sense of self-worth. Emerging evidence also suggests that touchscreen use influences brain development. The immediacy and stimulation provided by phones can undermine patience, reduce tolerance for delayed gratification, and affect engagement in tasks such as reading — all of which are crucial for successful learning and future resilience.

Additional Resources

For families wishing to explore this topic further, a wide range of materials is available:

- **Website:** *Smartphone Free Childhood*
<https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/>
- **Book:** *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt
- **Documentaries:**
 - *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix)
 - *Childhood 2.0* (YouTube)
 - *Screened Out* – explores the neurological effects of screens
 - *Plugged In* – designed for parents navigating digital challenges
 - *Disconnected* – featuring children discussing burnout and online pressures

Balancing Technology with Safeguarding

We fully appreciate that families hold a wide range of views about children's use of smartphones and digital technologies. We remain committed to helping our children develop the skills needed to navigate the online world safely and responsibly, acknowledging that AI and digital tools are part of modern life.

However, our primary focus is on *readiness*. Society already provides protective boundaries in many areas—film age ratings, legal age limits on driving, smoking, or drinking, and guidelines for online activity. It would be inconsistent not to have similar safeguarding measures around smartphone use, especially when these devices can pose significant risks to well-being. Our ability to support and protect children should not be diminished by industries that design platforms to engage young users intensely.

As we move towards 14th April 2026, children will receive clear information about the change so that they feel prepared and confident.

Finally, we would like to thank parents and carers for your ongoing support. We would like to reassure you that this approach has been developed with careful consideration of emerging research, professional observations, and—above all—our commitment to improving the mental health, well-being, and long-term success of the children and young people in our care.

Kindest regards



The image shows five handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged horizontally. From left to right, they are: 'R. Bean', 'A. Brown', 'D. Hart', 'J. Law', and 'J. Mills'. The signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.