

16th October 2026

Dear Parent / Carer,

Introducing Focus Pouches to achieve a Mobile Phone Free School

I am writing with information about the introduction of phone pouches at Churchill Academy & Sixth Form immediately after the half term holiday.

The decision to introduce phone pouches follows extensive research and consultation with other schools, where the impact on students and overall school culture has been very positive. It also builds on a research project conducted last academic year with the University of the West of England and the Lighthouse Schools Partnership.

Our approach is in line with recent government guidance, which states that schools should have policies that prevent the use of mobile phones and similar smart technology throughout the school day, including during lessons, between lessons, and at break and lunchtime. Whilst our current policy discourages the use of devices, it does not prevent it, and the use of phone pouches enables us to fully meet the new statutory expectations.

Ultimately, we believe that introducing mobile phone pouches will help create an even safer, calmer and more focused learning environment for our students.

Why is this change needed?

The evidence is clear: students are spending more time on their devices than ever before.

- Children aged 13–18 spend on average 8.5 hours per day using devices (Rideout et al, 2022).

- 35% of 13–14-year-olds and 52% of 15–17-year-olds report being online “constantly” (PEW Research Centre, 2022).
- On average teenagers receive 237 ‘ping’ notifications a day or 10 per hour (PEW Research Centre, 2022)
- 50% of girls and 40% of boys of secondary school age getting less than 7 hours sleep due to mobile phone use at night (Haidt 2024)

This level of device use has been linked with both reduced academic performance and increased mental health challenges. These concerns align directly with what national research continues to show.

Impact on Learning and Academic Performance

Mobile phones risk distraction, disruption, and diversion. Nationally, one in three secondary pupils report that phones are used in most lessons without permission. This was also reflected in the UWE research project data from Lighthouse Schools Partnership schools. This not only affects the individual but also interrupts the focus of the whole class.

Research further suggests that even the mere presence of a phone – without it being used – can reduce attention and performance on complex tasks. These are precisely the kinds of higher-level tasks that we expect students to be engaging in every day. It can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on what they were learning after receiving a notification on their device.

Impact on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Research also highlights the serious concerns around smartphone use and wellbeing. By removing mobile phones during the school day, we can help students build healthier habits, strengthen their friendships, and focus more fully on their learning.

Introduction of Focus Pouches

We will be introducing the use of Focus Pouches for all students in Year 7 - 11 at the beginning of Term 2 on Tuesday 3rd November 2026. Students will be given their first Focus Pouch (free of charge) on this date. It will be each student's responsibility to bring their pouch to school every day and keep it in good working condition.

If a student brings a mobile phone to school, instead of it being kept in their school bag, as is the current school rule, their mobile phone must be switched

off, placed in the pouch, locked and placed in their school bag at the start of their morning tutor session (or if they arrive later in the day upon signing in at reception). This will mean that mobile phones cannot be used on school premises for any reason.

Phones will remain in the pouch until the end of period 5 when they will be unlocked upon leaving the lesson, or when the student signs out to leave the school site for an approved reason.

There will be a small number of medical exemptions, such as our diabetic students, and we are happy to speak to families about individual requirements where medical evidence exists to support a variation to the policy. Students in those cases can be given a Focus Medical pouch secured by Velcro, rather than locked shut.

Morning routine during tutor time

The following routine will be explained to students next week, and implemented from 3rd November:

1. Enter your tutor room and sit in allocated seat
2. Put your switched-**off** mobile phone and pouch on the desk.
3. A member of staff will check your phone and pouch.
4. Put the switched-off mobile phone in the pouch and **lock** it shut
5. Turn your pouch upside down and **shake** to show it is locked
6. Put the pouch **away** in your bag

If the student has forgotten their pouch, they will switch off their phone and hand it in to their tutor. It will be kept securely in reception for the day. The student will collect it at the end of school.

End of the day routine: unlocking at the end of period 5

An unlocking station is available in every classroom. At the end of Period 5, teachers will dismiss students in an orderly manner to unlock their pouches as they leave the classroom.

Arrangements for the Sixth Form

The government guidance stipulates that schools' approaches "should include prohibiting the use of mobile phones by sixth-form students in front of younger pupils, for example, limiting use to a sixth-form common room.

Sixth-form students should remain subject to the school's behaviour policy and misuse of their phone should have the potential to lead to sanctions." We will be responding in line with this statutory guidance. Sixth Form will **not** routinely be issued with a Focus Pouch. Sixth Formers will be permitted to use their mobile phones:

- Within the Sixth Form Centre
- In a lesson at the express request of the member of staff

Sixth Form students should **not** use their mobile phones elsewhere around the Academy site during the school day (from 8:00am to 3:05pm), and **never** in front of younger students. Breach of this expectation will result in the confiscation of the mobile phone. We reserve the right to issue a Focus Pouch to any Sixth Form student as necessary.

In conclusion

We know that, like us, you want to ensure the very best outcomes for your child – academically, socially, and emotionally. Together, we can make Churchill a place where students continue to thrive, free from unnecessary distractions.

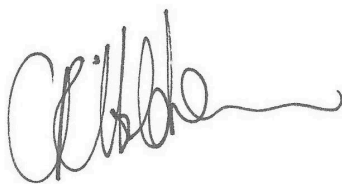
If you have any questions, please read the key documents below.

- Focus Pouch FAQs (attached to the end of this letter)
- [Mobile Devices Policy](#) from November 2026
- [Statutory Government Guidance: mobile phones in schools](#)
- [Information about Focus Pouches](#)

If you have further questions after reading this guidance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you in advance for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Hildrew', with a stylized, flowing script.

Chris Hildrew
Headteacher

Mobile Free Churchill

Frequently asked questions for parents/carers

<i>How is the mobile phone policy changing?</i>	The current policy states that if a student brings their mobile phone to school, it is switched off and kept in their school bag. This will change to the mobile phone being switched off, placed in a Focus Pouch that is then closed and kept in their school bag.
<i>When will students be given a Focus pouch?</i>	All students in Years 7-11 will be given a Focus pouch during morning tutor time on Tuesday 3rd November. All students will be given their first pouch free of charge.
<i>What if students need to contact a parent during the day?</i> <i>What if school needs to contact parents/carers?</i>	As is our current policy, students should go to Student Reception to contact home and parents should phone Main Reception. We have very clear procedures in place for when a student is unwell, as assessed by our First Aid team. Parents/carers will be contacted by our First Aid team.
<i>What if my child has a medical need that requires their mobile phone?</i>	If your child has a medical need which requires mobile phone access, please contact nurse@churchill-academy.org with the medical evidence. Once approved, we will issue a Velcro pouch to enable access.
<i>My child needs their mobile phone to support their mental health; will they be allowed access to their device?</i>	Research shows that mobile phones have a negative impact on mental health and in some cases exacerbate any challenges young people face. Further information is found on the Parents Against Phone Addiction in Young Adolescents (PAPAYA) website and in the excellent book by Jonathan Haidt titled The Anxious Generation. Mobile phone access will not be permitted.
<i>I have heard that the magnets used on a Focus pouch damage phones.</i>	This is not true. The pouches are not protective cases and so should be treated with the same care as a phone not in a Focus pouch. Damage can occur if a student drops their pouch on the floor for example, as it would if they dropped their phone on the floor. As pouches should be in bags at all times, we don't anticipate this being an issue as there is no reason to have them out till the end of the school day when unlocking takes place.

<i>Where will the unlocking stations be?</i>	There will be unlocking stations at the following areas of the school: - In every classroom to be used at the end of the final lesson of the day - Reception - Outside the Academy Hall - Sixth Form Centre Mobile unlocking devices will be used on school trips (see below)
<i>If my child leaves school late due to clubs, revision sessions etc. how will they unlock their pouch?</i>	Students will unlock their pouches at the end of period 5 so clubs and matches etc are not impacted.
<i>What happens if my child arrives in school in the morning and their pouch is locked?</i>	If an empty pouch is locked, the student will need to unlock their pouch in their tutor room at the start of the session.
<i>What happens if a student forgets their pouch?</i>	If a student leaves their pouch at home, they will switch their phone off and hand it to their tutor. The phone will be securely stored in Reception for collection at the end of the school day. The student will not be permitted access to their phone, just as if it was locked in a pouch. The student will be issued a BP1 for “forgotten pouch.” Repeatedly forgotten pouches may lead to escalated sanctions.
<i>How will staff know phones are in the pouches? What about smart watches? How do we ensure they only have one phone?</i>	During morning tutor time, students will place their pouch on the desk. Staff will watch them switch off their phone and lock it into their pouch. If a student arrives late to school, staff will watch the student switch off the phone and lock it into their pouch as they sign in at reception. All wearable technology will be unusable due to the phone being switched off in the pouch. Spot checks will be carried out by staff in a range of lessons each week.

What sanction will be incurred if a mobile phone is found on school site outside of a pouch?	Phone found in a pupil's possession outside of a pouch: • Phone confiscated and must be collected by a parent/carer • Internal suspension for up to 1 day in the first instance • Repeated offences will result in external suspension being used for persistent breaches of the school behaviour policy Refusal to hand phone over or complete a phone related sanction: • External suspension for 1 day in the first instance Refusal to participate in a spot check: • External suspension for 1 day in the first instance Deliberate damage to pouch: • Internal suspension for up to 1 day • Replacement pouch chargeable to parents
How will after school trips work? E.g. sports fixtures.	The default will be that, if a trip takes place during the school day, phones will be locked away. We will supply a pouch unlocking device as part of all trip packs. Staff may use professional judgment to make adjustments to this dependent on the context of the trip.
Will parents have to replace a lost pouch? Will parents have to replace a pouch that has been damaged intentionally?	Yes. Replacement pouches will be charged via ParentPay at a cost of £20 per pouch. New pouches will be collected from student reception.
Will parents have to replace a pouch that has been unintentionally damaged?	The devices have a warranty that can be found inside the pouch on delivery. Pouches will be replaced free of charge in the case of unintentional damage covered by the warranty.
If they cannot use their phone, how can students see their timetable during the school day?	We provide students with a small timetable which will fit in the clear pocket of the Focus Pouch so it can be viewed at all times.
Will all classes have working clocks as a lot of students use their phones to tell the time?	Yes. The time is also displayed on all noticeboard screens, and we are installing large external clocks around the site.

<i>What about staff use of phones?</i>	We will encourage staff to follow the same mobile phone-free policy around the school, wherever possible. Some staff do use their phones to communicate or check key information and this is permitted.
<i>What about Sixth Form students?</i>	Sixth Formers will not be issued with pouches. They are permitted to use their phones within the Sixth Form Centre, and in a lesson at the express request of the member of staff. Sixth Form students should not use their mobile phones elsewhere around the Academy site during the school day (from 8:00am to 3:05pm), and never in front of younger students.
<i>What happens if there is a critical incident during the school day?</i>	Where appropriate, students will be directed to unlock their pouches by staff. The Academy will contact families where necessary.
<i>Will cover and/or supply teaching staff follow the procedure?</i>	Yes. SLT and House Teams are always made aware when there is a cover teacher for a tutor group and will prioritise visiting these tutor groups. As the phones are locked away during the day, there should be no instances of a cover teacher not following procedure during lessons.
<i>When do the students lock the phone away?</i>	Morning routine during tutor time 1. Student enters their tutor room 2. Student puts their mobile phone and their pouch on their desk. Phone should be switched off. 3. Teacher checks the mobile phone and pouch are on the desk, and that the phone is switched off. 4. Student puts the switched-off mobile phone in the pouch and clips it shut 5. Student will turn their pouch upside down to show their pouch is now locked 6. Student puts their pouch in their bag
<i>When do students unlock their pouches at the end of the day?</i>	On leaving the classroom – there will be a lock in every classroom to do this. Students will be directed to unlock a row or group at a time.
<i>How do students lock their phones in their pouch on an assembly day?</i>	The students will lock their phone in their pouch on entering the assembly hall. This will be checked by the Head of House and tutor.