

Mobile Phones, Headphones and Smart Watches

School Wide Ban – comes into effect on Monday 26th February

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s),

Mr. T. Chamberlin BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH

headteacher

I am writing to inform you that, after much consideration I have taken the decision to ban the use of mobile phones at Chase Terrace Technology College. This brings us in line with other secondary schools in our district. Despite our best efforts over a long period of time to negotiate a mobile phone solution that works for everyone, and believing that we had found that compromise, our Heads of Year, Student Support Officers, middle managers and senior staff have found themselves dealing with an ever-increasing number phone related issues over the past few weeks. The ready access that mobile phones offer to social media exacerbates this problem very significantly.

In a school which is typically calm and purposeful and features students who are going about their business in a way that any school would be proud of, we find ourselves dealing with a wave of anti-social, unwelcome and unpleasant comments, opinions, pictures, videos and audio clips shared by text and social media chat applications. As parent(s)/carer(s) will know taking video or pictures of others without their consent is illegal. It seems that more and more people have an opinion that they are increasingly prepared to volunteer through this apparently invisible medium.

Our students are constantly bombarded by a feed of social information and alerts that distract them and that in many cases they are not well equipped to deal with. Despite most social media platforms being targeted at the 13 year olds and above, the great majority of students access social media sites at a considerably younger age than this. This in turn affects us in school. As a school the time it takes us to deal with these issues is substantial and our ability to manage these situations is reaching saturation point. Whilst we invest heavily in educating students about the safe use of social media and we would always try to assist when things aren't as they should be, our ability to effect change when the problems are generated outside our school day through media-based contact is very limited.

Another alarming trend that we face is that parents are being contacted directly by their child whilst in school rather than reporting a problem to a member of staff. This might be because they are unwell or they are in trouble but either way this cannot happen. This presents us with Health and Safety and Safeguarding issues. Please be assured that we will contact parents directly from school if we need to.

I believe that giving students a 7-hour break from their phone screens, constant alerts and the isolation that headphones promote will be highly beneficial to them and I am confident that the great majority of parents will agree with me - some parents may even decide not to allow their child to bring a mobile phone to school at all. Whilst some students might be relieved about this break from alerts, I fear that most of our students will not immediately see the benefits of this action and challenge the schools decision! As parent(s)/carer(s) I seek your full support with this decision and ask you to strongly back this course of action with your child. I am not suggesting that your child cannot bring a mobile phone to school as I completely understand that the safety benefits of carrying a mobile phone before and after school hours outweigh any potential risks. I do ask for your support in ensuring that students understand that phones must be switched off (not just on silent) and out of sight in their school bags whilst in school.

A ban on mobile phones during the school day also means that headphones and smart watches are rendered unnecessary. Students should not bring these to school. If mobile phones, headphones or smart watches are seen during the school day they will be confiscated and returned to the student at the end of the day. Frequent need to confiscate will result in items being returned to parent(s)/carer(s) rather than the student.

The few benefits that mobile phones did offer to school – taking a picture of the work done on a white board for instance, can still be done using a tablet. I continue to strongly support the use of these devices, provided that they do not have anything other than WIFI connectivity (no 3G etc.). When connected through our school network all social media applications are blocked. All students should bring a calculator to school as part of their standard daily equipment.

A final plea is that parent(s)/carer(s) take a very close look at the applications that their child has on any of their devices. In recent conversations that I have had it is clear that parent(s)/carer(s) often do not know what applications their children are using. There are new social media apps coming out every week – some with some very alarming features! The NSPCC produce a very useful app for parents called NetAware which lists apps that students use and tells parents what the apps do. This informs parents of any risks associated with using these apps.

With thanks for your support in this matter

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. Chamberlin', written in a cursive style.

Tim Chamberlin
(Head Teacher)