INTERIM

Mobile Phone Guidance

for Early Learning Centres
and Schools
in Dumfries and Galloway

November 2026



Dumfries and Galloway Council

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Introduction

We understand the many challenges faced by schools, children, young people and families when it comes to smart phones. This guidance is designed to help schools manage the access pupils have in school to devices such as smart phones, smart watches and tracking devices. Whilst the devices themselves have a range of risks and benefits, the content available to children and young people through smart phones and smart watches can be of considerable concern.

We are therefore clear that children and young people do not need or require a smart phone for school.



Following the launch of new guidance for phone-free learning published by the Scottish Government on 30 June 2026, the Education Secretary said:

"We know that mobile phones are causing distraction in the classroom and we must end this so our children and young people can reach their full educational potential. Beyond distraction, we know there is a spectrum of other harms associated with the online world from issues with sleep, mental health and loss of concentration through to exposure to harmful, violent or misogynistic content and, in extreme cases, incitement to self-harm, severe bullying and grooming.

"The Scottish Government intends to introduce new laws to restrict the use of mobile phones in schools. As we develop the legislation, I am encouraging Scotland's education authorities, headteachers and schools to act now, following our refreshed guidance. As a minimum, restrictions should apply during teaching and learning time, but schools should also consider implementing a whole school ban. Any steps taken by schools should be informed by consultation with the whole school community, including with pupils and staff."

- **As a minimum, all schools in Dumfries and Galloway are expected to comply with national guidance.**
- **All headteachers should ensure that they have robust and compliant mobile phone policies and should submit these along with their School Improvement Plan on an annual basis.**
- **Any headteacher who wishes to impose a more extensive smart phone/smart device ban has the full support of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate.**

This guidance will be updated when the Scottish Government produce further guidance or legislation relating to the restriction of mobile phones in schools.

Guidance for Headteachers

Scottish Government

Mobile phones: Guidance for Scotland's schools, updated 2026

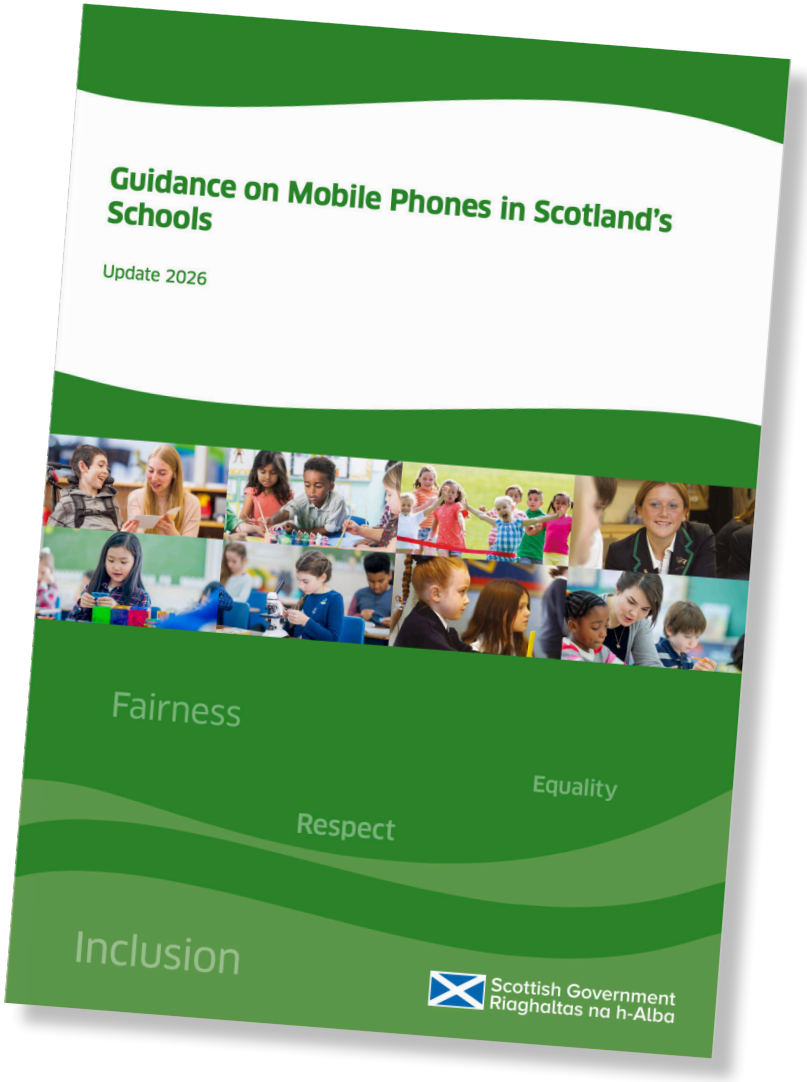
Phone-free learning in Scottish schools

UK Government

The UK government will ban social media for under 16s. Alongside this, certain harmful features on other online services like livestreaming and strangers contacting children will be restricted for under 18s.

The first set of Regulations will be laid before the end of 2026, and the changes should be implemented in Spring 2027.

Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online



Developing and implementing mobile phone policies

Effective implementation and enforcement rely on the support and cooperation of all members of the school community, including staff, pupils and parents and carers.

To ensure this support and cooperation, it is imperative that schools seek to **develop their policies in collaboration** with their whole school community and engage with parent councils, to understand their respective needs and concerns.

Co-creating policy expectations should ensure that all members of the school community understand the aims and purpose of the school's approach and feel a shared ownership and commitment to its successful implementation.



- **Schools should implement policies to restrict mobile phones**, up to and including restricting access to mobile phones for personal use in schools across the school day.
- **Policies should be supported by an ethos of citizenship** that leads to respectful and responsible use of technology, including to support learning whilst encouraging schools to have a robust but measured response to the inappropriate use of mobile phones to minimise distraction, disruption and emotional harm.
- **Schools' mobile phone policies should be informed** by the consideration of the full range of relevant rights under the UNCRC, including respect for the views of the child, considering their local circumstances, with acting in the best interests of the child as a key consideration.
- **Policies must also be informed by the need to protect both pupils** and **staff** from the **risks of inappropriate use** of mobile phones, including protection from misuse and abuse.
- **Policies should be regularly reviewed** to ensure the commitment of new staff, pupils, parents and carers to the policy and to take account of experience of implementation and new developments in technology.
- **Mobile phone policies should be clear and specific**. The policy should be developed in collaboration with the whole school community and clearly and regularly communicated to pupils, parents, carers, school staff and the wider school community.

Early learning centres

and

Primary schools



Mobile phone policies in early learning centres (ELC), primary schools and/or partnerships

It is expected that ELC and primary school/partnership mobile phone policies should contain clear guidelines on the following.

Digital rights and responsibilities (what individuals can and cannot do):

- The scope of any restrictions or limitations on personal mobile phone use within the school, the school grounds within the school day, at social school events and on school outings. For example, a school may wish to restrict use of mobile phones during the school day altogether.

- Procedures for restriction, safe storage and return of mobile phones. Current practice includes phones being dropped off at a particular point or classroom, stored and returned from that location at the end of the school day.

- Clear expectations of what standards of behaviour are expected from all members of the school community, including pupils, parents and carers.

- Proportionate and consistent consequences for mobile phone misuse should be applied in line with each school's relationships and behaviour and anti-bullying policies. These should reflect national guidance on **Fostering a positive, inclusive and safe school environment**, reinforcing expectations and supporting positive relationships, wellbeing and safe learning environments.

- Clear protocols on reporting of misuse within the school, and the support available in school for staff and for pupils who are the subject of harassment using mobile phones.



- Consideration of situations where mobile phones may be used by pupils with particular needs, as set out in exemptions considerations below, including procedures for requesting exemptions.

- Arrangements in place for emergency contact with pupils and families.

- Clearly stated responsibility/liability for personal mobile phones in terms of loss, theft or breakage.

- How the school will support safe and secure use of technology through the curriculum to develop responsible, global citizens, respect children's rights, and promote an anti-bullying culture. This can be taught through Curriculum for Excellence, especially Health and Wellbeing and Digital Literacy.

Smart Phones, Smart Watches, Tablets and Tracking Devices (e.g. Air Tags) in early learning centres (ELCs) and primary schools

We do not expect children in ELCs and primary schools to bring any device with them into the setting.

Children in ELCs and primary schools must not have access to their own personal devices in playrooms or classrooms, unless this is covered by an appropriate exemption.

- All ELCs and primary schools must develop a policy that covers how they will manage these devices if children bring them into school.
- Pupils in ELCs and primary schools must not routinely have access to these devices in the playroom or classroom.
- Parents and carers must share with schools if they are sending their child to nursery or school (or on an external trip or visit) with any of these devices and must agree with the school how they will be managed during the school day.



Secondary Schools



Mobile phone policies in secondary schools

It is expected that school mobile phone policies should contain clear guidelines on the following:

- **Digital etiquette** (standards of conduct when using mobile phones).
- **Digital rights and responsibilities** (what individuals can and cannot do).
- **Safe and secure use of mobile technology** (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety).
- **The scope of any restrictions or limitations** on personal mobile phone use within the school, the school grounds within the school day, at social school events and on school outings. For example, it may be agreed that mobile phones should be switched off and out of sight during class times, or while on campus for example, within a school bag. Alternatively, a school may wish for pupils to hand mobile phones over to a member of staff during class time or may wish to restrict use of mobile phones during the school day altogether.
- **The prohibition of mobile phones and smart watches during exams**, unless used as part of an approved assessment arrangement in line with guidance from Qualifications Scotland.
- **Procedures for restriction, safe storage and return of mobile phones**. Current practice includes: the storage of phones by pupils within their own school bags during the school day; phones being dropped off at a particular point or classroom, stored and returned from that location at the end of the school day.

- **Clear expectations** of what standards of behaviour are expected from all members of the school community, including pupils, parents and carers, including how transitions between periods of use of phones and restrictions will be managed.

- **Proportionate and consistent consequences** for mobile phone misuse should be applied in line with each school's relationships and behaviour and anti-bullying policies. These should reflect national guidance on **Fostering a positive, inclusive and safe school environment**, reinforcing expectations and supporting positive relationships, wellbeing and safe learning environments.

- **Clear protocols on reporting of misuse within the school**, and the support available in school for staff and for pupils who are the subject of harassment using mobile phones.

- **Consideration of situations where mobile phones may be used by pupils with particular needs**, as set out in exemptions considerations below, including procedures for requesting exemptions.

- **Arrangements in place for emergency contact with pupils and families**.

- **An expectation that the policy will be applied consistently** across the school, with staff explaining to pupils why certain behaviours are unacceptable, and their potential impact.

- **Clearly stated responsibility/liability for personal mobile phones** in terms of loss, theft or breakage.

- **Clear guidelines on privacy policies**, and rules prohibiting the uploading of images or recordings obtained by use of mobile phones to social networking or other websites without the express permission of data subjects. For example, instructions that camera and filming functions must not be used without the prior consent of data subjects (pupils or staff etc.) and special permission of the school's management team. Decisions on restriction or limitation of access to mobile phones should be informed by local circumstances and priorities.

- **How the school will support safe and secure use of technology through the curriculum** to develop responsible, global citizens, respect children's rights, and promote an anti-bullying culture. This can be taught through Curriculum for Excellence, especially Health and Wellbeing and Digital Literacy.

Guidance for all settings,

Children and young people,

School staff and families



Exemptions

In developing approaches to exemptions, schools should consider the individual needs of their school community.

Potential exemptions which should be considered on a case-by-case basis, include:

- **Pupils who are young carers** and who require ongoing contact with family members.
- **Pupils who have medical conditions** that require monitoring using mobile technology.
- **Pupils with additional support needs** where access to their mobile phone is used as part of an agreed, planned approach to managing their learning needs.
- **Pupils who use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment,** including access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) etc., including pupils with disabilities.
- **Pupils who use their phone to support an agreed, planned approach to religious observance**.
- **Pupils whose only form of payment for school meals** is through using an app on their phone, in the event that other forms of payment are temporarily unavailable (note that pupils entitled to free school meals in Dumfries and Galloway should be permitted to scan the QR code at the till to ensure their entitlement is met).



Legal and policy aspects

There are several online behaviours that could constitute a criminal offence.

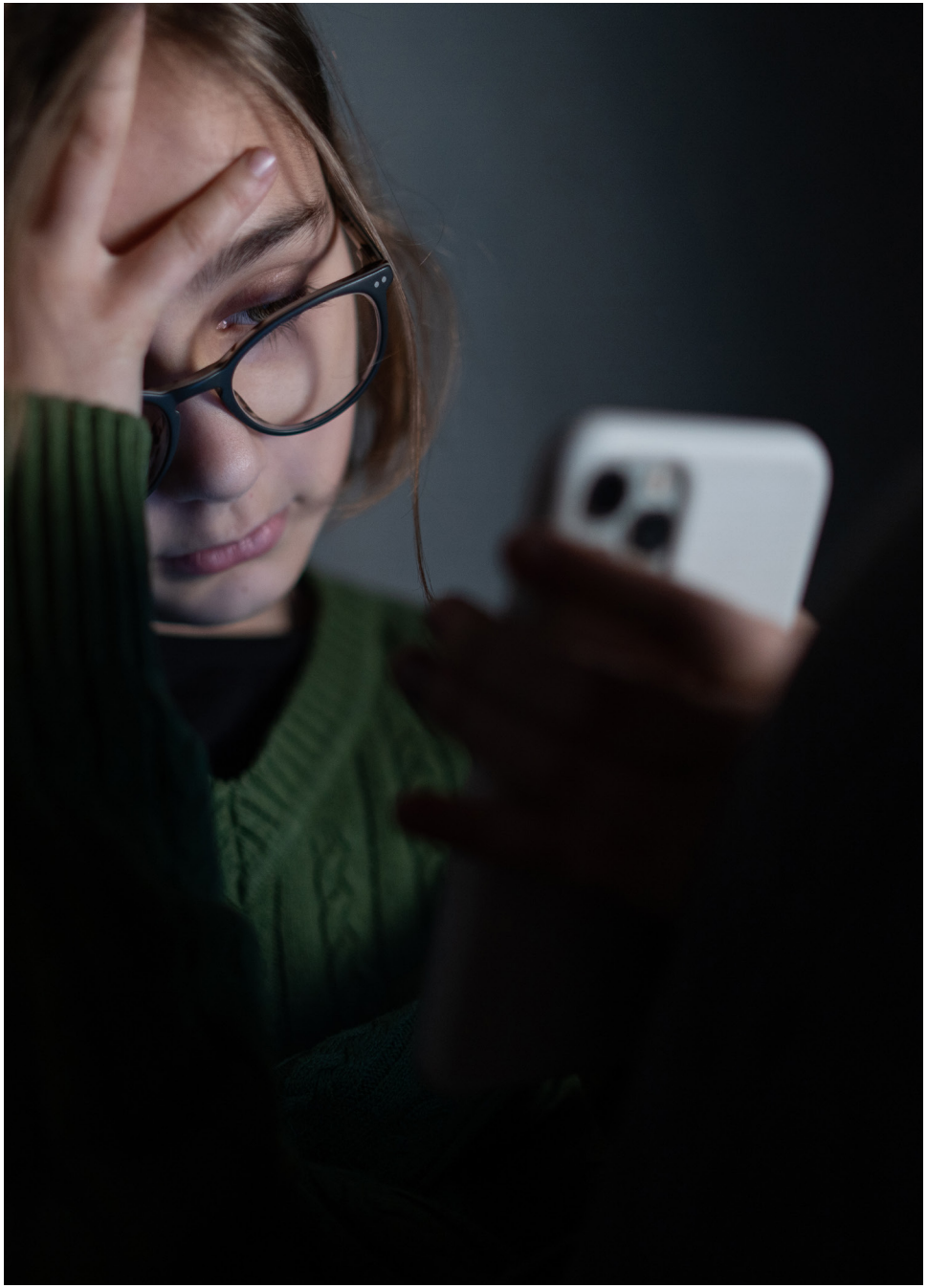
In responding to any specific behaviours, towards pupils or staff, it is important for schools to have an awareness of the relevant legislative landscape and to seek legal advice where appropriate.

- **School staff cannot access content on a pupil's mobile phone without the pupil's consent**, or the consent of their parent or carer where the pupil does not have capacity to consent.

- **Policies should make clear that there are consequences** for misusing mobile phones. Where potentially criminal events have been recorded using mobile technology, this should be drawn to the attention of the police.

- Taking **photographs**, **videos** or **audio recordings** of an individual **without** their **permission may be regarded as a breach of that person's rights**, and may, in some instances, be regarded as an offence by the police.

- Should **images or recordings** be **uploaded** onto social networks **without permission** from the data subject, **the individual should be asked to remove this** as part of the normal behaviour policy of the school. If the individual refuses to remove these images or recordings, advice should be sought from Police Scotland.



Smart phones and the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy

Teachers must not permit mobile phones to be used for learning in ELCs and primary schools. In secondary schools, teachers will not routinely allow mobile phones to be used for learning. In all settings, we aim to create phone free learning environments in the Broad General Education.

- Where young people choose to bring their own device to school (such as a tablet or laptop), these should only connect to the BYOD network and must not use mobile data. The responsibility for ensuring this will be made clear to parents, carers and young people.

- Appropriate exemptions must be in place for young people (for example with additional support needs or medical needs). This is detailed in this guidance and in each individual school policy.

Dumfries and Galloway Council Acceptable Use guidance

All staff in ELCs, primary and **secondary schools must engage with** the **Dumfries and Galloway Council Staff Acceptable Use guidance** and a record of mandatory training should be maintained.

All pupils in **P6** to **S6 must engage with Pupil Acceptable Use guidance** annually.

The parents and **carers of pupils in ELC to P7 are required to engage with the Acceptable Use guidance** on their behalf on enrolment to school.





A message for children and young people on mobile phones

At our schools, we want everyone to feel safe, happy and ready to learn.

Because of this, smart phones should stay at home whenever possible. This helps everyone focus on learning and spending time with friends.

If you bring a smart phone to school

If you need to bring a smart phone to school, you must follow your school rules. Usually you will be asked to:

- Turn it off
- Keep it out of sight
- Hand it to a member of staff if your school asks you to
- Not use it in classrooms

Why do we have this rule?

When phones are not being used, it is easier to:

- Concentrate on learning
- Talk and play with friends
- Look after our wellbeing

Sometimes there are exemptions

Some children may need a device because they:

- Have a medical condition
- Help care for someone at home
- Have additional support needs
- Use technology to help them communicate or take part in learning

If this applies to you, your parent or carer should speak to the Headteacher.

Getting to and from school

If your family wants to keep in touch while you travel to and from school, **a simple phone for calls and texts is often enough**.

Remember, your school will help you contact home if you need to.

A message for parents and carers on mobile phone use in schools

Dumfries and Galloway Council has introduced new guidance to support phone-free learning in schools.

The guidance is based on the view that children and young people **do not need a smart phone for school**, and aims to reduce distractions, support wellbeing and help keep children safe online.

As a result, schools will have clear policies restricting the use of smart phones and other personal devices during the school day.

In primary schools and ELC settings, children must not have access to personal devices in classrooms or playrooms unless an agreed exemption is in place.

Schools recognise that some children may need access to a device because of medical needs, caring responsibilities, disabilities or additional support needs. Any exemptions will be considered on an individual basis in discussion with families.

Parents and carers can support this approach by

- Encouraging children to leave devices at home whenever possible.
- Discussing safe, responsible use of technology.



Together, we can help create a safe, positive and distraction-free learning environment where all children can focus on learning, wellbeing and healthy relationships.

Travel to and from school

Many families are concerned about being able to keep in touch with their child when they are travelling to and from school.

Parents and carers should be confident that they will be alerted by their child's school if they do not arrive on time for the start of the school day, and schools will support children and young people to contact home if there are issues during or at the end of the school day.

If families wish to stay in contact with children during travel to and from school, **a basic mobile phone that can make calls and send texts may be sufficient**.

Where families choose to purchase a phone for the purposes of keeping in touch during travel, **we recommend a cheap non-smart phone** (that can make and receive phone calls and texts but does not allow apps to be downloaded).

Tracking devices

We are also aware that some families of children in ELCs and primary schools are choosing to give their child a tracking device (such as Air Tag) to monitor their journey.

We strongly advise parents and carers to liaise with their child's school regarding tracking devices.



Advice for parents, carers and families

The decision to purchase a smart phone or smart watch for a young person rests with families.

Children and young people do not need or require a smart phone or smart watch for school.

Access to school work for secondary pupils

Many schools provide additional support and revision materials through Glow or Teams, or through school specific apps.

We recommend that school work is best accessed on a laptop, desk top computer or tablet, and access to a shared device at home should be more than sufficient.

However, where parents and carers take the decision to provide a smart phone, or a personal device which can use mobile data (and so circumvent parental controls on an internet router), we strongly advise that they contact the provider or manufacturer to make themselves aware of how to set parental controls on the device.



All secondary schools provide access to computers for young people:

- in the school library
- during supported study sessions
- or at homework clubs

Young people can also request paper copies of homework tasks from their teachers.

Paying for lunch in secondary schools

There are many options that young people have when paying for their lunch.

We recommend that parents and carers use the Young Scot card to add money that pupils can use to pay for food at break and lunchtime.

The advantage of this system is that parents and carers can keep control of their child's spending and can also review what they have bought.

School canteens have a variety of payment methods, including cash and card payments.

Young people entitled to free school meals have their entitlement pre-loaded onto their Young Scot card, and the school meals service works hard to ensure that there are no barriers for young people in accessing this entitlement.



Support and advice for families

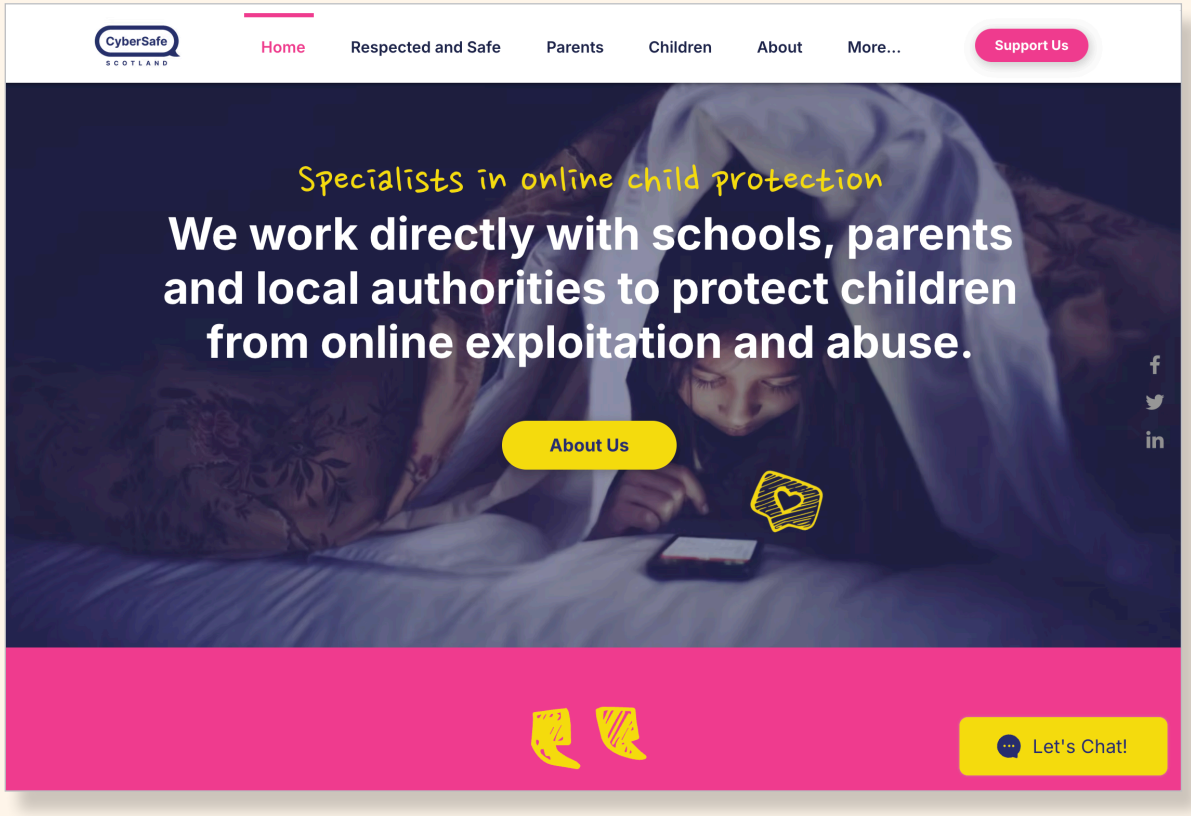
Parents and carers can access advice, help and support from their school, or through:

Cyber First Aid Box - Cyber Scotland

Parents | CyberSafeScotland

Children, phones and online safety | NSPCC

Childline | Free counselling service for kids and young people | Childline



Respected and Safe

Respected and Safe is Cybersafe Scotland's main programme, created to help children, families and school staff to improve their understanding of online abuse, risk and responsibility.

CyberSafe SCOTLAND

A message for teachers and school staff

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Mobile Phone Guidance supports a phone-free learning environment and reflects national guidance.

The guidance aims to reduce distraction, improve concentration, support wellbeing and minimise the risks associated with online content and inappropriate device use.



Schools are expected to have clear policies that restrict the use of smart phones and other personal devices during the school day.

- **Staff should ensure that expectations are communicated consistently** and that any incidents of misuse are managed in line with the school's positive relationships, behaviour and anti-bullying policies.
- **Teachers should not permit pupils to use smart phones as part of learning activities in ELCs and the Broad General Education.** Where pupils bring personal devices such as laptops or tablets under a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) arrangement, these should only be used in accordance with school procedures and the Acceptable Use Guidance.
- Staff should also **be aware that exemptions may be required** for some pupils, including those with medical needs, caring responsibilities, disabilities or additional support needs. These arrangements should be agreed through established school processes and applied consistently.

By working together to implement clear, consistent expectations, schools can create a safer, calmer and more focused environment where children and young people can engage fully in learning and develop positive, responsible attitudes towards technology.

Teachers and staff in schools may find the following resources helpful:

Cyber resilience and internet safety – DigiLearn

Online Safety Self-Review Tool for Schools | 360 degree safe Scotland

Professionals Online Safety Helpline | SWGfL

Report Harmful Content - We Help You Remove Content

respectme | Scotland's anti-bullying service

CEOP Safety Centre

CEOP Education

The wider policy context

The Dumfries and Galloway Mobile Phone Guidance for ELCs and Schools sits within a wider framework of national legislation and regional strategies that shape how devices are used safely in schools.

The current policy context has significant implications for how we learn about and use technology.

The new guidance has been developed with reference to:

- Scottish Government legislation and policy
- Regional digital, customer and people strategies
- and the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Digital Strategy 2026

Together, these frameworks help ensure that device use in Dumfries and Galloway ELCs and schools is responsibly and safely managed, while acknowledging the central role played by Headteachers in guiding and responding to their distinctive school communities.

The guidance therefore acts as a **bridge between national and regional policy and local delivery, translating national guidance into practical actions and monitoring** across Dumfries and Galloway's schools.

Impact Assessment

An impact assessment of this guidance was undertaken in October 2026. The impact assessment is published on the Dumfries and Galloway Council website.

A Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment was undertaken in October 2026. The Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment is published on the Dumfries and Galloway Council website.