



28 February 2025

Dear Parent

We are pleased to announce that Glenlola Collegiate is one of ten schools in Northern Ireland to have been selected to participate in the Department of Education's upcoming pilot to test the effectiveness of mobile phone inhibiting devices.

This pilot offers our school community the opportunity to test and evaluate an approach to restrict the use of mobile phones during the school day through the use of lockable mobile phone pouches. There is evidence to indicate that restricting the use of mobile phones during the school day can have a positive impact on academic engagement and achievement, social interaction levels and wellbeing of pupils involved. We are looking forward to seeing what benefits this particular approach can have for our own school community.

The pilot will launch in September 2025 and run until the end of March 2026 with all pupils in our school participating. In order for the approach to be successful, it is important that every child in our school is involved. Each child will be provided with a free lockable pouch which they will use to store their mobile phone, and/or other related devices such as a smart watch, in for the duration of the school day. Pupils will be required to keep the pouch with them during the day and will be responsible for locking their mobile within the pouch at the start of the school day and for unlocking the pouch at the end of the day. Non-locking pouches will be available for children who may require access to their mobile phones during the day for specific exceptional circumstance (e.g. for medical needs).

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Headmaster: W E Thompson BSc MSc MEd PGCE PQH(NI)



The Department is keen to evaluate the impact of the pilot in order to gather evidence to help inform decisions in relation to its future approach to mobile phone usage in schools. This evaluation will be informed by the views of school staff/teachers, pupils and parents gathered through online surveys. Your support, and the support of pupils, in completing those surveys would be appreciated. Further details will be provided in due course.

We will provide further details about the pilot with you in the coming months and we will be engaging with pupils to prepare them for the introduction of the mobile phone pouches so that they are prepared for the pilot beginning in September. In the meantime, please see the attached frequently asked questions (FAQ's). If you have further questions or concerns regarding the pilot, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

**Mr W E Thompson MSc, MEd, BSc, PGCE, PQH
Headmaster**



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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- **Why are you running this pilot?**

The Department of Education is funding a small number of post primary schools to trial the use of the lockable mobile phone pouches, with the aim of testing and evaluating the practicalities and impact of this approach in real school situations. Our school has been selected to participate in the pilot.

There have been a growing number of reports highlighting the use of mobile phones in schools as an area of concern. For instance, UNESCO has urged caution on the use of mobile phones in schools, highlighting that they must only be used if they can clearly support learning outcomes. Furthermore, the OECD has also raised concerns about mobile phones distracting pupils during lessons.

There is also growing evidence about the unauthorised use of phones in class, their use in bullying, links between smartphone access and mental health and a growing sense that young people struggle when separated from their phones.

- **What is the evidence that this will be a successful intervention?**

Research has shown that mere proximity to a mobile device can distract students and to have a negative impact on learning. Research has also shown that the use of smartphones and other digital devices for leisure during the school day can be a learning distraction. Digital distraction is not merely an inconvenience; it appears to have a tangible association with learning outcomes, according to PISA. The purpose of the pilot is to evaluate how the use of mobile inhibiting devices works in schools in Northern Ireland.

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- **Is banning mobile phones in school not just a reactionary measure to punish children?**

The use of lockable pouches is focused on limiting the use of phones to ensure young people can fully participate in school life, enabling children and young people to take a break from their devices during the school day and helping them to engage in learning and participate more fully in school life without the distraction of a mobile phone.

- **Are children not going to find ways around this policy?**

All approaches to manage the use of mobile phones in school have benefits and challenges. I hope that students will see the benefits of this approach and will engage with it. The pilot provides a good opportunity to understand how effective and deliverable this approach is, as well providing a chance to obtain the views of pupils in relation to this approach.

- **Are many schools already doing this?**

Many schools, including Glenlola, already have policies and procedures in place to restrict the use of mobile phone during the school day. While the use of lockable pouches is not commonly used in Northern Ireland currently, it is well established in a number of other countries.

- **Is there not a contradiction between encouraging the use of technology in schools and banning phones?**

The pilot is aimed at ensuring that mobile phones are not a barrier to learning or full participation in education.

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Technology, when used well, can have a valuable role in supporting learning. It has a range of potential benefits particularly for older children including digital textbooks and class notes, submission of homework, allowing feedback on pupils' work and allowing access to pre-recorded online lessons. Glenlola has invested in technology such as tablets and laptops to support learning and teaching.

The pilot recognises the essential role of technology in society but aims to support our children to get the most from their school day and to help keep our children safe, guide them in using technology appropriately and support them to become happy and well-rounded individuals.

- **In this day and age are mobile phones not just part of life for young people?**

Phones are a part of life for young people and technology clearly has an essential role in society, but the pilot aims to support our children to get the most from their school day.

While there are wider societal issues, we want to ensure that we help guide our young people in using technology appropriately and support them to become happy and well-rounded individuals.

- **What about children who use mobile phones to monitor health issues?**

We will of course wish to ensure a bespoke and tailored approach dependent on the particular needs of individual pupils, for example those with specific medical conditions or Special Educational Needs who may require access to a mobile device.

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Notably, pupils with diabetes may need access to their phone to monitor glucose levels. We will therefore consider reasonable exceptions.

- **Will the pilot cover Smart Watches and other similar devices?**

The pilot will be applicable to personal mobile phones and other similar devices, meaning those with similar capability to mobile phones for example, ability to send or receive messages, make calls, access social media or browse the internet.

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