9th April 2019

Re: Mobile Phones

Dear Families,

Further to my previous correspondence regarding my concerns about the use of mobile phones, I am writing to outline changes to the academy’s mobile phone policy.

The accessibility to mobile technology is rapidly changing the world in which young people live and develop. There are many positives to this and we recognise that it can be a powerful and beneficial tool.

We have high expectations for what our students can achieve and are very ambitious about the progress they should make. Our focus on significantly raising standards and expectations, alongside the paramount need to safeguard all within the academy community, has, subsequently, led us to reflect on the often-damaging role mobile phones play in our students’ academy day and the negative impact on teaching, learning, behaviour and mental health.

Importantly, the widespread use of mobile technology poses a significant safeguarding concern and in particular:

- The ability to identify student location through roaming identification.
- The damaging prevalence of antisocial and bullying behaviour through the posting of harmful comments, pictures, videos and messages.
- The detrimental effect and pressures that social media can have on young people’s self-esteem and mental health.

There have also been a number of studies into the educational benefits of restricting phone use. For example:

- A study (2017) by the London School of Economics found that in academies where mobiles were banned, the test scores of 16-year-olds improved by 6.4% — the equivalent of adding five days to the academy year.
• Research has shown that, whilst outcomes improve across the board when the use of mobiles is restricted, the greatest gains were for lower achieving students and those from lower incomes. The impact of banning phones for these students was equivalent to an additional hour a week in academy.

• Between 2006-2012 the number of schools restricting use of mobile phones (either by not permitting them or insisting students hand them in) has significantly increased.

• Receiving messages, if even phones are on silent, is a significant and serious distraction to learning.

Accordingly, having considered all of this important evidence, we intend to prohibit the use of mobile phones for all students within the zones of academic learning throughout the academy day. Phones may be used on the playing fields and in the Dining Hall, before school, at break and during lunchtime. This restriction would be in effect from the moment the students enter the academy gates at the start of the day and until they leave at the end of the day. Simply, we want our focus to be on learning and for pupils to feel safe.

We firmly believe that giving students a break from constant updates and messages, will not only improve academic progress and outcomes, but will also support safety and benefit their social skills, fostering an environment of positive communication and interaction with peers and adults.

We know that many families whole-heartedly agree and already do not allow their children to bring phones to academy for a variety of reasons, some of which are linked to the information shared above. Nevertheless, we also acknowledge that, for some students, the idea of not having access to their phone during the day will be a challenge. We will continue to educate on the benefits of this decision, whilst providing reassurance to students and parents as to how effective communication between the academy and parents will be maintained in routine and emergency situations.

Please note that, as at present, any valuable items brought into academy are entirely at the students’ responsibility. The academy cannot be held responsible for any phones confiscated due to students choosing not to meet our expectations.

We also understand the safety benefits of having a phone for the journey to and from academy may outweigh the risks. Nevertheless, we ask for your support in ensuring that all students understand that, while in the academy learning zones, phones must be switched off and be out of sight in academy bags.

The expectation will be simple – if it is seen or heard, it will be confiscated for two weeks.

Please be assured that our actions are in the best interest of the safety, learning and progress of your child.

Yours faithfully,

Anthony Hamilton
Headmaster
George Dixon Academy Mobile Phone Policy

Principles and Rationale

At George Dixon, the welfare and safeguarding of our students is paramount. The purpose of this policy is to promote safe and appropriate practice, whilst preventing unacceptable use of mobile phones and personal electronic devices by students. As an important safeguarding measure, this will protect the Academy’s students from undesirable materials, filming, intimidation or harassment.

The academy understands and recognises that there may be particular circumstances in which a parent wishes their child to have a mobile phone for their journey to and from academy. If you feel that your child does need to bring their phone into academy, it should be switched off and stored securely in their bag.

Where a parent needs to contact their child during the academy day, they should do so only through the Academy’s telephone system (via Reception) and not via student mobile phones.

Emergency contact from students to parents/families during the academy day can be made either through a request to their tutor, via Reception or the Pastoral offices at break and/or lunch. Where arrangements have changed for a visit or planned event, the organising member of staff will liaise with reception to ensure parents/carers are contacted.

Where a mobile phone is brought into academy, it is entirely at the student’s and parent’s own risk. The Academy accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of any phone or electronic device brought into academy. *(Ref: Section 94, Education and Inspections Act 2006 states that “where a teacher disciplines a pupil by confiscating an item, neither the teacher nor the academy will be liable for any loss or damage to that item. Equally, there is no statutory liability on academies for items that go missing in other ways.”)*

Mobile phones and devices brought into academy must be turned off - not placed on silent - and stored out of sight in the student’s bag immediately before the student arrives at the academy main building. They must remain turned off and out of sight until morning break, lunchtime and after academy hours.

Any student caught filming another person (and/or uploading images or video onto the Internet) will immediately have the phone confiscated. It will be treated as a disciplinary matter and parents will be informed. If the action is repeated, or is of a serious nature, the matter will be treated as a serious disciplinary issue, which may lead to an exclusion.
The Academy reserves the right to inform the Safeguarding Board and/or the Police where there is a reasonable suspicion that a phone may contain undesirable material, including those which promote or include pornography, violence or bullying.

There may be some exceptional circumstances in which there is a certified, medical, requirement for the use of a mobile device. In such circumstances, suitable evidence must be provided and agreed with the Headmaster in advance.

The Academy Policy for student found with a mobile phone is as follows:

If a mobile phone is seen or heard by a member of staff, the member of staff will be required to confiscate it immediately and, at the earliest opportunity, take the phone to the Finance Department for secure storage (in the academy safe). The phone will be kept securely for two weeks.

The student may collect the phone at the end of the second week.

If there is a second confiscation within the same half-term the phone will be kept in secure storage until parents come into academy to meet with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

In line with the above policy, the decision of the Senior Leadership Team is final.