

APEEE Position Paper on a Revision of the Mobile Phone Policy at EEB1

In response to concerns raised by parents at the beginning of the school year about the use of smartphones in the school and the current very light mobile phone policy¹, the APEEE has consulted with parents concerning their views on updating the policy. Based on the responses received from all eight language sections, the APEEE has adopted the following proposal for an update of the mobile phone policy.

Proposal

The school's policy should include the following elements:

- Definition of what devices are covered by the policy (mobile phones/smart watches/tablets/music players/ other electronic devices); use of headsets should also be covered. Exception should be made for e-readers.
- Clarity about responsibility for mobile phones/screen devices brought to school.
- Separate policies for primary and secondary cycles.
- Differentiated treatment of the lower years of secondary (S1- S3) and the upper years of secondary (S4-S7); some flexibility for S1-S3 and fewer restrictions for S4-S7.
- Exception where required for children with Special Educational Needs.
- Clarity about where and when mobile phones/screen devices may be used on the premises.
- Proportionate and clear consequences for use of mobile phones in class and elsewhere when not permitted.
- Clear privacy rules concerning images/recordings of individuals and the school premises:
no taking of images/recordings of any individual without their permission and no sharing of such images/ recordings without the individual's permission. This should apply to any person on the school premises. Exception for images/videos taken in the community interest.
- Rules should be communicated clearly to staff, parents and students, e.g. via website, school information booklets.
- The policy on mobile phones/electronic devices, including privacy rules, should form part of the code of conduct that students are required to sign.
- Staff should set an example of reasonable and moderate device use.

Primary

Students should be discouraged from bringing phones/electronic devices. If a student brings a phone to school it must be switched off all day until after the last bell, when it may be switched on, e.g. for communication with parents. No devices of any description may be used in class or during breaks unless there is a special exemption on SEN grounds. Teachers should not promote/encourage the use of mobile phones in the primary cycle.

Urgent communication with parents in primary during the school day should continue to be via the school. At the teacher's discretion in exceptional cases, e.g. to arrange an urgent medical appointment, a phone may be switched on during the school day to communicate with parents.

¹ See Annex for background to the consultation and the current mobile phone policy at EEB1 and other schools.

Secondary

For the entire secondary cycle, playing games or using social media should not be permitted during school hours. The use of a device to make brief telephone calls should be permitted across the cycle. The establishment of no-phone zones to apply to everyone (students, staff and visitors) should be considered, e.g. the Platon circle/library area and the ballgame area between Erasmus/Platon.

S1-S3: Mobile phones/electronic devices may be brought to school but the phone should in principle remain switched off during school hours (from first bell to last bell). Devices must be switched off in class but may be used for pedagogical reasons when permitted by the teacher, e.g. as a calculator or to take a photo of slides etc. Exemptions in justified cases (e.g. to arrange urgent medical appointments) should be possible.

There should be some flexibility to permit S1-S3 to use smartphones briefly in a dedicated space to check for messages and to use a device for pedagogical reasons (e.g. research or language learning, re-reading notes or preparing homework).

S4-S7: Given that this age group has more reasons for pedagogical use of devices, there should be specific zones where use of devices is permitted, e.g. café, library (for pedagogical reasons). In addition, tablets and laptops should be permitted more widely provided they are used for pedagogical reasons.

Enforcement

Enforcement of the rules should be effective while not being detrimental to the other tasks and responsibilities of staff. A balance must be struck between the competing needs and interests, and a common-sense approach should be taken that ensures protection of children's welfare while permitting reasonable use of mobile phones on campus. The objective should be to get students, parents and staff on board with establishing a culture of reduced device use rather than the imposition of harsh disciplinary rules; to this end, the opinion of the CdE on enforcement of the policy should be taken into account. As a first step students should be asked by staff to turn the device off and put it away, with confiscation being a last resort.

Awareness-raising

We would strongly support a greater focus on educating students about the dangers of devices, internet and apps (privacy, data protection aspects, health impact, staying safe online, dealing with inappropriate content (e.g. of a violent or sexual nature), cyberbullying, etiquette, responsible use of mobile devices). Parents should take an active role in the process and good practices should be promoted by the school and shared with parents, e.g. concerning ways of introducing mobile phones and promoting responsible use. The APEEE would welcome the opportunity to collaborate on awareness-raising activities and dissemination of information.

Going forward

It is important that students (CdE), parents (APEEE) and school management are all involved. Parents would appreciate feedback on implementation and a two-way dialogue on ongoing improvement of the policy. Given the speed at which technology changes, the policy should be reviewed regularly (e.g. every two years).

ANNEX

Background to the Parent Consultation

At the beginning of the autumn term, parents in a number of classes in both primary and secondary, in particular in the English and French sections, raised the issue of the policy on mobile phone use at EEB1. Quite a few of these parents were prompted to raise this issue having attended a talk by the secondary school psychologist Ms Gladsteen, at which she raised concerns about the amount of time children are spending on smartphones during school hours, especially during breaks, to the detriment of physical activity and social interaction. Others were motivated by the recent ban on phones in schools in France.

In particular, parents are increasingly aware of the current body of research concerning the effect of mobile phones on social interaction, concentration, academic attainment, etc., as well dangers such as gaming addiction and exposure to inappropriate content. By way of example, a study demonstrating the positive effects of banning mobile phones from schools can be found below, along with links to a number of other studies concerning the negative effects of mobile phones on, inter alia, academic attainment and cognitive capacity.

A consultation with parents was thus undertaken by the APEEE, comparing the different policies in the Brussels schools, with a proposal based broadly on the EEB4 policy. The parents who responded overwhelmingly supported updating and clarifying the policy, with a majority also in favour of a more restrictive policy. Most parents supported a complete ban on mobile phone use during school hours in primary, while permitting use after school hours to communicate with parents. A more flexible approach in secondary was also supported, with differentiation for S1-S3 and S4-S7. Parents were generally in favour of restricting device use but were mindful of the fact that students in the upper years of secondary, in particular, may need to use their devices for educational reasons.

Sample of studies (by way of example)

Impact of schools banning mobile phones on student test scores: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1350.pdf>

Mobile phone use and academic performance: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2158244015573169>

Effects of mobile phone use on students' learning: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/acp.3323>

Presence of smartphone reduces cognitive capacity: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/691462>

Current policy EEB1 (from website)

Primary:

No mention of any policy on mobile phones in the published rules for the primary school.

Secondary:

General Organisation Rules 2018-2019

"GSMs/i-Phones/i-Pods etc. must be switched off during lessons and study time."

Secondary Cycle Booklet for New Pupils:

"Mobile phones are tolerated but must be switched off during lessons. Any device which rings in class may be confiscated by the teacher who will hand it to Mr Louarn, Principal Education Advisor, from whom it may be retrieved. If it happens again, the Principal Educational Advisor will take more dissuasive action."

EEB2 Woluwe (from website)

Secondary School Regulations

"It is forbidden to use a mobile phone, a MP 4 player or an I-pod, a personal laptop, a PDA or any other electronically devices in class. If pupils do not respect school rules, teachers reserve the right to confiscate those objects. In addition it is forbidden to take photos or film anywhere within the vicinity of the school."

General Information 2018-2019

"For safety reasons and respect of privacy, the use of mobile phones with camera and/or Bluetooth is strictly forbidden on school premises. The use of any other mobile phones is strictly forbidden during lesson time. It is strictly forbidden for Primary pupils to bring such devices to school."

EEB4 Laeken (from parent representative)

Nursery/Primary:

"Pupils are NOT allowed to bring personal or valuable items to school. The school cannot take responsibility for loss, damage or theft of personal items. Pupils are responsible for their own personal property. Any electronic devices brought to school must be kept out of sight and turned off during the school day. They may be used only before and after school outside the school premises. Mobile phones are only tolerated at school if they are turned off and placed in the pupil's school bag. Mobile phones may be confiscated if used on the school premises and will only be returned to the pupil at the end of the school day. The school is not responsible for broken/ lost/stolen valuables such as iPods, mobile phones, toys, etc."

Secondary:

"Regarding cellphones, iPods, MP3 players and other similar devices (except e-books): these must follow the 'bus-to-bell' policy, unless permitted in particular locations governed by specific room rules (see appendices). When circulating on the school site, such devices must be turned off and put away. Breaking this rule will result in confiscation by school staff. Only after the last bell of the school day can they be used again.

Confiscated items will be returned on the Friday following confiscation unless parents come to claim the device beforehand. All confiscations will be the subject of a disciplinary event. In addition it is forbidden to take photos or film anywhere within the vicinity of the school.

Study Hall and Chill-Out Rooms: For S4-S7 students, the use of electronic devises (tablets, cell phones,...) is authorised to study or work."

EEB3 Ixelles (from parent representative)

"Code of Behaviour – Ecole Européenne III

Use of Mobile Phone (GSM)

In class:

- I am not allowed to use portable electronic devices in class, unless for pedagogical reasons, my teacher allows me.
- If I do not follow the school rules, I will have to turn my mobile phone off and place it on the teacher's desk during the class; I can only take it back at the end of the class. My mobile electronic device can be confiscated for a longer period than just one class, if I break the rules on more than one occasion (It will be kept in the head pedagogical advisor's office and can only be returned to my parents).
- Should this arise, my parents will be informed immediately by the relevant pedagogical advisor.
- Mobile phones are not permitted during the exams.
- Reminder: N.B. Point 8 in the internal rules of the school*

Students must leave their coats, bags, pencil cases, mobile phones, smart watches and objects of value outside the examination center. These items can be left in the designated rooms or in the lockers.

- N.B. Point 4 of the instructions for students for the examinations of the European Baccalauréat européen.*

Possession of a mobile phone and or of a smart watch is not allowed in examination centers and is considered a means to cheat.

Use of Mobile Phone – outside of class

I may **only** use my mobile phone in open areas which are situated:

- Outside all buildings
- In the cafeteria
- In room 6/7
- In the library (only for school related research)
- In the relaxation room B05
- In the Amphy 618

I should be aware that taking photos or making videos of people without their permission is forbidden by law.

Inside the buildings, any member of the educational team is entitled to ask a student to turn off their phones and to put it away.

Failure to respect the rules regarding mobile phone use in school

Failure to respect the school rules regarding mobile phone usage in the school will result in my mobile being confiscated and given to the Head Pedagogical Advisor. A letter will be sent by the educational advisors to either the parents or directly to the student, if he/she is over 18.

In accordance with rule 34 of the general rules of the European schools, the school is not responsible for any objects brought to school by students."

Luxembourg I (from website)

"Rules for the Secondary School 2018/2019

Annex V - Rules governing the use of mobile phones and headphones

General

- Students will not use any mobile phone at school to harass, intimidate, extort, blackmail, racketeering, or exert any physical, moral and/or psychological violence against someone else.
- Students will not take pictures, film or record the voice of other people at school without the written permission of the school.
- The Anti-cyber bullying policy and regulations on the Use of the Internet, Wireless Access and Pirating as stated above, in Annex IV – ICT Charter, apply to the use of mobile phones as well.

Inside classrooms

- Mobile phones must not be used, unless the teacher gives permission.
- Headphones must not be worn, unless the teacher gives permission.
- Mobile phones must be switched off or put in “Airplane mode” (therefore disabling Bluetooth, telephony and Wi-Fi).
- Mobile phones and headphones must be put out of sight. Students can leave them in their bags, in their jackets, or in their lockers.

Outside classrooms

- Mobile phones must not be used during the 5 minutes break between lessons.
- Mobile phones are allowed during the long breaks from 11:10 to 11:30, from 13:00 to 13:15, during the lunch break (except inside the canteen, read below), and during free periods. This, however, does not include, in any case, taking photos or filming, without written permission from the school.

In the library

- In general, mobile phones and headphones must not be used.
- Only for educational purposes and when this causes no disruption to others, pupils are allowed to use their mobiles phones in “Silent mode”. Otherwise, mobile phones must be switched off or put in “Silent mode”.

In the canteen

- Mobile phones must not be used.
- Headphones must not be worn.
- Mobile phones must be switched off or put in “Airplane mode”.
- Mobiles phones and headphones must be put out of sight. Students can leave them in their bags, in their jackets, or in their lockers."