



The Acorn School

Media & Technology Charter

This version printed: 09/06/2026 11:35	Next review due: June 2027
Updated:	June 2026

Approved by the Governors:	March 2025
----------------------------	-------------------

The Acorn School Educational Trust Ltd.
Church Street, Nailsworth,
Gloucestershire GL6 0BP

T: 01453 836 508

W: www.theacornschool.com

Table of Contents

<i>The Acorn School Vision</i>	3
Protecting Childhood.....	3
Family Commitment.....	3
How do we navigate the world of screens?	3
Our Acorn General Guidelines	4
<i>Our Class and Age Specific Guidelines:</i>	4
Class 1, 2 and 3	4
Class 4-5	4
Class 6, 7 and 8	5
Upper School (Class 9 upwards)	5
<i>Staff</i>	5
<i>FAQs</i>	5
My child in Class 8 (or below) already has a smartphone. What shall I do?	5
My child finds social media beneficial. Why should they stop?	6
Not everything about smartphones is bad. Why shouldn't they be used with individual discretion?	6
Educational use of technology for assisted learning	6
Further reading and resources:.....	6

The Acorn School Vision

To be a school that enables children to grow naturally, without unnecessary outside pressures, and so become well-rounded young adults.

The Acorn School was founded on strong principles of protecting childhood from the onslaught of modern media. This was at a time when social media, and their AI-algorithms designed deliberately to capture and control the attention of our children, had not even been conceived. Today we face a challenge so great that most adults feel powerless to resist it.

We are - as a community - made up of individuals with both autonomy and a healthy range of opinions, that come together in a spirit of care and cooperation.

Within this context, we ask each family in the school to take positive action and work with us. We ask each family to abide by our Media and Technology Charter.

Protecting Childhood

One of the core values of The Acorn School has always been to protect childhood and allow children's imagination and creativity to develop unhindered. The aim of our Media and Technology Charter is to ensure we continue to promote a safe environment where this can be achieved. We embrace a balanced, graduated approach to media and technology and strive to be age appropriate with what we expect in this regard. We therefore ask all parents to agree to uphold the following principles when joining our school community so that our students remain safe from harm, and can grow up happy, healthy and resilient.

Family Commitment

Families who choose The Acorn School for their children are choosing a supportive community that allows children to grow up free of smartphone use. Parents, carers, older siblings and relatives recognise they are modelling the behaviour their children look to and emulate. In and around the school grounds, at school events and on trips, smartphones are not used and are not visible to our students. At home families model positive and healthy habits around screen use and encourage and support children and young people in their screen-free imaginative and creative pursuits. Families understand that a cultural shift comes from working together to support our ethos and protect our children.

Families recognise that the school cannot (and does not want to) pry into individuals' homes and monitor the purchase and use of smartphones for students. They recognise too that we are a community of individuals with differing opinions. They also acknowledge that the strength of a community lies in cooperation and support.

So, whilst students are enrolled at the school, they do not have or use smartphones at all. Offsite, Upper School students may use brick or 'light' phones or laptops for practical, logistical and travel purposes where necessary, but eschew all social media activity, especially student social media groups (for example WhatsApp) which are exclusionary, detrimental and a safeguarding risk.

By working with us and abiding by our charter, you will be allowing the social health of the classes to strengthen and the imagination and wellbeing of each child to flourish alongside supporting the aims and content of the education to be achieved.

How do we navigate the world of screens?

We recognise that each family may have their own approach to media and technology. However, by choosing The Acorn School as the school for your child/ren you are choosing an environment where the richness of the

curriculum nurtures the child's imagination. We ask that, in order to help us build a consistent and healthy school culture, you integrate the following media and technology charter within your family life.

Our Acorn General Guidelines

- Always prioritise outdoor time, free play, and imaginative, creative activities over screen time
- Ensure weekdays are screen-free. This will encourage deeper learning and better attention and focus at school.
- Aim to make screen time is limited, occasional, and check and select only age-appropriate content.
- If you watch programmes and films, do so together and discuss the content: for example, have a family film night at the weekend.
- Always know what your child is watching: Check ratings for age groups, watch trailers to make a clear judgement of the content, use websites such as Common sense media (1) <https://www.common sense media.org>, (2) <https://kids-in-mind.com/> (3) <https://www.pluggedin.com/> to find out whether it will be appropriate for your child's well-being and their age.
- Work together as Class groups to share activities and appropriate, educational, nourishing reading material and films or programmes.
- Always set limits on screen use on the weekends/holidays.
- Have media-free areas in the house, such as bedrooms.
- No smartphones given to children and young people.
- Ensure Lower and Middle School children do not engage in gaming, in particular those with open chat rooms. Work to ensure Upper School students engage in minimal, supervised and non chat-room enabled gaming.

Our Class and Age Specific Guidelines:

Class 1, 2 and 3

- Ensure there is no screen time of any kind except when watched occasionally together with the family following the age-appropriate criteria
- Ensure your children do not play video games
- Instead: drawing, den building, playing, reading - audio books can be a good alternative (fairy tales, nature stories, stories with children the same age as yours). No Harry Potter, War, Star Wars, Disneyfied Greek Myths. Try to align home reading content with the curriculum your child is receiving at school – please ask your class teacher for advice on this.

Class 4-5

- Ensure there is minimal screen time and children watch together with the family following the age-appropriate criteria
- Screen free during the week.
- Always watch age-appropriate films together and discuss the content.
- Ensure they do not play video games.
- No mobile phones/smart phones (apps, social media, WhatsApp).
- Instead: encourage playing, musical instruments, drawing, singing, reading, paper crafts, building, construction, animal care, pottery, cooking, time outside, healthy physical activities with family and friends.

Class 6, 7 and 8

- No smartphones, text groups, or use of social media – Tik Tok, Instagram etc.. WhatsApp
- Monitor all use of the internet and avoid all social media usage
- Ensure they do not play video games: especially inappropriate or violent, threatening video games
- Instead: encourage mastering off-line skills: music, art, writing, drama, cycling, sports, woodwork, scouts, activity groups, joining clubs and/or organised activities such as DoE, being outdoors in nature, getting together with friends, family, enjoying activities with friends.
- Any student needing to bring a phone to school for logistical reasons will be asked to hand it in on arrival and collect it at the end of the day. They will not be permitted to access the phone during the school day.
- From September 2026 any student needing to bring a phone to school for logistical reasons will be asked to bring a brick phone only, which is not internet enabled.

Upper School (Class 9 upwards)

- No smartphones
- Choose a basic phone with limited functionality such as a brick phone, if needed.
- Stay informed about new apps and platforms.
- Do not use social media – Tik Tok, Instagram etc.. WhatsApp
- Limit screen time to cultural activities and educational usage.
- Instead: encourage mastering off-line skills: music, art, writing, drama, sports, cycling, woodwork, scouts, activity groups, joining clubs and/or organised activities such as DoE being outdoors in nature, getting together with friends, family, enjoying activities with friends.
- From April 2026 any student needing to bring a phone to school for logistical reasons will be asked to hand it in on arrival and collect it at the end of the day. They will not be permitted to access the phone during the school day. If students need to pay for something during the day they need to bring in money or a payment card as they will not be able to access their phone to use it for payments.
- From September 2026 any student needing to bring a phone to school for logistical reasons will be asked to bring a brick phone only, which is not internet enabled.
- Students should not use their phone to photograph their work, but instead should use a school camera or tablet, available from the teacher holding the class at the time.

Staff

Staff support the smartphone free childhood of our students. They only use their own devices in the staff room, out of sight of students wherever possible. They deliver Social Education lessons that inform students about smartphone use, as part of a wider curriculum on health and wellbeing.

FAQs

My child already has a smartphone. What shall I do?

Our recommendation is that you do the following (in order of preference):

- Ideally: work with and support your child to give up their smartphone altogether (resources are available on how to do this, and the community will also support you)
- Use a simple (brick) phone
- Ensure any device is not enabled for internet or social media. Monitor and limit use.
- Ensure no smartphones are brought into school from September 2026.

My child finds social media beneficial. Why should they stop?

We have looked at a [plethora of data](#) to show that smartphone use, screen time and especially social media engagement is detrimental to health and wellbeing in many ways. Whilst it's true that supportive communities may be found online for students who have niche interests, are neurodivergent and/or LGBTQ+, the risks are far greater than the rewards, the costs outweigh any benefits.

Not everything about smartphones is bad. Why shouldn't they be used with individual discretion?

There is nuance in everything, and smartphones are considered a necessary item in many ways. There are also benefits, such as being able to video-call relatives, take photographs, listen to music or stories, use a map to find your way etc. etc.

However, the data clearly shows that these devices - above all, engagements with social media - are having a very negative effect on the health and wellbeing of our young people. It has been shown that the effects are cumulative and may not be obvious in the earlier years of use, but very serious impacts are seen in later teen years and early 20s. The Acorn School cares above all about our students being happy, healthy, well and resilient, able to function in the world. We've taken the decision that a smartphone-free childhood is the most effective way to achieve this.

Educational use of technology for assisted learning

Our school's graduated approach to technology to support learning is as follows:

- Students with an individual SEN learning plan that requires technology for enabling learning will be supported in the classroom in the middle/upper school.
- In Lower School for SEN support, educational technologies, in communication with the Class Teacher, parent, and the school's LSCO, may be suggested for outside of school. (eg: 'Nessy' for dyslexia, age-appropriate Maths programmes)
- Students in classes 10/11/12 may use laptops for word processing for essay-based subjects and research reports, but this will be limited, and we are working to guard against laptops always being used in lessons.
- The school has a filtering system in place to safeguard students' use of personal laptops whilst in school and students will be encouraged to make use of school laptops where possible, rather than their own.

Further reading and resources:

- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tv-affects-child.html>
- <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk> (national campaign to have a smartphone free childhood)
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/#guides>
- <https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/social-media-guides>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/cell-phones-whats-the-right-age-to-start.aspx>
- Reset your child's brain – A four-week plan to end meltdowns, raise grades, and boost social skills by reversing the effects of electronic screen time. (Victoria L. Dunkley MD)