



Wednesday 18 March 2026

Dear Parent / Carer,

Introducing Focus Pouches to achieve a Mobile Phone Free School

I am writing to inform you about an important next step in our approach to mobile phone use at Backwell School.

As many of you will know, and as some may have seen when the school featured on BBC News before Christmas, we will be introducing mobile phone pouches for all students in Years 7–10 after Easter. This decision follows extensive research and consultation with other schools, where the impact on students and overall school culture has been very positive. It also builds on the research project conducted last academic year with the University of the West of England, to which many of you contributed.

This approach is also in line with recent [government guidance](#), which states that schools should have policies that prohibit the use of mobile phones and similar smart technology throughout the school day, including during lessons, between lessons, and at break and lunchtime. The use of phone pouches enables us to fully meet this expectation.

Ultimately, we believe that introducing mobile phone pouches will help create a safer, calmer and more focused learning environment for our students.

How it will work at Backwell School

We will be introducing the use of Focus Pouches for all students in Year 7 - 10 at the beginning of Term 5 on Monday 20th April 2026. Students will be given their first Focus Pouch (free of charge) during the final week of this term.

If a student brings a mobile phone to school, instead of it being switched off and in their school bag, as is the current school rule, their mobile phone must be placed in their pouch, locked and placed in their school bag at the start of their morning tutor session (or if they arrive later in the day upon signing in at reception).

This will mean that mobile phones cannot be used on school premises for any reason.

*Students with specific medical conditions will be exempt, please read below.

We believe that this move will benefit everyone in our school community, improving peer-to-peer relationships, raising attainment, and most importantly, protecting and strengthening the mental health of our young people.

What is a focus pouch?

For more information on the Focus Pouches, please click [here](#).

Students will be given a pouch during tutor time prior to the end of term 4.

Why is this change is needed?

The evidence is clear: students are spending more time on their devices than ever before.

- ✓ Children aged 13–18 spend on average 8.5 hours per day using devices (Rideout et al, 2022).
- ✓ 35% of 13–14-year-olds and 52% of 15–17-year-olds report being online “constantly” (PEW Research Centre, 2022).
- ✓ On average teenagers receive 237 ‘ping’ notifications a day or 10 per hour (PEW Research Centre, 2022)
- ✓ 50% of girls and 40% of boys of secondary school age getting less than 7 hours sleep due to mobile phone use at night (Haidt 2024)

This level of device use is associated with both reduced academic performance and increased mental health challenges. These concerns align directly with what national research continues to show.

Impact on Learning and Academic Performance

Mobile phones risk distraction, disruption, and diversion. Nationally, one in three secondary pupils report that phones are used in most lessons without permission – this was also reflected in the UWE research project data from our school. This not only affects the individual but also interrupts the focus of the whole class.

Research further suggests that even the mere presence of a phone – without it being used – can reduce attention and performance on complex tasks. These are precisely the kinds of higher-level tasks that we expect students to be engaging in every day. It can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on what they were learning after receiving a notification on their device.

Impact of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Research and evidence also highlight the serious concerns around smartphone use and wellbeing. By removing mobile phones during the school day, we can help students build healthier habits, strengthen their friendships, and focus more fully on their learning.

Our New Mobile Phone Policy

To achieve this, every student in Year 7 – 10 (this will include Year 11 from September 2026) will be assigned a personal Focus Pouch. It will be each student's responsibility to bring their pouch to school every day and keep it in good working condition.

How will this work in practice?

Students in Years 7 to 10 must place their mobile phones in their mobile phone pouch at the start of morning tutor time. Phones will remain in the pouch until the end of period 6 when they will be unlocked upon leaving the lesson, or until the student leaves the school site for an approved reason.

Morning routine during tutorial

1. Student enters their tutor room
2. Student puts their mobile phone and their pouch on their desk
3. Teacher checks the mobile phone and pouch are on the desk
4. Student puts the mobile phone in the pouch and clips it shut
5. Student will turn their pouch upside down to show their pouch is now locked
6. Student puts their pouch in their bag

If the student has forgotten their pouch, they will be sent to the Behaviour Support Room (BSR) where they will leave their phone for the day. They will collect it at 15:10.

End of the day routine: unlocking at the end of period 6

An unlocking station is available in every classroom. At the end of Period 6, teachers will dismiss students in an orderly manner to unlock their pouches before leaving the classroom.

There will be a small number of medical exemptions, such as our diabetic students, and we are happy to speak to parents/carers about individual requirements. Students in those cases can be given a Focus Medical pouch secured by Velcro, rather than locked shut.

We know that, like us, you want to ensure the very best outcomes for your child – academically, socially, and emotionally. Together, we can make Backwell School a place where students continue to thrive, free from unnecessary distractions.

If you have any questions, please visit the [Phone Free Backwell](#) section of our website, where you will find our guidance, including the key documents below. We kindly ask that you review the information first.

1. [Focus Pouch FAQs](#)
2. [Backwell School Mobile Devices Policy](#)
3. [The Government Guidance](#)

Thank you in advance for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Will Penny
Headteacher