

THE HUB EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CIC

ONLINE SAFETY AND ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY (DIGITAL-FREE PROVISION)

Updated for 2026

Introduction

The Hub Educational Services CIC is committed to providing a safe, calm, and distraction-free learning environment. In line with our safeguarding responsibilities and the strengthened guidance in *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE 2024–2026)*, The Hub operates as a **digital-free Alternative Provision**. This means that pupils do not use personal digital devices during the school day, and all such devices are collected on arrival and securely stored until the end of the day.

KCSIE emphasises that schools and APs should take **"robust and proactive steps to reduce online risks"**, including restricting or removing access to mobile phones where necessary. It also states that mobile phones can be a **significant safeguarding risk**, contributing to bullying, exploitation, exposure to harmful content, and disruption to learning. Our digital-free approach directly reflects this guidance and is designed to protect pupils from online harm, support emotional regulation, and promote positive social interaction.

This policy outlines how online safety is maintained within a digital-free environment, the expectations placed on pupils and staff, and the procedures for managing devices, exemptions, and non-compliance.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that The Hub maintains a safe and controlled environment where pupils are protected from online risks during the school day. By removing access to personal digital devices, we significantly reduce exposure to harmful content, online bullying, peer-to-peer abuse, and external influences that may compromise safeguarding.

This policy also ensures that staff model safe digital behaviour, that pupils understand the reasons for our digital-free approach, and that parents are fully informed of expectations and consequences. It supports our wider safeguarding framework, behaviour policy, and pastoral systems.

Digital-Free Provision: Rationale and Expectations

The Hub is a digital-free environment for all pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Pupils must hand in all digital devices upon arrival, including mobile phones, smart watches, tablets, laptops, gaming devices, and any item capable of connecting to the internet. These devices are securely locked away for the duration of the school day and returned to pupils when they leave.

KCSIE 2024–2026 states that schools should **"implement clear policies on mobile phone use that prioritise pupil safety and reduce distraction"** and that **"removing mobile phones from pupils during the school day can be an effective safeguarding measure."** Our approach is fully aligned with this guidance and reflects the needs of our cohort, many of whom are vulnerable to online risks.

The only devices permitted on site during the school day are **brick phones**—basic mobile phones with no internet capability. These may be used for essential communication only and must be declared to staff on arrival.

Device Collection and Storage Procedures

On arrival each morning, pupils hand in all digital devices to staff. Devices are logged, placed in secure storage, and kept locked away until the end of the day. Staff return devices directly to pupils as they leave the premises.

This procedure ensures that pupils cannot access the internet, social media, messaging apps, or digital content during the school day. It also prevents distraction, supports emotional regulation, and reduces the risk of online conflict spilling into the school environment.

Exemptions

There are only two exemptions to the digital-free rule:

Medical Exemptions

Where a pupil requires a digital device for medical monitoring or health-related purposes, an exemption may be granted. This must be supported by medical evidence and agreed in writing by senior leadership. The device will be used strictly for medical purposes and monitored accordingly.

Post-16 Students

Post-16 students may be permitted to use digital devices for educational purposes, provided this is risk-assessed, supervised, and compliant with safeguarding expectations. Their use must not compromise the safety or learning of younger pupils.

No other exemptions will be granted.

Non-Compliance

Non-compliance with the digital-free policy is treated as a safeguarding concern. If a pupil refuses to hand in a device, attempts to conceal a device, or uses a device during the school day, they will be sent home. Parents or carers are responsible for collecting the pupil or arranging transport at their own expense.

This consequence reflects the seriousness of online safety risks and the need to maintain a consistent, safe environment for all pupils.

Repeated non-compliance may result in further safeguarding intervention, behaviour planning, or review of placement.

Staff Responsibilities

Staff model safe digital behaviour and adhere to The Hub's Staff Acceptable Use of Technologies Policy. Staff do not use personal devices in front of pupils except in emergencies or for safeguarding purposes. Staff ensure that device collection procedures are followed consistently and that exemptions are monitored appropriately.

Staff also educate pupils about online safety, digital citizenship, and responsible behaviour outside of school hours. Although pupils do not use devices during the day, they still require guidance on safe online behaviour at home and in the community.

Online Safety Education

Even within a digital-free environment, pupils must learn how to stay safe online. The Hub provides structured teaching on:

- Online risks
- Cyberbullying
- Grooming and exploitation
- Harmful content
- Digital footprints
- Safe communication
- Reporting concerns

This education ensures that pupils are equipped to navigate the digital world safely outside of school hours.

Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if guidance changes. It is monitored through safeguarding records, behaviour logs, parental feedback, and staff observations. The digital-free approach will continue to be evaluated to ensure it meets the needs of pupils and reflects national safeguarding expectations.

10. Alignment with Ofsted Expectations

Ofsted's 2024/25 framework emphasises the importance of strong safeguarding culture, clear behaviour expectations, and proactive online safety measures. Our digital-free policy demonstrates robust leadership, reduces risk, and supports pupils' personal development. It also contributes to a calm, focused learning environment free from digital distraction.