

Student Centred 'Digital Use Policy' Framework

This framework suggests key actions leaders can take to build a conscientious and contextualised phone use policy, placing student voice at the heart of the development process. Integrating at least one of the elements will have positive impact on community engagement (Hadijah, 2024) and intended outcomes. Implementing elements of all of them will support you delivering a policy that is relational and prioritises student experience and safety.

Element 1 - Collaborative consultation

Element 2 - Build competency and understanding

Element 3 - Clarity on expectations

Element 4 - Regular, active review

Element 1 - Collaborative consultation

Explore the digital context of your community and engage students, staff and parents as active stakeholders, avoiding tokenistic methods (Al-Thani, 2025).

Suggested actions:

- Ask students, parents and teachers to complete surveys covering their opinions and understanding, auditing anxieties and enthusiasm on digital use and safety.
- For each stakeholder group, invite individuals to be part of policy working groups.
- With the working groups, analyse and reflect on the survey outcomes - sense checking the conclusions and determining if there are further questions.
- With the working group, build a proposed policy that addresses the anxieties and enthusiasms of all stakeholders.
- Ensure there is community wide clarity around the intended impact of any policy, and that the measures built into it align with delivering this impact.
- Circulate policy for consultation, with transparent methods for feedback.

Element 2 - Building competency and understanding

The RSE Statutory Guidance and the Computing National Curriculum requires schools to teach about online harms, digital wellbeing and digital safety, but you may want to go deeper with the skills young people will need to be critical and positive users of technology.

Suggested actions:

- Audit your curriculum to ensure you are covering the statutory and national content.
- Engage with ongoing research and evidence on digital citizenship, digital literacy and AI competency (Estellés & Doyle, 2025)
- Informed by the survey data, determine which skills young people need to achieve their hopes and wants. Note: critical thinking is key in the Education White Paper.
- Research different skills curriculums and digital readiness programmes to identify and that meet your needs, or use the evidence base to build your own.
- Provide staff with training in strategies and pedagogy around digital wellbeing and safety.
- Engage pupil voice regularly and openly (Macauley et al, 2022) - see Element 4 for more detail.

Element 3 - Clarity on Expectations

Clear boundaries provide psychological safety. Ambiguity can be where conflict and break down in relationships arise between students, staff and parents.

Suggested actions:

- Ensure the expectations for digital use are really clear for all stakeholders, with explicit consideration for vulnerable and SEND students, and facilitating objectivity for application and implementation (Bernier, 2022).
 - For example, are you permitting digital devices to be used as education tools in certain lessons (perhaps for research, or as a revision tool) - in which case how are these exceptions articulated and clearly defined?
- Share the intended impact for boundaries - for example wanting to improve engagement in enrichment, or higher social interaction, and provide opportunity for co-design for measure to achieve these outcomes (Schimmel, 2003).
- If your phone use policy and behaviour policy interact, ensure the consequences of not meeting expectations are proportionate, purposeful and consistent (Jones et al, 2023).
 - Are you taking a relational, agency-led approach: exploring the reason for not meeting expectation, and providing opportunity to consider the impact of the behaviour?
 - Are you including a staged approach and building a relational culture of 'assumed good intent'?

Element 4 - Regular, active review

Technology often moves faster than policy, curriculum, and adults. A static policy can quickly lose its impact, and rigid, unresponsive approaches can feel oppressive and irrelevant to young people (Thornberg, 2008).

Suggested actions:

- Set reasonable time frames for regular, compulsory review.
- Determine who needs to be involved in review. Youth voice should be key here.
 - This could involve reconvening your policy working groups from Element 1.
 - This could be by establishing digital ambassadors or enlisting your youth council to feedback on student body experiences and suggestions.
- Regularly collect evidence of stakeholder experience and impact.
- Review impact data. Has the policy had the impact you desired it to? Examine how your data informs you about this and if stakeholder engagement reflects the data.
- Include a review of curriculum content.
 - Is there anything students want to learn more about?
 - Is there anything staff do not feel confident teaching?
- Determine if there are any actions or changes that need to be made, communicate these clearly, with time for adaptation.
- Build in regular and systematic youth voice engagement to ensure young people know there are open lines of communication around risks, harms, opportunities and competencies.

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