

# Screen Use and Online Safety Policy

## 1. Guiding Principles

At Wicklow Democratic School (WDS), we do not have a single, uniform rule that bans or restricts personal devices. This reflects our core ethos as a democratic, mixed-age learning community. Although WDS does not have a uniform policy, individual families can develop their own policies and agreements around device use for their child(ren).

We believe that learning how to use devices responsibly is an important life skill. Students develop this skill through practice, reflection, and support, rather than through blanket restrictions. For this reason, we take an individualised and adaptable approach to device use, recognising that each student has different needs, habits, and levels of self-regulation.

Decisions about device use are not imposed unilaterally by staff. Instead, they are shaped through dialogue, agreements, and, where appropriate, student-led proposals in line with our democratic processes. Parents and family members are also part of this conversation, since it is ultimately their decision whether and to what extent students have access to personal devices.

## 2. Role of Parents and Carers

The school does not provide personal devices to students. Responsibility for decisions about device ownership and use outside school rests with families.

Parents and carers who have concerns about their child's device use are encouraged to:

- Use parental controls where appropriate
- Set clear expectations at home
- Choose not to send a device into school if this better supports their child

We work in partnership with families to support each student's wellbeing and development.

## 3. Tailored Approach to Device Use

Students use devices in a wide variety of positive and meaningful ways, including:

- Research and project work
- Creative activities such as drawing, video-making, and song writing



- Listening to music, podcasts and audiobooks
- Supporting self-regulation (e.g. managing overstimulation or sensory needs)

Many students are able to manage their device use independently. For those who find this more challenging, staff work with the student to:

- Understand the underlying needs the device use may be meeting
- Identify skills that may need development (e.g. attention, emotional regulation, habit-building)
- Set personalised goals and supports

Students who demonstrate healthy device habits can therefore continue using their devices freely and may act as positive role models within the community.

## 4. Supportive Structures

To support self-regulation, we provide practical options rather than restrictions. For example:

- A secure phone storage box is available in the kitchen for students who wish to securely store their devices for part or all of the day
- Students may choose to create personal agreements about their device use with staff support (sometimes students identify the need for this themselves and other times staff members identify the need and discuss it with the student)

These structures are voluntary and designed to empower students to make intentional choices about their device use.

## 5. Younger Students

For younger students, we strongly encourage families not to send phones or tablets into school.

- The school provides shared devices (computers and tablets) for learning and project work
- All school devices have parental controls in place
- Gaming is not permitted on school devices, except for selected educational games

It is common and fully supported for younger students not to have personal devices in school.

A school phone is always available, and students can ask a staff member if they need to contact their parents or carers.

## 6. Online Safety Education

Online safety and digital wellbeing are an essential part of our curriculum as they relate to the overall wellbeing and competence of students.

All students participate in regular, mandatory workshops covering topics such as:

- Recognising and understanding AI-generated content
- Safe interaction with others online
- The impact of social media on mental health and self-image
- The effects of screen use on sleep, focus, and mood
- Building healthy and balanced digital habits

In addition, conversations about device use form part of our ongoing mentorial support. Students are regularly supported to reflect on their habits and develop skills for safe and balanced engagement with technology.

## 7. Review and Development

This policy is a living document and may evolve over time. In keeping with our democratic ethos, students and staff may propose changes or additions through agreed school processes.

Students have collaborated and consulted on every step of designing this policy, as well as developing and co-holding the device safety workshops.

As always, we also encourage open communication and feedback from parents, and we value the input parents have had on this topic, through the screen-use survey, discussions in parent updates and family check-ins, and comments via email, text and informal chats.