April 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

A reminder of our Important Change from September: Smartphone-Free Schools

At Empower Multi-Academy Trust, everything we do is guided by our commitment to Inspire, Empower and Achieve — for every child, every day. It is with this commitment firmly in mind, that we are writing to remind you of an important decision that will take effect from September 2026.

From the start of the new academic year, all schools within Empower MAT will become smartphone-free. We want to be clear about what this means in practice, why we have made this decision, and how it will work, day to day.

What Does Smartphone-Free Mean?

From September, smartphones will not be permitted on school premises during the school day. We ask that pupils leave their smartphones at home.

We fully understand that some families rely on their child having a means of communication — particularly for those walking home independently.

We want to reassure you that we have carefully considered this:

- If your child has a genuine safety need to carry a communication device — for example, if they walk home alone — a basic non-smartphone (a simple call-and-text handset) may be brought to school.
- Any such device must be handed in to the school office at the start of the day and collected at the end. It will be kept safely and returned to your child before they leave.
- Smartphones will not be accepted under this arrangement. The distinction matters, and we will explain why below.
- If you believe your child has a specific need that requires a different arrangement, please contact the school office and we will be happy to discuss this with you individually.

Why Are We Doing This?

This has not been a decision taken lightly. We have reflected carefully on the evidence, listened to the concerns of staff, and thought deeply about the young people in our care. What the research tells us — clearly and consistently — is that smartphones, and the social media platforms they carry in a child's pocket, are causing real harm to children and young people.

75% of teenagers aged 13–17 have encountered potential harm online (Ofcom, 2024)	**3 in 5** secondary-age children have been contacted online in a way that made them uncomfortable (Ofcom, 2024)	**1 in 4** adolescents show symptoms of probable anxiety — consistent with UK-wide data (Carter et al., 2024)

The mechanisms of harm are well documented. Researchers have identified that smartphones and social media are linked to:

- Increased exposure to cyberbullying, content supporting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide.
- Impaired concentration and cognitive function.
- Unhealthy social comparisons — particularly damaging during the formative teenage years.
- Displacement of the behaviors that protect young people's wellbeing: sleep, physical activity and real, face-to-face conversation.

A UK study published in 2024 found that problematic smartphone use was strongly linked to anxiety and depression in adolescents — and that Instagram and TikTok in particular were associated with that harm. One in eight young people in the study said they wanted help cutting down their usage.

Even a ten-minute walk with a smartphone causes damage.

Research shows that the moment a child picks up their phone — even briefly — they are exposed to content designed by algorithms to provoke reaction, comparison and anxiety. That ten-minute walk home could and should be ten minutes of decompression, fresh air, and real conversation with a friend. We want to protect that.

The Walk Home Matters

One of the things that strikes us most is how many children — once they step beyond the school gate — immediately reach for their phones. That short walk, that journey home, is one of the most natural opportunities in the day for children to talk, to reflect, to simply be. We want to encourage that.

This is why our policy is not just about the school day. We are also asking you, as partners in your child's education and wellbeing, to think about smartphone use at home — particularly in the evenings and before bed, where the evidence for harm to sleep and mental health is especially strong.

We Need Your Support

We know that parenting around technology is genuinely difficult. Smartphones are embedded in daily life, and asking children to be without them goes against the current. We are not underestimating that.

But we also know that the most powerful thing we can do for our young people is to act on the evidence — even when it is uncomfortable — and to do so together. Schools cannot do this alone. The research is clear that school-based restrictions are most effective when families are working alongside us.

We are asking you to:

- Support the policy by ensuring your child does not bring a smartphone to school from September.
- Talk with your child about why we are doing this — not as a punishment, but as an act of care.
- Consider the smartphone habits at home, particularly around bedtime.
- Contact us if you have any concerns or individual circumstances you would like to discuss.

Thank you for trusting us with their education and their future.

If you have any questions about the new policy, please do not hesitate to contact your child's school office. We look forward to working with you on this.

Yours faithfully,

Signed on behalf of The Executive Leadership Team

Empower Multi-Academy Trust