# Student Use of Digital Devices and Online Services guide

A new policy for student use of digital devices and online services is being implemented in NSW public schools in from the start of Term 1 2020.

During 2020, schools will be expected to update their existing school procedure or develop a new one to reflect the new policy requirements. The school procedure is to be developed in consultation with the school community.

This guide is intended to support development of school procedure for your school.

| **Review policy and supporting resources** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| [Student Use of Digital Devices and Online Services policy](https://policies.education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library)[[1]](#footnote-1). | This policy provides advice to NSW public school communities in managing students’ use of digital devices and online services. It promotes the learning, safety and wellbeing of students and the management of any risk of harm and distraction. |
| Access the department’s [support resources](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools)[[2]](#footnote-2) for the digital device policy. | The Department has provided resources that you can use to help you implement this policy in your school. Along with this checklist, these include:   * frequently asked questions * definitions of key terms * sample school procedure * professional learning for teachers (Term 1, 2020) * parent information slide pack (Term 1, 2020) * posters. |

| **Develop your school procedure** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| Review your current school procedure or approach to managing digital devices and online services. If you have an existing procedure in place, consider how closely it aligns with the new policy requirements. | Your school digital devices and online services procedure needs to align with this policy, accepted school practices and any other requirements. |
| Consult with your school community. | Students, parents, carers, and school staff are to be consulted in the development of your school procedure. Students may be represented by their Student Representative Council and parents and carers by the school’s Parents & Citizens association as appropriate.  Refer to the *Consult with your school community* section for more guidance on this process. |
| Adopt and adapt [the sample school procedure](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools), amend your existing school procedure, or develop a new one using the [online form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=muagBYpBwUecJZOHJhv5kV_pPC8E0lpLo0_x2qJ0mX1UQjdCMUtRNjJET042SldFME45UU40VDlSMS4u).[[3]](#footnote-3) (STAFF ONLY). | Ensure the procedure is clear and accessible and written in plain English so it can be more easily understood.  Your school procedure must include any mandatory requirements set out in the policy, including any restrictions, the need to make reasonable adjustments and to consider exemptions for individual students. |
| For **primary school students** the school procedure must include the mandatory NSW public primary school restriction. | The use of digital devices by primary school students (personal or school provided) **must be restricted** during class, recess and lunch unless:   * approved by a teacher or principal for an educational purpose * use forms part of a reasonable adjustment for student learning and wellbeing * an exemption has been granted for other reasons.   Principals, in consultation with their community, have discretion to make decisions about student use of digital devices in all other school related settings, including before and after school. |
| If you are a **secondary school** **principal**, these mandatory restrictions do not apply. | Principals, in consultation with their community, have the flexibility to make decisions about restricting or permitting student use of digital devices (personal or school provided) in all school-related settings, including during class, at recess and at lunch.  If you are applying any digital device restrictions, you are obliged to make reasonable adjustments for student learning and wellbeing needs and consider exemptions for individual students. |
| Outline your school’s approach to restricting or permitting student use of digital devices and online services in a range of contexts and settings. | Contexts and settings may include:   * during class (restricted for primary school students) * at recess and at lunch (restricted for primary school students) * before and after school * on school grounds or in designated spaces * on excursions and other school events such as camps * on other educational sites such as TAFE * during detentions and exams. |
| Outline your school’s approach to managing the storage of digital devices (personal and school provided). | Schools are under no obligation to provide storage facilities. Schools should consider the liability they assume when they take possession of students’ digital devices ([Legal Issues Bulletins](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/rights-and-accountability/legal-issues-bulletins)[[4]](#footnote-4) 8, 35 and 56 provide advice in this regard). Schools can approach their local Asset Management team to discuss what support may be available. |
| Outline your school’s preferences in regards to exemptions, noting you must consider exemptions | An exemption from parts of the school procedure can be requested from the principal by parents, carers, school counsellors, school psychologists and student support officers, and, if required, students themselves. This may cover times when or places where use would otherwise be restricted.  Except where required by law, the school principal has discretion to consider and approve exemptions and to choose which parts of the school procedure the exemptions applies. The exemption may be ongoing or for a certain time period.  Examples of exemptions include but are not limited to:   * A student has a wellbeing need to privately contact a support service or their parents or carers. * A student is a young carer. * Family circumstances may require an exemption for compassionate reasons. This may include circumstances such as a family member having a new baby, undergoing an operation or facing terminal illness.  It may also include restriction on times when a student can contact a parent such as a family member living overseas or parental incarceration.   Some students require reasonable adjustments to their learning and support needs under the Disability Standards for Education 2005.  A disability includes a medical condition impacting a student. The school must consult the student, and their parents or carers as appropriate, in determining the adjustments for the student.  Reasonable adjustments include access to digital technologies to participate in the education on the same basis as a student without a disability. Providing reasonable adjustments to students with disability is an obligation under the Disability Standards and does not require students or parents or carers to seek an exemption under this policy. |
| Outline your school’s approach to managing incidents of inappropriate use of digital devices and online services, including breaches of the procedure. | Inappropriate use of digital technology should be addressed according to your school’s existing behaviour management plan and wellbeing and disciplinary procedures, departmental policy and any other statutory and regulatory obligations. This includes incidents outside of school where there is a clear and close connection to the school.  A link to your school’s existing behaviour management plan and wellbeing and discipline procedures may be all that is required. Consult [Legal Issues Bulletins](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/rights-and-accountability/legal-issues-bulletins)[[5]](#footnote-5) 8, 35 and 56 regarding liabilities that arise when student property is confiscated. |
| Outline your school’s approach to managing contact between students and parents and carers during the school day. | If your school has restricted digital devices during school hours, it is suggested that you require students and parents and carers to communicate with each other via the school office. This expectation needs to be clearly communicated to your school community. |
| Outlines the responsibilities and obligations for students, parents and carers, principals, teachers and non-teaching staff to ensure that students use digital devices and online services in safe, responsible and respectful ways. | The sample school procedure lists a number of recommended inclusions for each stakeholder group and provides a sample list of expected student behaviours. |
| If your school has a bring your own device (BYOD) program, consider whether you will outline your approach to this program in your school procedure or keep it separate. | The policy states that all school principals, in consultation with their school communities, can make decisions about participation in and implementation of a BYOD program.  Digital devices provided under a BYOD program are covered by the new policy, which does not distinguish between personal and school provided devices. If you choose to have a separate school procedure on bring your own device arrangements it will need to be updated to reflect the new policy requirements.  If your school is participating in a BYOD program, you might want to include any specification requirements as an appendix in your school procedure, as demonstrated in the sample school procedure. You should communicate with your school community about any device specification requirements your school has. |

| **Consult with your school community** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| Consult with your staff, students, parents and carers when developing your school procedure. | The new policy will be most effective when staff and families recognise their complementary roles in teaching students to use digital technology in a safe, responsible and respectful ways. Schools need to involve their whole community as active and valued participants in its implementation.  Schools can use surveys, parent information evenings, school councils, calls for submissions, Student Representative Councils, advisory committees and other participatory decision-making to involve school community members. You can approach the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW for support with community engagement activities.  The Department has also provided a number of resources that you can use to help your school implement this policy. |
| Communicate early, often and honestly. | Advise staff, students and parents/carers of the new policy as soon as possible to give them plenty of time to review it, consider it and have their say. Update them regularly about how they can contribute, what stage school procedure development is at, and any timeframes or deadlines. Schools who successfully manage the use of digital devices have found communicating in advance of key changes to be critical to success community engagement.  DELs have been provided with a communication toolkit principals might find useful for communication with school staff and the broader school community. |
| Organise a team. | Establish a team of staff members to be subject matter experts, champion the policy/procedure and be a first point of contact for other staff, students and parents/carers. |
| Information versus consultation. | Be clear about what aspects of the procedure the school community can influence, and what parts you are simply informing them about. If people can’t actually influence or change anything, they should be made aware. |
| Consult with the school community. | Obtain feedback from the school community on how the policy can best be applied at school. Keep the school community informed, listen to and acknowledge their concerns. Provide feedback on how their input has influenced decisions and is directly reflected in the final school procedure. |
| Collaborate with the school community. | Partner with the school community on specific details of the policy/procedure – get them directly involved in identifying challenges and providing innovation and advice around developing alternatives and formulating solutions. |

| **Communicate and Review** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| Make the final procedure publicly available. | Promote the Student Use of Digital Devices and Online Services procedure at school assemblies, in newsletters, on the website and [posters](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools)[[6]](#footnote-6) in high-traffic areas such as the front office, bathrooms, First Aid area, library, and student services area. |
| Once implemented, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school procedure and make adjustments if needed. | The policy requires that school principals monitor and periodically review the suitability of their school procedure. |

| **Support school staff** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| Provide staff training. | School staff should be trained and familiar with the policy and your school procedure. In Term 1, 2020, the Department will provide schools with a professional learning course on the new policy. This can be delivered by school staff. A series of short videos exploring the policy and related matters will also be provided. |

| **Get further information** | **Policy/supporting information** |
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| Visit the Australian Government’s Office of the [eSafety Commissioner website](https://www.esafety.gov.au/)[[7]](#footnote-7). | This Office of the eSafety Commissioner website has information about online safety issues including cyberbullying, as well as professional learning for teachers and resources for schools, students and parents. |
| Visit the Department’s [Digital Citizenship website](https://www.digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au/)[[8]](#footnote-8). | This website provides practical advice to students, teachers and parents on the responsible use of technology, addressing safe and ethical online behaviour. Articles and resources are linked to the NSW and Australian Curriculum. |

1. https://policies.education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The sample school procedure and link to the online form can be found on the support resources page (see previous footnote). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/rights-and-accountability/legal-issues-bulletins [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/rights-and-accountability/legal-issues-bulletins [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.esafety.gov.au/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)