



May 2024

Dear Parents

I am sure I have met many of you at various Alleyn's events over the past year, but I would like to take this opportunity to re-introduce myself.

I am the Deputy Head Pastoral and I oversee our pastoral provision, structures and systems. I work closely with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (and other members of staff with key pastoral roles) to coordinate the School's overarching approach to pastoral care, with the ultimate aim of steering our young people through any challenges ahead with age-appropriate information, education and advice. When crises occur - which sometimes they do - our pastoral team is there to support and guide both students and parents.

I hope your child is looking forward to joining Year 7 in September. There will, no doubt, be many things they are excited about and one of these may be an expectation that they will receive a shiny new mobile phone. The media is full of discussion around their use and the impact of the associated social media on our young people. At Alleyn's we are alert to these risks and do a great deal to educate our students on how to navigate many of the challenges that will come their way. That said, we do feel that the game is somewhat stacked against them and that the best cure in this instance is likely to be one of using some preventative measures.

In the Lower School, phones are locked away at the start of the day and returned to children at the end of the day. Phones are not permitted to be seen or heard on the School site from Year 7 through to Year 11 (there are slightly different permissions for Sixth Form students). Even so, we find ourselves supporting children and parents with the misuse of phones in their own time and we would therefore encourage you to think carefully about the choices you are making for your child over the next few months; what devices you are equipping them with, and what those choices will enable them to access. The School has an evolving approach to how we manage what can be a particularly pernicious challenge for all of us. It is a fast-moving debate, and I can certainly see additional changes or even an overhaul of our approach in the future. For the moment, Alleyn's allows smartphones, but I would not wish you to purchase an expensive item, the use of which we may have to restrict further in the relatively near future.

Instead, we would urge you to consider purchasing a 'dumb phone' for your child to bring to and from school; they do not need a smart phone for school. I try not to draw on my personal life, but I can speak as a parent of a Year 7 child who, on starting 'big school', was less than joyful at being presented with a Nokia 3310 which cannot access the internet or anything more addictive than 'snake'. There was a conversation, of course, and we said the following things:

- The most exciting thing that a phone brings is freedom - freedom to go on the bus to school, to go to Nandos (other restaurant chains are available) with your mates, to walk to the shop, to go to the park. You have all of that with this phone.

- Smart Phones make you vulnerable to the poor decisions of others – 'I trust you, I don't trust everyone else.'
- If you lose your phone or someone 'nicks' it – I'll be a bit grumpy but will be able to buy you a replacement.
- For everything potentially (and very fleetingly) cool you miss, there are 3 things you'll be glad you have nothing to do with.
- If people want you to come to their parties, they'll have to speak to you or make a special effort to invite you.
- You can wear this however you like – ashamed of your OTT Dad or like a kid who knows what really matters – be 'uncommon'. Either is fine, but you can blame me, and I'm good with that.
- It's not forever (16 is what we're shooting for).

So she has a 'dumb phone' – she doesn't miss out on much, she has a friend who teaches her dances from Tik Tok, she absolutely looks at other kids' phones and has said she doesn't like what she sees sometimes. She has embraced being one of the 'care less' kids even though occasionally I have to suffer a begging, pleading, ranting moment. We do look at online stuff together and discuss what is going on, the algorithm and sometimes laugh at dogs doing funny stuff.

I check her text messages and call history once a week if I remember, but if I forget, what's the worst that can happen? I feel like it's liberating as a parent to express trust knowing that the risks for her if I get it wrong are pretty small.

We don't track her – but if we did, we probably wouldn't use a smart phone. It might encourage her to leave her phone somewhere safe while she goes and gets up to mischief somewhere less safe....without a phone!

There is one thing she misses out on ... when I send her a thumbs up, a high five or a laughing face, I receive the reply, 'Dad... I don't see emojis...I just see squares'.

We haven't nailed it, 16 might be over ambitious but what I do see in school is that once our students get the other side of Year 10 there is a significant difference in how young people use their phones and their relationship with their devices changes for the better, so this is what I'm aiming for.

I hope you find this helpful, and that it provides clarity around our approach to managing mobile phone use in School. We really feel that this is a team effort between home and School, and we will appreciate your support and, come September, if we can be of any help at your end in reinforcing healthy mobile phone use amongst our young people, please do get in touch.

In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you at the new parents' evening in a few weeks' time and joining my colleagues in welcoming your child to Alleyn's in September.

With best wishes



Gavin English
Deputy Head (Pastoral)