

5 February 2019

Dear McCarthy Parents and Carers

As many would be aware the use of mobile phones in schools is a 'hot topic' of conversation at the moment. On the back of significant mainstream and social media attention being directed to the potential for bullying activity and distraction to learning, even the NSW government has taken the bold step to actively ban mobile phones in the state's Primary schools.

See attached link to SMH article from December 2018 - **Mobile phones to be banned from NSW primary schools**

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/mobile-phones-to-be-banned-from-nsw-primary-schools-20181213-p50m2g.html>

Here at McCarthy, whether there is a blanket ban or not, we have a strong and active belief that the responsible use of technology is a life skill that all students and adults need to learn to ensure effective and safe access and application of technological knowledge and resources. That said, mobile phones are not the only means of accessing technology. As a college that boasts over 600 devices (laptops, chromebooks, tablets, etc), we leverage technology in many alternate forums to ensure responsible application of technology as a learning tool in the classroom. Importantly, our Year 7 and 8 students have 'anywhere - anytime' access via our Bring Your Own Designated Device (BYODD - Chromebook) program that encourages and models responsible use both in the classroom and at home.

While we might occasionally ask students to use a mobile phone, there is no mandatory requirement to own one as a student of the college. Similarly, while some families may determine that a mobile phone is essential for their child to use while traveling to and from the college, once again it is not a mandatory requirement.

So, ultimately, as a community we need to collectively embrace the fact that technology and 24/7 access to the internet and its inherent technology and social media is here to stay and our kids need to be supported and educated in living in that 'tech' world responsibly and ethically. As Matt Bower says in the SMH article "an outright ban for all schools may not be the ideal solution."

Therefore, I write to you today to present our current policy and seek your input on suggested changes for the future. Currently, we have a 'Traffic Light' Policy (see attached document) that encourages a graded access to mobile phone usage in the classroom. Put simply the default is for students at the start of the lesson to place the phone in the Red box at the front of the classroom or keep it in their bag or personal locker. If it utilized by the student during the lesson it is confiscated and the student can pick it up at the end of the day from the College Office. Repeat offenders will be referred to their Leader of Student Care and parents will become involved in a solution. The Amber and Green colors determine that the phone may used at some stage during the lesson and, in the meantime, the phone is to be placed on the desk on silent, face down. Use of phones before school and at break times is not restricted.

An alternative process that has received strong advocacy from some staff and some parents is to restrict access during the school day to the 'junior' section of the college. That is, that all Year 7, 8 and 9 students might be able to bring a phone to school but it must be in their locker when the bell goes at 8.45am and is to remain there until they leave at 3pm. That would allow for those families that wish to communicate with their children while travelling to do so. Contact with students during the day can still be made via the College Office. If a Year 7, 8 or 9 student failed to follow this direction then the phone would be confiscated and kept in the College Office until it could be claimed by a parent or carer. Repeat offenders would continue to be managed in consultation with the family and the Leader of Student Care. Access to learning technology would still be possible as the BYODD program would be in full swing by 2020 with all Year 7, 8 and 9 students assessing their own personal learning device at school. Under the proposal all Year 10, 11 and 12 students would continue under the protocols of the 'Traffic Light' Policy.

The main catalyst for my communication is to ensure proper consultation and strong support and advocacy (or not) from our families for any proposed changes. The staff and parent advocates for a change suggest that the 'junior' students do not yet have the emotional and decisional maturity to manage responsible use of mobile technology and social media. Notwithstanding though that we do and have educated these students in a variety of forums for many years, not the least being our Academic Pastoral Care Program where we will continue to educate students about the responsible use of technology and social media. This suggested change argues that by the time a student enters Year 10 that they are more mature and should be able to utilise their mobile technology much more responsibly. Also note that I have some advocacy from other groups who suggest that it should only be a privilege for Year 11 and 12s to have mobile phones during the school day.

In conclusion I ask that you ponder this complex situation and be prepared to respond to a staff and parent/carer survey later in the term that will seek community opinion about maintaining the current policy or making the proposed changes or even considering other ideas. As always I am happy to take feedback. We are intending to run Information Nights in Stage groupings later in the term whereby you could talk to me afterwards or you may like to write to me via email or 'snail-mail'?

Thank you for taking the time to consider this challenging societal issue. I look forward to gathering your feedback and opinions prior to final resolutions being made.

May God go with you.



Geoff McManus
Principal

