



ALTERNATIVE ACRES

Mobile Phone and Smart Device Policy

Academic Year 2026/27

Policy owner	Head of Provision
Head of Provision	Gemma Robertson
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Daun Beresford
Deputy DSL	Gemma Robertson
Safeguarding record	CPOMS
Reviewed	01/09/2026
Next review	01/09/2027 or sooner if guidance, safeguarding risk or provision arrangements change

Core expectation: learners may bring a phone for travel where needed, but they do not have routine access to it during their Alternative Acres session.



1. Purpose

Alternative Acres aims to provide a calm, safe, relationship-based and distraction-free environment in which learners can engage with education, mentoring, animals, practical activities and the outdoor environment.

Personal mobile phones and smart devices can create safeguarding, privacy, online-safety, distraction and relationship risks. This policy therefore establishes a clear default: learners do not routinely use or access personal mobile phones or smart communication devices during their Alternative Acres session.

2. Status and adopted approach

Alternative Acres is a non-school alternative provision. The Department for Education's statutory Mobile Phones in Schools guidance applies to specified schools in England rather than being presented by Alternative Acres as a direct statutory duty on this provision.

Alternative Acres nevertheless adopts the central safeguarding principle of a mobile-phone-free education day as a proportionate benchmark. The approach is adapted to Alternative Acres' setting, individual learner needs, SEND profile, commissioned placements and safeguarding responsibilities.

3. Devices covered

For this policy, 'mobile phone or smart device' includes personal smartphones, basic mobile phones, smartwatches and other personal interactive communication devices capable of messaging, calling, recording, photographing, accessing the internet or social media.

Provision-owned laptops and other devices used under staff supervision for planned educational purposes are governed by the Online Safety and E-Safety Policy and Filtering and Monitoring Policy.

4. Core learner rule

- Learners may bring a mobile phone to Alternative Acres where it is needed for travel to and from the provision or another legitimate reason.
- On arrival, the learner's phone must be switched off and placed in the designated secure storage arrangement.
- The phone will remain securely stored for the whole Alternative Acres session.
- The phone will normally be returned when the learner leaves at the end of the session.
- Learners do not routinely access phones during lessons, mentoring, breaks, lunch, animal care, practical activities, woodland/farm activities or other parts of the provision day.
- Smartwatches or other communication devices must not be used to bypass the policy.



The expectation applies consistently even where a learner says they only wish to check a message, social media notification, time, music or another non-educational function.

5. Arrival and secure storage

At the beginning of the session, staff will remind the learner of the phone arrangement and ensure the device is switched off and placed in the designated secure storage.

Alternative Acres will take reasonable care of a device while it is held in the agreed secure storage. Learners should not bring unnecessarily expensive devices or accessories to the provision. Any concern about loss or damage will be reported promptly to the Head of Provision and considered on the individual facts.

Staff should avoid unnecessary handling of a learner's device and must not access its contents merely because it has been handed in for storage.

6. Contact between learners and parents/carers

Parents/carers should not expect a learner to answer calls, messages or social-media contact during an Alternative Acres session.

If a parent/carer needs to communicate an urgent message, they should contact Alternative Acres through the agreed provision contact route. Staff will ensure an appropriate message is passed on.

If a learner genuinely needs to contact a parent/carer during the session, staff will facilitate appropriate contact through Alternative Acres or, where justified, supervise agreed access to the learner's own phone.

This arrangement means learners can still carry a phone for safety while travelling to and from Alternative Acres without having routine access during the provision day.

7. Exceptions and individual adjustments

The no-routine-access rule is the default. Alternative Acres will consider an individual exception where access to a personal device is genuinely necessary because of a medical condition, disability, SEND/accessibility need, safeguarding plan or another exceptional individual need.

An exception must normally be agreed in advance by the Head of Provision and/or DSL, recorded clearly, and be no wider than necessary. Where appropriate, the parent/carer, commissioner and relevant professional will contribute to the decision.



Examples may include approved health technology, assistive communication technology or an individual safeguarding arrangement.

A parent/carer preference for a learner to keep their phone during the session will not, by itself, override the Alternative Acres policy. Alternative Acres will explain the provision's communication and emergency arrangements and consider any genuine individual need raised.

8. Emergencies

In an emergency, Alternative Acres staff will use the provision's established communication and safeguarding arrangements. Learners do not need routine possession of their personal phone in order for emergency contact to take place.

Where an individual emergency makes access to a learner's own phone appropriate, a member of staff may authorise and supervise that access.

9. Refusal to hand in or store a phone

Alternative Acres staff will not use physical force to obtain a learner's phone.

If a learner refuses to switch off or place a device in secure storage, staff will respond calmly, seek to understand the reason, restate the expectation and involve the Head of Provision/DSL where necessary.

Depending on the circumstances, Alternative Acres may contact the parent/carer and commissioning school/local authority to agree how the session can be managed safely. Staff will consider whether the refusal is linked to anxiety, SEND, a safeguarding concern, coercion, exploitation or another unmet need.

Any response will be proportionate and consistent with the Behaviour Policy, safeguarding procedures and the learner's individual needs/risk assessment.

10. Misuse during a session

If a learner accesses or uses a phone contrary to this policy, staff will intervene calmly and ask for the device to be switched off and returned to secure storage.

Misuse may include:

- Taking photographs, video or audio recordings without permission.
- Accessing social media, messaging, gaming or non-approved internet content.
- Contacting other learners or adults in a way that creates safeguarding concerns.



- Cyberbullying, harassment, threats or harmful communication.
- Viewing, creating or sharing sexual, violent, extremist, humiliating or otherwise harmful material.
- Using a smartwatch or secondary device to circumvent the policy.

Where misuse raises a safeguarding concern, the DSL/Deputy DSL will be informed immediately and the concern recorded on CPOMS.

11. Photographs, recordings and privacy

Learners must not use personal devices to photograph, film or audio-record other learners, staff, visitors, animals/activities involving identifiable people, safeguarding information or provision records.

Unauthorised recording can create serious privacy and safeguarding concerns, particularly for learners who may be vulnerable or whose placement at Alternative Acres should not be disclosed.

12. Sharing nudes, semi-nudes and sexual imagery

Any incident involving nude or semi-nude images, sexual imagery, sexualised AI-generated/deepfake material or suspected child sexual abuse material will be treated as a safeguarding matter.

Staff must not routinely view, copy, forward, download or save such material. The DSL/Deputy DSL must be informed immediately and will manage the response under the Child Protection and Safeguarding and Online Safety policies, seeking specialist or statutory advice where required.

13. Searching or examining a learner's phone

Alternative Acres staff must not assume that school-specific statutory powers to search pupils or examine data on devices automatically apply to Alternative Acres as a non-school alternative provision.

Staff will not conduct informal searches of a learner's phone, demand passwords, browse messages, photographs or accounts, or attempt to investigate a safeguarding incident themselves.

Where a device may contain evidence of a safeguarding concern or offence, staff will preserve the situation as safely as possible, inform the DSL/Head of Provision and seek appropriate advice. The device may be kept securely where this is necessary and lawful while advice is obtained, but staff should avoid accessing its contents without a clear lawful basis.



14. Online safety and filtering

Personal mobile data does not pass through Alternative Acres' laptop filtering arrangements. This is an additional reason why learner phones are stored and not routinely used during sessions.

Where an individual exception permits phone access, the agreed plan will consider the fact that the learner's mobile data may sit outside Alternative Acres' technical filtering controls. Supervision and other safeguards will be specified where required.

15. Staff mobile phones and devices

Staff may need mobile phones for legitimate operational reasons, including communication, emergencies, lone-working arrangements and providing authorised internet hotspots for Alternative Acres-owned laptops.

Staff use must remain professional and should not undermine the learner phone expectations. Staff must not use personal devices to form inappropriate communication channels or social-media relationships with learners.

Staff must not take photographs, videos or recordings of learners on personal devices unless an exceptional, expressly authorised arrangement has been risk-assessed and complies with safeguarding and data-protection requirements. Routine practice is to use approved provision arrangements.

Where a staff phone is used as an authorised hotspot, the Filtering and Monitoring Policy & Procedure applies.

16. Visitors, volunteers and contractors

Visitors, volunteers and contractors should use personal devices discreetly and must not photograph, film or record learners without explicit Alternative Acres authorisation. Any safeguarding concern about device use must be reported immediately.

17. Safeguarding concerns involving a phone

A phone-related incident may be an indicator of wider harm, including child-on-child abuse, grooming, exploitation, coercive control, bullying, sexual harassment, radicalisation, criminal exploitation or abuse outside the provision.

Staff will look beyond the device itself and consider what the behaviour or content may indicate about the learner's circumstances. Safeguarding concerns will be reported immediately to Daun Beresford as DSL or Gemma Robertson as Deputy DSL and recorded on CPOMS.



18. SEND, communication and trauma-informed practice

Alternative Acres recognises that some learners may have a strong attachment to a phone because it provides predictability, communication, regulation or perceived safety. Staff will not dismiss this need.

Where a learner experiences distress about handing in a device, staff will use a calm, relational approach, explore the reason and consider whether an agreed adjustment or transition plan is required. The objective remains to maintain a safe mobile-phone-free learning environment while meeting genuine individual needs.

19. Roles and responsibilities

19.1 Head of Provision – Gemma Robertson

- Ensures the policy is implemented consistently and proportionately.
- Agrees individual exceptions with the DSL where appropriate.
- Ensures secure storage arrangements are suitable.
- Communicates expectations to parents/carers and commissioners.
- Reviews incidents and practice where necessary.

19.2 DSL – Daun Beresford

- Provides safeguarding oversight of phone-related concerns.
- Advises on safeguarding exceptions and individual risk arrangements.
- Ensures concerns are acted on and recorded appropriately on CPOMS.
- Coordinates external safeguarding referrals/advice where required.

19.3 All staff

- Apply the phone-free expectation calmly and consistently.
- Ensure phones are stored at the start of the session.
- Do not search devices or demand passwords.
- Report safeguarding concerns immediately.
- Respect agreed medical, SEND, accessibility or safeguarding exceptions.

20. Communication with parents/carers and commissioners

Alternative Acres will make the policy clear to learners, parents/carers and commissioners. Families will be advised that learners can bring a phone for travel where necessary but will not have routine access during the session.



Where a family raises an individual medical, SEND, disability, accessibility or safeguarding need, Alternative Acres will consider it on its merits rather than applying the policy in a way that creates avoidable disadvantage or risk.

21. Related policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2026/27.
- Online Safety and E-Safety Policy 2026/27.
- Filtering and Monitoring Policy & Procedure 2026/27.
- Staff Code of Conduct 2026/27.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Data Protection Policy.
- Managing Allegations and Low-Level Concerns Policy 2026/27.
- Needs and Risk Assessment procedures.

22. Quick staff procedure

Arrival	Phone switched off and placed in designated secure storage.
During session	No routine learner access. Phone remains stored.
Urgent contact	Use Alternative Acres contact arrangements; supervised learner access only where genuinely needed.
Learner refuses	Do not use force. Respond calmly; explore reason; involve Head of Provision/DSL and parent/commissioner if needed.
Phone misuse / harmful content	Stop access calmly and tell DSL immediately if safeguarding-related; record on CPOMS where appropriate.
End of session	Return the stored device to the learner for departure/travel.

23. Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following significant safeguarding incidents, changes to national guidance, changes in technology or changes to Alternative Acres' operating arrangements.