

Looking Yondr at FHS Sloane Square

It has never been more important to recognise the magic of people - those unique moments of human connection that remain with us forever.



Isn't it a bit of a shame then, that adults in the UK spend an average of 5 hours per day on their phones, while teenagers spend a terrifying 7+ hours? This equates to a staggering 22 YEARS over an average life-span, or 38 trips to Mars and back! At Francis Holland, we are looking to redress the balance.

Our ultimate goal is to equip our pupils with the skills, talents and outlook to emerge as resourceful, imaginative and brave young women – the next generation of leaders, thinkers, innovators, designers and game-changers. While, of course, ensuring pupils are digitally literate is imperative, an appreciation of the value of human interaction, emotional intelligence, lateral thinking skills and creativity is what will set them apart and allow them to embrace both the challenges and opportunities of this rapidly changing world.

In 2023, we became one of the first schools to introduce a phone-free policy for pupils in Years 7-10 using bespoke technology from Yondr, a company that works with educators, artists, organisations and individuals around the globe. Founded in 2014 in San Francisco, the company states its mission as simple: *'alleviating the intrusion of personal technology to create vital, distraction-free experiences that enrich people's lives'*.

Students in Years 7-10 are given a Yondr pouch to store their phones in for the duration of the school day. The pouch is locked magnetically, so girls are always in possession of their phone but are spared from the distraction it poses, leaving them free to concentrate on learning and having fun. Unlocking bases are at the main exit points of the school and, at the end of each day, girls simply tap their pouches on them to release their phones.

Mobile phones are brilliant in so many ways, but a lot of self-discipline is needed to use these powerful devices appropriately. By locking their mobile phones away during school, our pupils can focus on connecting with each other in real life and escape the tyranny of alerts, all while having the security of knowing their phone is in their possession. To have so many phone-free hours every day releases precious time for far more worthwhile activities than selfies and scrolling! Applying the policy to entire year groups removes the fear of missing out that results from individual confiscations, so girls are able to relax in each other's company without worrying they're missing something online. Yondr representatives give a presentation to students at the beginning of each academic year, discussing how celebrities including Rihanna use Yondr to make audiences more present and the experience more immersive at concerts, reinforcing that phone free time is positive rather than punitive for students.

We have been delighted by the response to the policy, from our students, parents and staff alike. Parental feedback has been excellent across the board and the very few initial doubts have been assuaged by the ability of students to easily contact them via the school office during the day and the availability of unlocking stations meaning there have been no cases of girls forgetting to unlock their pouches. Pupil feedback has also been positive; for example a current Year 8 student has commented, "I think some positive impacts of Yondr pouches are that it is easier to be productive and I have greater engagement in lessons, clubs, activities and conversations with my friends. It is also a welcome break from the stress of notifications and expectations!"

It is important to also note, however, that digital literacy is integral to the education we provide. We have adopted the Microsoft Surface Pro and the Microsoft 365 apps for our digital learning provision and use them extensively across the curriculum to enrich pupils' learning. In Year 7, girls make their own video game and a virtual tour of a house. They learn how to code, manipulate data and create new media as they progress up the school, as well as how to stay safe online and become active digital citizens. These skills, essential for wellbeing and prosperity, are embedded across the curriculum.

Our Yondr policy has in no way detracted from our digital learning provision; instead it allows pupils to truly focus and hone these critical skills without distraction, truly understanding the best ways to harness the opportunities of modern technology without falling victim to its negative effects.