

Elmfield Media, Computing, Phone and Electronics Policy

At Elmfield we aim to provide our students with opportunities to engage creatively and responsibly with electronic technology. In the Steiner Waldorf Schools movement we believe, that in order for this to happen, children need to be introduced to these technologies gradually and at an appropriate age.

We therefore discourage young children from using mobile phones, watching television and DVDs and using electronic games and media. We also strongly recommend that social networking sites are completely out of bounds for younger children and that no child, of any age, is exposed to electronic media in the morning before school.

Though much heated public debate currently surrounds these technologies, there are some very sound reasons for believing that electronic media fundamentally affects our children. Most of those effects are generally adverse, no matter how good or educational the content of the programme. Some studies have shown, and teachers observe, that exposure to television and other electronic media significantly shortens the attention span of pupils, stifles the imagination and reduces initiative, patience and perseverance.

Television, cinema and computers also expose children to the coercive use of advertising. In addition, the restricted interaction between a child and a screen genuinely undermines the child's own creativity. In the context of the Waldorf curriculum, which works so strongly in the child's imaginative realm, the exposure to television and other electronic media is particularly counter-productive. Computer games can be particularly habit-forming and can break down a child's view of life into cartoon characters.

However, we recognise that, whilst at home, a child's exposure to electronic and other media lies in the domain of the family. It is therefore parents who must decide what role television and other media play in your children's lives. However, if the class teacher or guardian considers that media use is significantly undermining the healthy development of the child, or the class, this will be brought to the attention of the parents of the children concerned for discussion.

It is very much the wish of the school that parents who bring their children to our Waldorf School understand and support the school's policy on Media, Computing, Phone and Electronics.

Further to this, please also be aware that Elmfield is a WiFi Free and Mobile Free Zone for parents and teachers as well as pupils.

Early Years

In the early years young children can live very strongly into the fairy tale imaginations that they create for themselves from the spoken word. Visual images on a screen allow less scope for this creative inner picturing. Many of the images on screens may also be inappropriate. In the early years children are very good imitators and they may act out things they have seen on the screen, even things that they can barely understand. This can lead to inappropriate play activities.

Lower and Middle School

The experience of electronic media is also unhelpful for children in the Lower School. However, it is understandable that in some families with older siblings some access to electronic media is unavoidable. However, we ask that before 12 years of age access to electronic media should be avoided during the school week. If this is difficult we propose the following suggestions for managing the children's consumption of television and other electronic media.

1. Arrange viewing limits, including what can be watched and for how long.
2. The parents should, if possible, watch with the children.
3. The telling or reading of bedtime stories is a good way of preparing the children for a healthy night's sleep.

We also recommend that activity on Social Networking sites in particular, is not allowed at this age.

Middle to Upper School

As children grow older, from the middle school years, television and other media may play a gradually increasing, but hopefully a modest part in their lives. It is therefore important to practice discrimination with regard to the exposure of young people's minds and senses to modern visual and electronic culture. We suggest that the use of electronic media should be agreed beforehand and take place in the company of family and friends and not in their own room.

Activity on Social Networking Sites should be introduced carefully, limited and supervised at all times as youngsters may well become exposed to misuse.

It should also be noted that teachers are not permitted to be 'Friends' with students on Social Networking sites nor be in contact with students via either mobile phones or the internet.

Upper School

Elmfield recognises that teenagers are eager to embrace the modernity of the world they will step into as adults. Our aim is to help them to develop the skills and understanding that provide for a mature and discriminative use of the new technologies. For this reason, we have a number of rules within school and guidelines for home.

COMPUTERS: The school aims to train students to be familiar with formatting

documents in word processing, creating spreadsheets, setting up PowerPoint presentations and use of databases. IT lessons have this aim.

In addition, teachers may show subject-relevant films or clips. Students may be given options as to how to present Main Lesson or GCSE work, and these may well include computer-generated components. Teachers may also ask students to research topics online for homework.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES: The Learning Support department at times recommends that certain students use laptops to take notes and write during lessons. In such cases, parents are requested to ensure the student achieves consistency of access to the equipment. Laptops are also used in exams by candidates with special access arrangements.

PHONES: The school is a mobile-free zone. We ask that all mobile phones are switched off and kept in bags. At the end of the day students should step outside the gates before using phones. The school can accept no liability for phones lost or stolen under this arrangement. Phones seen in use during the school time or within the school grounds will be confiscated.

MUSIC PLAYERS: With the occasional exception of use within the confines of GCSE Music or Dance lessons, the rules for MP3 players are the same as for phones.

GAMING: While the school cannot do more than advise, it would be useful to converse with Class Guardians in cases where a student is spending a great deal of time on computer games & consoles. This has noticeable effects on homework and the quality of academic progress in the Upper School.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Parents are advised that social relationships within school can be severely compromised by comments posted on social networking sites from students' homes. In some cases this may lead to the school initiating bullying investigations. Parents are therefore requested to maintain supervision of their children's online activities.

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