

Sixth Form devices FAQ

A recent survey of current parents of Year 11-13 students garnered 128 responses, giving parents' opinions on the value of various digital learning activities and provided an opportunity for parents to ask questions and raise concerns about increasing the use of devices to facilitate Sixth Form studies. The following FAQs address the most common questions that were raised.

Q: Isn't digital learning a solution looking for a problem? Why do we need it when students are learning perfectly well already?

Central to our vision is not to replace existing, well-established teaching and learning methods but to *augment* them with digital learning activities such as those listed below. A clear desire to be able to use devices in these ways was seen in the responses from both present Sixth Form students and staff in the surveys that they also completed as part of a wider consultation on device use within school.

We believe that learning is much more than preparing for exam successes and that the augmentation of traditional learning methods through the introduction of devices during lessons will allow our students access to a far richer array of learning opportunities that will enable them to take their studies to much greater depths.

For example, by ensuring that each Sixth Form student has a device, teachers will be able to plan to use digital learning platforms within lessons, allowing students to engage in activities such as:

- Accessing learning resources, PowerPoints and digital worksheets within Teams which can be completed digitally and assessed in a more timely fashion by their teacher and/or peers.
- Completing assignments that have been set on Teams during independent study periods, rather than waiting to complete these at home.
- Accessing electronic textbooks, which contain links to online resources to enrich the textbook's content.
- Adding personalised annotation to a teacher's PowerPoint directly within the lesson and adding snippets from these presentations directly into students' electronic notes using notetaking applications such as OneNote.
- Submitting work in rich-media formats, such as recording a speaking task for a modern foreign language, or a performance for music.
- Accessing websites, online articles and educational videos that have been posted by teachers to Teams that offer richer insight and real-world application of concepts taught during a lesson.

Q: What devices are students expected to use?

Having identified what our teaching staff and students want to do with digital devices, we assessed a range of potential devices for their suitability in allowing us to achieve our vision. Included in this selection process were Microsoft Surface Go and Pro tablet devices, Chromebooks, various models of Apple iPad (including Pro and Air models) and Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 and S8 devices.

After considering the features, integration with existing systems and cost of each option, our recommended device is an [Apple iPad \(9th generation\)](#).

We have opted for an iPad due to its small form factor, all-day battery, “instant-on” availability, excellent “digital inking” and keyboard case options and first-class Microsoft Office and Teams applications to integrate seamlessly with our existing IT infrastructure and digital learning platforms. But, of greatest importance, we believe that an iPad is the best-value device on the market that will allow our students to access the learning activities listed above that we believe will most positively impact and enhance their education.



Figure 1 Apple iPad (9th generation) with Logitech Rugged Combo Folio keyboard case

Q: How much is this likely to cost? We already have a device that my son uses at home. Does he need to buy a new one for school?

The school is recommending an iPad as the preferred device which, when combined with a keyboard case, digital stylus and insurance, will cost around £400.

However, students are welcome to bring existing devices if they already have one, although there are some requirements that any device must meet:

- For any student studying Mathematics, one of the Sciences, Economics, Geography or Art, the device **must** be capable of “digital inking” – that is to say, it must be possible to use a digital stylus to draw onscreen in an application such as OneNote.
- The device must be capable of running native Microsoft Office applications, Teams and OneNote and not only “web-app” versions. Windows and iPad OS both offer first-class native applications for Microsoft Office, Teams, OneDrive and OneNote (available at no charge with students’ Reading School Microsoft accounts).
- The devices must be capable of all-day battery life. There will not be sufficient capacity to charge devices within lessons, nor during breaks within the Sixth Form common room. A fully-charged iPad can last 10+ hours with active all-day use.
- The device must have a small form factor (13” or smaller screen) so as to take up minimal room on a student’s desk and to facilitate its “disappearance” when not in use.

- The device must have a keyboard, either permanent or attachable. A foldable “keyboard folio” case is ideal for the additional protection that it offers to the device when closed.
- It is highly recommended that any device used in school has location services enabled and can be tracked and remotely disabled in the event of loss. iPads have this capability built-in and makes them far less attractive targets for theft as a stolen iPad is effectively useless and cannot be restored/reset once in its locked state.

Any iPad that is compatible with an Apple Pencil (or compatible high-precision pencil device, such as a Logitech Crayon) will be suitable. This includes any iPad released since 2018 (6th generation and later) and all models of iPad Pro.

A healthy second-hand and refurbished device market exists for iPads, with suitable models available from websites such as backmarket.co.uk and ebay.co.uk from £150.

Q: What impact will increased digital learning have on face-to-face interaction with classmates and teachers?

Digital learning is not to be confused with remote learning, as took place during the national lockdowns during the COVID pandemic.

Introducing devices into lessons and increasing the integration of digital learning within and outside the classroom will have no impact upon the amount of time that students spend in lessons receiving face-to-face teaching from their teachers, nor the time spent interacting with classmates and peers in school.

Q: I am concerned that using digital devices will subject my son to more “screen time” and cause them to be distracted during lessons. How will this be managed?

Another central tenant of our digital device strategy is that students should use devices that can “disappear” when not in use. Our recommended device, an Apple iPad with keyboard cover and stylus, can be closed and put to one side when not required during a lesson just as easily as a textbook. When the device is required for a lesson activity, teachers will direct student to open the device and it will then be used to support the learning objective of the lesson. This might be through accessing and reading an article which will then be discussed, or completing a self-marking electronic quiz to assess a student’s understanding of a topic.

When used in this way, additional screen time resulting from the use of devices in lessons should be minimal and with devices closed for significant portions of a lesson, distraction should be kept to a minimum also. Another reason for recommending an iPad is its focus on a single full-screen application at a time and the lack of disruptive requests to apply updates when opened for use in a lesson.

As with out current Bring Your Own Device (BOYD) policy, Internet access via devices will be subject to the school’s firewall, reducing access to non-educational websites and online platforms.

Q: What impact will using a device have on my son's handwriting? After all, exams are still handwritten and it's important that they keep practising this.

GCSE and A Level Exams are handwritten and will remain so until such a time as Ofqual, JCQ and the relevant exam boards deem otherwise.

As mentioned, central to our vision is the notion that devices should *augment* traditional learning activities and not replace them. Within this is the expectation that most students' predominant means of working will remain pen-and-paper, whilst additional activities might be conducted electronically and online. Certainly, any practise exam tasks will be completed by hand unless they have specific access arrangements in place.

Q: What happens if a student's device is lost or broken? Will the school cover this?

We are currently in the process of selecting a partner company to manage the sale and provision of devices to those who wish to buy new devices. These devices will include insurance that will cover devices against loss and damage, contingent upon location services being used and the device being kept within an approved (and supplied) case to meet the insurers' standards.

If you choose to use a device that is already owned or to obtain one from another supplier then it will be necessary to arrange your own device insurance. Policies from an insurer such as ProtectYourBubble.com can be obtained for the recommended model of iPad (value £330 + accessories) that includes damage, loss and theft for £6/month. Of course, premiums will depend on the value of the device your son brings to school. As mentioned, those who opt to purchase a device from the school's device partner will have insurance included in their purchase price.