

**GUIDELINES
ON
THE USE OF
MOBILE HANDHELD
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION
DEVICES
IN SCHOOLS**

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GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Ministry of Education



1 Introduction

In support of its reform thrusts of decentralisation and school-based management, the Ministry of Education provides these guidelines to Principals and School Supervisors for the regulation of Mobile Handheld Electronic Communications Devices (MHECDs) in schools and at school related activities.

2 Policy Statement

The Ministry recognises the value of Mobile Handheld Electronic Communications Devices (MHECDs) as useful tools in teaching, learning, research and the management of schools. The Ministry also recognises the challenges associated with the use of these devices in schools and at school activities.

It is the policy of the Ministry that MHECDs be used to support the effective and efficient delivery of education in schools and at school related activities, as well as to promote knowledge and use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), providing they are used in a managed, responsible, safe and legal manner.

3 Statement of Intent

It is the intent of the Ministry that the use of MHECDs be effectively managed, not banned, in schools and at school related activities. The Ministry also recognises that the use of these devices may apply differently, from school to school.

The Ministry therefore supports that the use of MHECDs in schools and at school related activities as prescribed in the Policy Guidelines, at Paragraph 5.

4 Policy Context

The Ministry recognises that the world is moving steadily towards a combination of wireless electronic technology and mobile computing. More and more people and organisations are using MHECDs for timely computing and communication. From an educational perspective, the question that begs is how are the mobile electronic technologies affecting the learning environment, pedagogy and school life? More specifically the question is, how should these technologies be allowed to affect/influence school life, since banning them from schools would be pointless?

In today's world, education systems and schools are faced with steep costs when implementing technology that touches the entire school community. By leveraging the growing base of mobile electronic technologies, schools can become more efficient with promoting schoolwork, and in communicating with students, parents, staff, and their communities with minimal costs.

There can be no doubt as to the usefulness and necessity of such devices to parents, school personnel and students in emergencies, illness and circumstances of threats to personal or school security. However, the national cry for regulation of the use of these devices by students has been unanimous from all quarters with an interest in education. These concerns are shared with the citizenry of nearly all developed and developing countries. Thus there can be little doubt

that the use of such devices by students of school age must be regulated to ensure responsible and inoffensive use.

The forms of MHECDs are constantly changing. Principals and School Supervisors are urged to familiarise themselves with the capabilities of these new devices, being mindful of new features as they become available: for example, some relatively inexpensive cellular telephones are now capable of much more than providing voice communication in the traditional sense. Many of these devices can be used to access the Internet, send text and voice messages, capture and send photographs and music, and broadcast audiovisual material.

It is more likely than not that these devices will enable an increase in the range of possibilities in the field of multimedia telecommunications as manufacturers utilise technological developments as they target the teenage and pre-teenage markets. In addition to all of this, Principals and School Supervisors must note that there is certain scientific speculation, that excessive use of cellular telephones may be dangerous to the long-term health of young people.

Principals are further advised and/or reminded that, although incidents may be rare, these devices may be used for dishonest, illegal or offensive purposes. These may originate from the owners or from completely unknown individuals broadcasting from outside the school compound. There ought therefore to be clear sanctions and controls that govern the use of MHECDs in schools and at schools' related activities.

This policy therefore sets the guidelines for the controlled use of MHECDs in schools and in schools' related activities and is aligned to the Ministry's overall Information Communication's Technology (ICT) Policies and Guidelines.

5 Policy Guidelines

These policy guidelines relate to the use of mobile handheld electronic communications devices (MHECDs) in schools and during school activities. They must be widely circulated, explained, and institutionalised. They should be scrupulously incorporated into all school-based operational guidelines.

- 5.1 Parents and guardians wishing to allow their charges (students) to carry MHECDs to school or to a school related activity (on or off the school compound), must understand that such devices are the responsibility of their charges.
- 5.2 All MHECDs must be powered off before entering the school's compound or any school related activity, unless permission is specifically granted by the school's Principal or the "Person In Charge".
- 5.3 The Principal may delegate the duties associated with these guidelines to teachers or other school officers.
- 5.4 Permission for the use of MHECDs on schools' compounds and at school related activities, should be clear and specific relative to the purpose of use and must be guided by the need for:
 - A safe school or safely conducted school related activities;
 - The promotion of effective and efficient teaching, learning, research, assessment, and management;

- Non-interference with, or disturbance of, others, and any classroom or school-related activity; and
 - Communication in cases of emergency, ill-health and threats to security.
- 5.5 Teachers should be supported and encouraged (by the school Principal) to use MHECDs in curriculum delivery such as in the conduct of field studies and other forms of research by their students.
- 5.6 The Ministry shall support the use of MHECDs in the learning process through programmes such as Open and Distance Education and the Integration of ICTs into the Curriculum.
- 5.7 The use of MHECDs must be prohibited under the following circumstances:
- within the immediate environs of an examination
 - where matters of a confidential nature are being conducted
 - during the singing of national songs
 - during religious ceremonies.
- 5.8 When permission is granted for the use of MHECDs, these devices and their storage media must be used in an ethical and responsible manner, exhibiting respect for the law, persons, and property.
- 5.9 Principals must ensure that educational programmes for students, teachers, parents, and the wider community, are carried out at least once annually to provide guidance on the responsible and safe use of these MHECD devices, on the associated risks involved with their use, and to promote their use as effective educational tools.
- 5.10 The Ministry will monitor and evaluate the effective use and application of these guidelines within schools and at school related activities.

- 5.11 Where MHECDs are used illegally, appropriate sanctions will apply in accordance with the Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Education Act of Trinidad and Tobago and Circular Memoranda issued by the Ministry of Education.
- 5.12 These guidelines will be reviewed by the Ministry biannually.

6 Policy Guidelines - Responsibilities

Responsible Party	Policy Guideline
Ministry of Education (Head Office)	5.6; 5.10; 5.11; 5.12;
School Principals	5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.7; 5.8; 5.9; 5.11;
Teachers	5.1;
Other School Staff	5.1;
Parents/Guardians	5.1;
Students	5.1;
Visitors/Guests	5.1;

7 Mobile Handheld Electronic Communications Devices (MHECDs)

Although the actual consumer items produced in this category may change from time to time, they share one set of defining characteristics. Some of these are as follows:

- They enable two-way multi-media communication by users;
- The service that enables this communication may be self-generated or may be part of that of a network provider;
- In keeping with modern technological trends, they are becoming more and more miniaturised, inexpensive, capable of incorporating different technologies and more consumer oriented;
- As they become more inexpensive their marketing is geared towards young people and their great desire to communicate and share interests.

7.1 This category of device may include, but is not limited to, the following typical examples:

- Mobile telephony devices e.g. cellular telephones, 'walkie-talkies', 'pagers', and 'beepers'.
- Hand-held multi-media computing devices with wireless communication capability; e.g. personal digital assistants (PDAs), Palm Pilots, Pocket PCs, etc.
- Specialised discrete mobile devices for 'downloading' and playing musical scores e.g. IPODs, MP3 players, etc.;
- Internet Protocol (I/P) enabled digital cameras, still and motion. Note: digital cameras and video recorders are increasingly being found in cell phones;
- Wifi and Bluetooth-enabled communication devices;

- Fusion devices that combine several or all of the technologies embedded in the forgoing items, such as combination Phone/PDA/MP3-Players/Digital Cameras/Digital Video Cameras.

NOTE:

This policy does not apply to officers of the protective and security services when they are on a school compound, or at a school activity, in an official capacity.

COMMENTS:



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