



AAC and Social Media

Communication Matters Statement

Communication Matters welcomes the Government guidance (DfE, 2026) on the use of mobile phones during the school day, announced in January 2026. We also welcome the statement within the guidance that students with a disability must not be disadvantaged by this policy. Reasonable adjustments must be made under the Equality Act (Gov.UK 2010) for specific pupils when required, including for children and young people who use technology as their voice.

The proposal to ban social media for under 16's is concerning for those that use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Communication is a fundamental human right (Bercow, 2008) for all children. We are concerned that a ban on mobile phones and access to social media may be viewed by some professionals and families as having access to 'banned equipment and/or software' without fully understanding how vital these resources are for children and young people with little or no speech when used for developing cognition, communication, connection and to access the curriculum (Murray, 2024).

Having little or no intelligible speech is classed as a medical condition. A child or young person who uses AAC will have been assessed by a speech and language therapist as needing AAC resources to communicate, take part in learning, be part of the school community and to develop a peer group with others who may not live locally.

AAC devices are often powerful computers due to the way communication software functions. As portable communication systems they may be able to access other functions not required for learning in school e.g. texts and social media. It may be possible to use communication software in 'airplane mode' by turning off wi-fi access, but not always. Schools will need a policy in place, drawn up with the relevant AAC professional and family for each individual AAC user to ensure the appropriate access for software updates and functional use.

Whilst AAC and ATech are not entertainment systems, telephones or social media portals but sophisticated digital resources that support communication, connection, learning and therapeutic activities (RCSLT, 2023) there are additional benefits for teens with communication disabilities using this specialist technology. These include the ability to develop and maintain social relationships through social media with 'others like them' (Hynan, 2013; Hynan, Goldbart and Murray, 2015) when often there no other AAC users in their local area. Over time social media has proven invaluable for teenage AAC users to meet online with role models and particularly to take part in 1 to 1 peer mentoring sessions with adult AAC users (Grace et al. 2019; Grace et al. 2023). Whilst use of social media is underused by AAC users compared to the general population (Hemsley et al. 2024) this should not be a reason to stop good practice. For many teenage AAC users these sessions will be set up and possibly supervised by an adult. The activities these young people undertake often require the active engagement of a knowledgeable communication partner, frequently under the guidance of speech and language therapists or IT specialists.

For children and young people who use AAC and ATech we need professionals to understand the benefits of bespoke communication and learning packages, encourage joint interactions, modelling and shared learning on a consistent basis in each environment the child accesses. Time limits or a ban on usage of communication equipment are not relevant as an AAC user, this may compromise essential development. Best practice

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guidance should be followed for learning to use AAC and students should not be made to feel guilty or shamed that the use of AAC is essential for their cognitive, language and social development.

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