BILTON GRANGE

PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Bilton Grange Early Years Screen Use Policy

Advent 2026

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out Bilton Grange's approach to the safe, purposeful and limited use of screens and digital devices with Early Years children, in accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework and the Department for Education guidance Help for early years providers: Screen use. It reflects the principle that responsive interaction with adults and other children, real-world play and physical activity are the foundations of healthy development in the early years, and that screens are used only where they demonstrably support children's learning.

2.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff working with Early Years children at Bilton Grange, including The Nest (pre-school class) and Reception, and is shared with parents and carers. It covers the use of all digital devices with screens, whether used with children for learning, for assessment and administration, or in the day-to-day running of the setting. It applies to devices provided by the school and to personal devices used within it.

Whilst the guidance is primarily aimed at Nursery providers (Nest), our Reception staff will remain mindful of the advice contained within.

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3.1 Legislative Framework and Statutory Requirements

The EYFS Statutory Framework (effective 1 September 2026) requires providers to keep children safe, to promote their welfare and to support their learning and development. This includes maintaining a safeguarding policy that sets out how mobile phones, cameras and other electronic devices with imaging and sharing capabilities are used in the setting. This policy sets out how Bilton Grange meets these requirements in relation to screens, and how it has regard to the Department for Education guidance Help for early years providers: Screen use (updated September 2026), together with related guidance on internet safety and online safeguarding.

3.2 Aims and Principles

The aims of this policy are to ensure that:

- Screens are used with Early Years children only where there is a clear educational purpose that cannot be met as well by other means;
- Children's screen time is limited in line with national guidance and does not displace sleep, play, physical activity, time outdoors, stories or interaction with adults and other children;
- All digital content shown to children is checked in advance and is age-appropriate, safe and suitable;
- Screens never replace high-quality interaction between educators and children;
- Children begin to develop an age-appropriate understanding of technology and how to use it safely;
- Staff use digital devices for assessment, communication and administration proportionately and securely;
- Parents and carers understand our approach and are supported to promote healthy screen use at home.

3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The Head of Pre-Prep has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead oversees online safety and the safeguarding aspects of device and screen use.

All Early Years Staff follow this policy whenever screens or digital devices are used with, or in the presence of, children.

Parents and Carers are encouraged to support healthy screen use at home in line with national guidance.

3.4 Screen Use and Screen Time: Definitions

Screen time refers to the amount of time a child spends looking at a screen. Screen use refers to how, why and in what context screens are used, taking into account the quality and pace of content, its purpose and the child's level of engagement. This policy is concerned with both: with keeping screen time low, and with ensuring that any screen use is intentional, interactive and appropriate.

3.5 Screen Time Limits by Age

Bilton Grange follows the national screen time advice for children:

- Children aged 2–5: screen time is limited to no more than one hour a day, and less wherever possible.

Staff bear in mind that children may already have reached, or exceeded, these limits at home, and take this into account when planning any screen use in the setting. These limits do not apply to screen-based assistive technologies for children with SEND (see 3.12), which can have essential benefits for communication, wellbeing and quality of life.

3.6 A Precautionary Approach and Purposeful Planning

Bilton Grange takes a precautionary approach to screens. Evidence indicates that too much screen time in the early years is associated with poorer cognitive and behavioural outcomes, including reduced verbal interaction and vocabulary, developmental delays, reduced attention and lower executive function. Screen use is therefore limited, carefully planned and clearly linked to intended learning aims.

Before any screen is used with children, staff consider:

- Whether the screen use is necessary, and whether another resource or method would achieve the same aim;
- The clear educational rationale for using a screen;
- How the activity extends and enhances learning rather than replacing the educator's role;
- How children will interact with the content rather than watch it passively, and how it will be discussed;
- Whether the content is suitable and has been checked;
- How movement and physical activity can be incorporated;
- Any safeguarding risks associated with the device or content, and whether these have been checked.

Screen use must not displace sleep, physical activity, time outdoors, story time or engagement with other children and adults. A story, rhyme or song on a screen cannot match one told by an engaged adult who makes eye contact, uses different voices and expressions, and responds to children's reactions. Interactive, screen-free activities are always preferable.

3.7 Suitable Content and Safety Considerations

All content is checked by a member of staff for suitability before it is shown to children. Digital content used with children is:

- Checked in advance to ensure it is suitable for Early Years children;
- Slow-paced, repetitive and predictable; fast-paced or overstimulating content is avoided, including content with frequent cuts, movement or flashing, complex or overlapping audio, fast-talking characters or complex plots;
- Advert-free, as young children cannot distinguish advertising from other content;
- Free of scrolling, autoplay and algorithm-driven recommendations, so that children are not exposed to unintended content or kept on screens for longer than planned.
- Any internet-connected screen use should take place through approved school systems with the school's filtering and monitoring arrangements in operation.

Apps, software and tools that describe themselves as educational or child-friendly are not automatically safe or of high quality. Staff use their professional judgement to assess any resource against this policy before using it with children.

3.8 Practice Expectations When Screens Are Used

When a screen is used with children, staff:

- Co-engage with children throughout, and never allow children to use screens alone or only with other children;
- Prompt children to think, predict, respond and discuss, using commenting, narrating, describing and open-ended questioning;
- Avoid activities that give an automatic response requiring no effort from the child;
- Use screens only for short periods, to protect children's ability to focus and concentrate;
- Do not use screens to manage behaviour, to calm or occupy children, or during transitions, as this affects children's developing ability to self-regulate.
- Staff use of screens for assessment, administration or parent communication should be brief and proportionate and must not lead to prolonged disengagement from the children.

3.9 Screen-Free Times and Zones

Designated spaces within the setting are kept permanently screen-free to protect social interaction and learning. Screens are never left on as a default and are switched off when not in purposeful use. Screens are not used during mealtimes, or within an hour of a planned sleep or rest period.

3.10 Artificial Intelligence and Connected Toys

Bilton Grange does not permit Early Years children to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools directly. This includes generative AI tools, online chatbots or digital assistants, and toys or devices with in-built AI features. Any future child-facing use would require prior approval and assessment under the school's safeguarding, online safety, acceptable use and data protection arrangements. Any staff use of AI is governed by the relevant whole-school policies and applicable UK data protection legislation

3.11 Children with SEND, Communication Needs and EAL

Some children with SEND, with communication needs (whether or not diagnosed), or with English as an additional language may need a more tailored approach to screen use. Decisions for these children are made on a case-by-case basis using professional judgement, in partnership with parents and any supporting professionals.

3.12 Assistive Technology

Screen-based assistive technology can be an important tool to help children communicate, take part in everyday activities and access an inclusive learning environment. The screen time limits in 3.5 do not apply to assistive technologies where these support a child's communication, wellbeing or quality of life. Their use is planned around the child's individual needs and reviewed regularly.

3.13 Children's Own Devices

Children are not allowed to bring their own devices into the setting.

3.14 Online Safety and Safeguarding

All screen and device use is subject to the setting's safeguarding and online safety arrangements. Concerns about content, devices or online safety are reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

3.15 Working in Partnership with Parents and Carers

We work in partnership with families to support healthy screen use at home and in the setting. We:

- Share this policy and our approach to screens with parents when children join the setting;
- Share information on recommended daily screen time limits, how screen use can displace other important activities, and alternative screen-free activities;
- Signpost parents to national guidance, including the Best Start in Life screen time guidance for the under-5s;
- Offer opportunities for parents and carers to discuss healthy screen use through our Coffee and Conversation workshops and other parent information sessions.

3.16 Staff Training and Professional Development

All Early Years staff are supported to understand this policy and current best practice, so that they can apply it confidently and offer parents practical, consistent advice. Screen use is included in induction and revisited as guidance and evidence develop.

4.0 POLICY OWNER

Assistant Head Pre-Prep

This policy is owned by the Assistant Head Pre-Prep and is reviewed annually or in response to changes in statutory guidance or emerging evidence.

5.0 RELATED POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Bilton Grange Early Years Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Mobile Phone, Camera and Acceptable Use Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- SEND and Inclusion Policy

6.0 FURTHER INFORMATION

This policy is informed by:

- Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (effective 1 September 2026)
- DfE guidance: Help for early years providers – Screen use (updated September 2026)