5.2 Screen Use Policy

Applies to: All children, staff, volunteers, students and visitors at St Mary's Nursery
Age range: Children aged 2 years and above

Purpose

At St Mary's Nursery, we recognise that children are growing up in a digital world and that technology can have a positive role in children's learning when it is used appropriately.

However, young children learn best through real-life experiences, play, conversation, movement, exploration and responsive relationships with adults and other children.

This policy sets out how St Mary's Nursery will manage screen use in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework and the Department for Education's **Screen use guidance for early years settings**, which takes effect from 1 September 2026.

The EYFS requires early years providers to have regard to this screen-use guidance.

Our approach

St Mary's Nursery takes a **precautionary and child-centred approach** to screen use.

Our priority is to provide children with:

- High-quality face-to-face interaction with adults and other children.
- Opportunities for active and imaginative play.
- Daily outdoor play and physical activity.
- Books, stories, songs and rhymes.
- Hands-on exploration and real-world experiences.
- Opportunities to develop communication, language and social skills.
- A balanced curriculum across all areas of the EYFS.

Screens will **never be used simply to occupy children, manage behaviour, fill gaps in the day or as a reward**.

Screen-free activities will always be considered first.

Screen-time expectations

The Department for Education guidance states:

- **Children under 2:** screen time should be avoided, except in exceptional circumstances such as a video call with parents or carers.
- **Children aged 2–5:** screen time should be limited to **up to one hour per day, and less if possible**.

As St Mary's Nursery cares for children aged 2 years and above, our nursery approach is to use considerably less than this where possible.

The one-hour recommendation is **not a target** and St Mary's Nursery will not aim to provide children with one hour of screen time.

Screen use at nursery will normally be provided in **short, purposeful periods** and only where there is a clear reason for using a screen.

We recognise that children may also use screens at home. Nursery staff will therefore consider the child's overall wellbeing and will work sensitively with parents and carers rather than treating the one-hour figure as an entitlement to screen use at nursery.

When screens may be used

Screens may be used where they provide a clear benefit to children's learning, development, communication or inclusion.

Examples may include:

- Looking at photographs or images connected to a current learning experience.
- Exploring a particular topic that cannot easily be experienced directly.

- Listening to a carefully selected song or rhyme as part of an adult-led activity.
- Viewing a short educational video that supports something children are learning.
- Using digital technology to support creative activities.
- Exploring age-appropriate technology as part of understanding the world.
- Supporting communication for a child with additional needs.
- Using assistive technology where this supports an individual child's communication, participation, wellbeing or independence.
- Making a video call in exceptional circumstances, such as communicating with parents or relatives.

Where possible, children will be actively involved in the experience rather than watching passively.

Screens will not replace real experiences

Staff will consider whether a screen is actually necessary before using it.

For example, where a story can be read by an educator, the educator will read the story rather than showing the story on a screen.

Where children can explore a real object, visit an outdoor environment, conduct a practical activity or speak directly with an adult, these experiences will normally be preferred.

Screen use must not displace:

- Physical activity.
- Outdoor play.
- Social interaction.
- Conversation with adults.
- Free play and imaginative play.
- Creative experiences.
- Books and stories.
- Rest and sleep.
- Mealtimes.

- Hands-on exploration.

Adult supervision and co-engagement

Children will **not be permitted to use screens independently or without adult co-engagement**.

An educator will be present and actively involved when children are using a screen.

Staff will:

- Talk to children about what they are seeing.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Encourage children to predict, explain and respond.
- Connect screen experiences to real-world experiences.
- Encourage children to communicate with one another.
- Monitor children's responses and engagement.
- End the activity when its purpose has been achieved.

Screen use should involve interaction and communication rather than passive viewing.

Appropriate content

All digital content must be checked by an appropriate member of staff **before it is shown to children**.

Content must be:

- Age appropriate.
- Suitable for the individual children involved.
- Safe and appropriate for an early years setting.
- Calm, slow-paced and predictable where possible.
- Free from inappropriate advertising.
- Free from inappropriate or unexpected content.

- Appropriate to the learning purpose.
- Free from unnecessary flashing, rapid movement or overstimulation.

Staff will avoid content containing:

- Advertising.
- Inappropriate language or imagery.
- Frightening or upsetting material.
- Fast-paced or overstimulating sequences.
- Autoplay.
- Scrolling feeds.
- Algorithm-driven content where children may inadvertently access unsuitable material.

Staff will not rely solely on an app, programme or website describing itself as "educational". Practitioners will use their professional judgement to determine whether it is appropriate.

Online safety

Children's access to online content will be carefully controlled.

Staff will not allow children to freely browse the internet, video-sharing platforms or other online services.

Where online material is required for an activity:

1. The content will be identified and checked in advance.
2. Staff will access the material themselves before using it with children.
3. Children will be supervised throughout.
4. Unnecessary links, recommendations, advertisements and autoplay features will be avoided.
5. The activity will end once its learning purpose has been achieved.

Children will not be given unrestricted access to search engines or online video platforms.

Artificial intelligence

In line with current Department for Education early years screen-use guidance, St Mary's Nursery will **avoid children using AI technology**, including toys with built-in AI features, until there is sufficient evidence about the impact of such use on young children.

Staff will not introduce AI-powered applications or devices for children's direct use without first considering updated government guidance and the nursery's safeguarding requirements.

Screen-free areas and times

St Mary's Nursery will maintain appropriate screen-free periods and spaces to protect children's opportunities for interaction and active learning.

Screens will not be used:

- During meals or snacks.
- Within one hour of a child's sleep or rest period.
- As a routine transition activity.
- To settle or calm children.
- As a reward or punishment.
- To manage children's behaviour.
- To occupy children while staff undertake other tasks.
- As background entertainment.
- Simply to fill time.

Screens will not be left switched on in the background.

Screen use and behaviour

Screens will not be used as a behaviour-management tool.

In particular, staff will not:

- Offer a screen to stop a child crying.
- Use screen time as a reward.
- Remove screen access as a punishment.
- Use screens to distract children during transitions.
- Use screens to keep children occupied while waiting.

Instead, staff will use appropriate early years strategies to support children's emotional regulation, including sensitive adult interaction, distraction through play, comfort, visual cues, predictable routines and co-regulation.

Children with SEND and communication needs

St Mary's Nursery recognises that some children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), communication needs or English as an additional language may benefit significantly from digital or screen-based support.

Screen-based assistive technology may be used where it supports a child's:

- Communication.
- Independence.
- Participation.
- Learning.
- Wellbeing.
- Ability to access the curriculum.

The general screen-time limits do not apply to screen-based assistive technologies for children with SEND where the technology is necessary for the child's communication, wellbeing or quality of life.

Any such use will be considered on an individual basis and discussed with parents/carers and relevant professionals where appropriate.

Staff use of digital devices

Staff use of digital devices must not interfere with children's care, supervision or learning.

Personal mobile phones and other personal devices must be used in accordance with St Mary's Nursery's safeguarding policy.

Staff must not use personal devices to photograph or record children.

Nursery-owned devices used for photographs, observations or communication must be handled securely and in accordance with the nursery's safeguarding, data protection and confidentiality procedures.

The number of photographs and videos of children will be kept to the minimum necessary.

Digital devices and observations

Digital devices may be used by staff for appropriate nursery business, including recording observations and communicating with parents.

However:

- Observations will be based on children's real-life experiences and professional observation.
- Children will not be asked to complete activities on a screen simply to assess their development.
- Staff will prioritise interaction with children over completing digital paperwork.
- Digital recording will be proportionate and necessary.
- Devices will not become a barrier to responsive interaction with children.

Children's own devices

Children should not normally bring personal digital devices into St Mary's Nursery.

If a child requires a specific device or assistive technology to support communication, SEND or another identified need, this will be discussed with the child's parents/carers and managed on an individual basis.

Partnership with parents and carers

St Mary's Nursery recognises that families make their own decisions about technology and screen use at home.

We will work in partnership with parents and carers in a supportive, respectful and non-judgemental way.

Parents will be informed about our approach to screen use when their child joins the nursery.

We may also provide information through:

- Parent meetings.
- Newsletters.
- Conversations with parents.
- The nursery website or parent communication system.
- Signposting to appropriate government guidance.

Staff will not judge families based on children's screen use at home.

Where parents ask for advice, staff will provide information based on current government guidance and encourage a balanced approach that prioritises sleep, physical activity, play, communication, relationships and real-world experiences.

Staff responsibilities

All staff are responsible for following this policy.

The Nursery Manager/Designated Lead will ensure that:

- Staff understand the September 2026 EYFS requirements.

- Staff are familiar with the DfE screen-use guidance.
- Digital content is appropriately checked.
- Screen use is purposeful and proportionate.
- Staff understand expectations around online safety.
- SEND-related screen use is considered appropriately.
- Parents are informed about the nursery's approach.
- The policy is reviewed when government guidance changes.

Monitoring and review

The nursery will periodically review how screens are being used and whether their use continues to benefit children.

The leadership team will consider:

- Whether screen use is genuinely necessary.
- Whether it has a clear learning or developmental purpose.
- Whether screen use is replacing a better hands-on experience.
- Whether children are actively engaged with an adult.
- Whether screen use is sufficiently short.
- Whether the content remains appropriate.
- Whether children are receiving sufficient physical activity, outdoor play, social interaction and real-world experiences.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner if government guidance or the EYFS statutory framework changes.

Our commitment

At St Mary's Nursery, we believe that **children should experience technology as one small part of a rich, varied and predominantly hands-on early years curriculum**.

Our starting point will always be:

Talk. Play. Explore. Move. Create. Read. Connect.

Technology will be used only when it adds genuine value to children's experiences and will never replace the relationships, play and real-world experiences that are at the heart of high-quality early years education.

Related guidance

This policy has been developed with reference to:

- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework applying from 1 September 2026.
- Department for Education: *Screen use guidance for early years settings*.
- Department for Education: *Screen use by children aged under 5 – independent report*.
- Relevant safeguarding, online safety and data protection requirements.

This Policy was adopted by	St Mary's Nursery, Camberley,	*(name of provider)*
Last reviewed On	1st September 2026	*(date)*
Date to be reviewed	1st September 2027	*(date)*
Signed on behalf of the provider		
Name of signatory	Sue Dunn	
Role of signatory (e.g. chair, director or owner)	Acting Chairperson	