

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT COUNCIL MEETING

9 OCTOBER 2023

Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")
S. Reid (Joint Chair)
A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair)
Katrina Adams
Joanne Logan
Christopher McLaughlin
Mo Wright
Dougie Wilson
Elizabeth McHaffie
Helen Alagbe
Meenal Poddar
Multesh Poddar
Lorna McIntosh
Anne-Marie O'Brien

Apologies: Samantha MacConnell
Julie Flaherty
Mairead Brophy
Iltaf Dean
Adeolu Alagbe
Jennifer Clare Abalo
Lynsey O'Dwyer
Chimezie Umeh
Michela Pagliocca

School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")
J. Cumming
T. Creighton
M. Gallagher
C. McCrea

1. Welcome

The Office-Bearers ("OB") welcomed the Parent Council ("PC") Members in attendance. JS led the meeting in an opening prayer.

2. Apologies

A note was taken of the PC Members & School staff in attendance, and of intimated apologies.

3. **Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes**

The draft Minutes of (i) the Annual General Meeting of the Parent Council on 11 September 2023 and (ii) the Parent Council Meeting on 11 September 2023 were proposed and approved, without adjustment.

4. **Brief Updates on Action Points from last Meeting**

The following updates were noted:

- (1) New Learning Base – The new learning base is now in operation.
- (2) Improving Attendance - Mr O'Neil reported that improving attendance (including punctuality) remains a priority.

At the September 2023 PC Meeting a number of PC members had expressed concern that statistics indicating decreasing attendance may be attributable in part to a tendency to discontinue teaching in the days and week leading up to the end of the School terms.

Mr O'Neil agreed to issue a clear communication to parents and pupils that teaching will continue right up to the final day of the School terms – and that attendance is mandatory up to that date.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **Mr O'Neil will prepare a communication to parents and pupils that teaching will continue (and pupil attendance is expected) right up to the final day of each Term.**

5. **Fair Access to University**

As sanctioned by the PC, a letter dated 28 September 2023 was duly issued on behalf of the PC to the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills on the issue of fair access to University education (*See Annex 1*).

Similar letters were sent to each of the regional and list MSPs.

So far, two responses have been received. Both are supportive in tone.

A fuller report will be given to the PC Members at the next meeting, once further responses are received.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The OB to collate responses and provide a fuller report to the PC at the next meeting.**

6. School Photographs

Concerns were expressed by some parents as to the pricing and quality of recent official school photographs. Particular disquiet was expressed around the withdrawal of a discount offer by the photographers.

Some parents had enquired whether school pupils might be tasked with taking such photographs in subsequent years, as part of their educational experience.

Mr O'Neil observed that the school photography exercise was just too big and time-intensive for pupils and staff to organise internally. Apart from the logistics of organising the photo-shoots, significant work was carried out behind the scenes on editing and quality assurance.

That said, Mr O'Neil agreed speak to the photographers to address parental disquiet regarding pricing (including the discount arrangements) and quality.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. Mr O'Neil will communicate with the photographers regarding parental concerns surrounding pricing structure (including the withdrawal of discount offers) and product quality.**

7. Additional Support Learning ("ASL")

The Vice-Chair enquired as to the current funding arrangements to address ASL needs within the School. Clarification was sought as to whether funding was made available by ERC or the Scottish Government to support children with ASL needs – and the extent to which ERC was using "hub schools" to teach children with ASL needs.

Mr O'Neil advised that an estimated 25% to 30% of the pupil roll is believed to have some form of ASL need. He has a degree of autonomy to allocate his budget to deal with that particular need as he sees fit. SNHS currently has 3.5 FTE ("full time equivalent") – and certain *ad hoc* assistance is also available which increases that available resource. A lot of time is spent training teachers for ASL.

One parent asked whether a "club" might be created, perhaps run by older children, where children with similar ASL needs might gain mutual support.

Mr Creighton confirmed that there is certainly merit in peer-to-peer teaching. Indeed, there is already such a group (known as "Dyslexia Strategies"), and peer-to-peer teaching is building up considerably. That said, it was appreciated that ASL needs vary considerably. When classes are being put together, the principal teachers seek to take account of the number of pupils with ASL needs.

Over 240 pupils have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia within the School, though most have other complications, so the issue is of significance and attracts a lot of staff resource and attention. Last week, the School promoted "Dyslexia Week", with presentations at all assemblies.

Happily, Mr O'Neil reported that those pupils with dyslexia are not under-represented in exam results. He stressed that on-line supports are in place (on Teams, and in various Microsoft packages)

The PC Members requested further details on these online supports, and greater dissemination to the parent body, perhaps by way of a Parent Workshop.

Pastoral Support Teachers should also be approached, in the first instance, by parents who are seeking information on ASL supports.

Mr O'Neil agreed that a 1st Year Parent Workshop may provide a good opportunity for the communication of this ASL information to parents.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **Mr O'Neil will consider the feasibility of a Parent Workshop (perhaps for parents of 1st year pupils, in the first instance) to disseminate information on available supports for pupils with ASL needs.**
8. **Should the use of mobile phones be restricted in the School?**

The OB referred the PC Members to recent publications, in reputable journals, reporting an increasing body of scientific evidence in favour of the formal restriction of mobile phone use by pupils in school. (*See Annex 2*)

Scientific evidence (approved by UNESCO) now supported the following conclusions:

- That classroom education is being disrupted;
- That the ability of children to focus and concentrate is being impaired;
- That exam performance is being compromised;
- That "Smartphone" behavioural addiction is increasing; and
- That cyber-bullying, anti-social behaviour, anxiety, depression and mental health concerns are increasing,

all linked to unregulated mobile phone use in school.

UNESCO could identify no significant educational benefit in allowing mobile phone use within schools - and, instead, identified an increasingly persuasive body of opinion proving tangible harm to children and young persons.

The OB invited discussion on the development of a policy to restrict the use of mobile phones during school hours (subject to suitable exceptions, in appropriate cases, such as to address particular vulnerabilities or needs).

A lively discussion ensued.

Vigorous views were expressed for and against the principle.

The School staff observed that they already actively discouraged pupils from using mobile phones during break times. In some classes, pupils are allowed to use their phones, for example, for research. Generally, Mr O'Neil did not see mobile phone use within school hours as a problem, and that staff do encourage children to "come off" their phones. In practice, Mr O'Neil believed that the UNESCO approach was being applied in SNHS, so there was no need for a formal "ban". Concerns were also expressed about the practicalities of a ban.

The OB observed that, according to reputable scientific studies, time spent on mobile devices correlates directly with lower exam results among various demographics of children in numerous countries (including GCSE pupils in England & Wales).

In light of:

- (i) the School's current practice of discouraging mobile phone use anyway, and
- (ii) scientific data establishing a direct correlation between unregulated mobile use and lower exam results,

the OB suggested that a formal "ban" (moderated, of course, with suitable exceptions) ought to be an "easy win" for the School.

Such a ban would involve no substantial change in culture within the School, and it would immediately generate the potential for increased attainment for those children who are liable to be most susceptible to distraction and damage by unregulated phone use at school.

No formal conclusions were reached from the first discussion.

The PC agreed to re-visit the issue.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The PC will re-visit the issue, once PC Members have had the opportunity to digest the available scientific material and consider matters further.**

9. Review of PC Constitution

The OB presented a draft proposed Amended Constitution to the PC Members for discussion.

Given the time constraints, it was agreed to re-visit the matter at the next meeting.

The PC Members requested that a copy of the current Constitution be circulated, in order that a comparison could be made of the existing and proposed new versions.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The OB will circulate a copy of the existing Constitution to the PC Members.**

10. Head Teacher's Report

Mr O'Neill reported the following to the PC Meeting:

- (i) A number of staff changes were notified.
- (ii) S1 & S2 Information Evenings have commenced.
- (iii) Career evenings are due to commence imminently (with over 1,000 attendees expected).
- (iv) Overseas and day trips are proceeding.
- (v) There is ongoing work to improve air quality in classrooms (by improving windows and installing CO2 measurements devices)

As regards the Career Evenings, the PC sought clarification as to how participants were identified.

The School staff explained that each Department maintains a list of volunteers willing to participate in the Career Evenings to speak about their respective disciplines/occupations. New volunteers are welcome. An email was sent to the Parent Forum last year requesting volunteers. Notes of interest should be communicated to the School's DYW ("Developing the Young Workforce") Liaison Officer (Lee-anne Mackintosh).

11. Parent Questions

The following questions were raised by email by parents:

- (1) *Why do our children have to choose their subjects so early (at the end of S1)? And why is French the only foreign language available?*
- (2) *It can often be difficult to access the car park in the morning. This can be especially difficult for disabled children, who rely on easier access to the disabled spaces. Can anything be done about the queues and level of congestion? Should access to the car park be restricted to staff and disabled access only?*

On question (1), Mr O'Neil explained that the statistics speak for themselves. The evidence-based rationale is that the current system "smooths the gradient" of learning and provides a better quality of grades. Mr O'Neil also observed that many schools offer only six subjects, whereas SNHS offers nine or ten, which represents a substantial spectrum of choice.

Mr O'Neil also emphasised that there is significant latitude in the system to allow pupils to change their minds at a later date, if a subject choice proves to be wrong for them.

On question (2), Mr O'Neil acknowledged that the traffic lights on Rouken Glen Road can cause problems with traffic congestion. However, he suggested that traffic issues are greatly exacerbated in the morning by parents choosing to drop their children too close to the School's front door, in cases where it is simply not necessary to do so. Better use could be made by parents of the ERC car park (located on the right), which is under-utilised.

Generally, Mr O'Neil discouraged the use by parents of the School's main car park in the morning and afternoon, as it causes unnecessary congestion.

Two designated disabled parking spaces are located at the back door (by the English Department). Those designated areas should be respected by others.

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting is on Monday 11 December 2023.

(Next Page: Summary of Action Points)

**SUMMARY
OF
ACTION POINTS**

<i>Ensuring fair access to University</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
1. The OB will collate the various responses received to its recent correspondence to the Scottish Government and MSPS - and will provide a full report to the PC at the next PC meeting.	OB	December 23
<i>Improving Attendance</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will prepare a communication to parents and pupils that teaching will continue (and pupil attendance is expected) right up to the final day of each Term.	HT	December 23
<i>Additional Learning Support</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will consider the feasibility of a Parent Workshop to disseminate information on available supports for pupils with ASL needs.	HT	Ongoing
<i>School Photographs</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will communicate with the external photographers regarding parental concerns surrounding pricing structure (including the withdrawal of discount offers) and product quality.	HT	December 23
<i>Should Mobile Phones be banned in School?</i>		
1. The PC shall re-visit the issue of formal ban on mobile phones use in School (subject to exceptions), once PC Members have had the opportunity to consider matters further.	OB	Ongoing

<i>Review of the PC Constitution</i>		
1. The OB will circulate a copy of the existing Constitution to the PC Members	OB	October 23

ANNEX 1

FAIR ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY

ENCLOSED PAPER FOR PC MEMBERS

1. Letter dated 28 September 2023 from SNHS PC to the Scottish Education Minister

THE PARENT COUNCIL
OF
ST. NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

Joint Chair:
Jacqueline Stewart
Stuart Reid

Vice Chair
Aundrie Wilmott

c/o St Ninian's High School
Eastwood Park
Rouken Glen Road
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Glasgow

Email: pcstniniangiffnock@gmail.com

The Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

28 September 2023

Dear Minister,

Fair Access to University Education

We write to you on the subject of the Scottish Government's policy of widening access to higher education.

As you will know, the Scottish Government's key target is that, by 2030, students from the 20 per cent "most deprived" backgrounds (as identified through the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation ("SIMD")), should represent 20 per cent of full-time, first-degree entrants to higher education at every Scottish University. As an interim measure, it also decided that, by 2021, students from that same quintile should represent at least 10 per cent of entrants to every Scottish University.

To its credit, in recent years the Scottish University sector has taken significant action to make higher education more open and accessible to students from all backgrounds. The interim target has largely been achieved, and good progress is being made towards attainment of the key target.

However, like all experiments in social engineering, the policy of widening access needs to be approached with care.

To be clear, the *objective* of the policy is entirely laudable. We support it.

But we respectfully suggest that the detailed *means* by which that objective is measured requires renewed scrutiny and critical analysis.

Two recurring issues of concern require to be addressed if the policy of widening access is to retain public confidence:

- SIMD, which is an *area-based* measure, is now widely discredited as the core tool for measuring widening access, and should be replaced with a more accurate measure of *individual* deprivation.
- Displacement of high-achieving (but less disadvantaged) students is a real risk, and should be addressed.

For the sake of brevity, we have set out a fuller explanation in the attached Schedule.

Meantime, it may suffice to observe that, in his final Report (May 2022), Peter Scott, the Independent Commissioner for Fair Access, concluded that “institutional SIMD targets are no longer fit-for-purpose.”

There are at least two credible alternatives to SIMD.

The first option is assess individual deprivation by reference to eligibility for free schools meals (“FSM”). Robust data is available. It is already in use by the Scottish Government. It focuses on the individual. Indeed, a Scottish Government Working Group recommended the use of FSM alongside SIMD back in 2019. The second option is to develop a measure using the new Scottish Child Payment. This would be novel, but would again focus on individual deprivation.

A wide range of other supplementary indicators is available to identify individual deprivation, including by reference to parental income, “first-in-family” applicants, care experience, or participation in access or bridging courses.

The Commissioner’s Report also acknowledges a direct correlation between displacement and inadequate public funding of University places for Scottish domiciled children.

In light of the foregoing, we would be grateful if you would confirm the following:

1. Do you agree that SIMD should be replaced, as the core metric by which to measure widening access, by suitable measures of *individual* disadvantage, such as eligibility for free school meals, or Scottish Child Payment, supplemented by a range of more accurate indicators of *individual* deprivation? If so, how do you intend to pursue this objective?
2. Do you agree that the Scottish Government must provide an adequate number of fully funded places in higher education as a means of mitigating the real risk of inequitable displacement arising from the Government’s policy of widening access? If so, how do you intend to pursue this objective?

Yours sincerely,

J. Stewart

Joint Chair

S. Reid

Joint Chair

SCHEDULE

The inadequacy of the SIMD metric

The core metric by which Universities are measured under the Widening Access Policy is the Scottish index of multiple deprivation (“SIMD”).

SIMD seeks to measure “deprivation” by reference to seven weighted criteria: average current income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, access to facilities. It applies those criteria nationally across 6,976 small areas, called “data zones”, with roughly equal population (of about 760 people per data zone).

Incontrovertibly, SIMD is a valuable statistical tool. It supports decision-making in many fields of public policy.

But as a mechanism to identify individual deprivation, it is inadequate.

The fundamental problem is that it is an area-based measure. This has three consequences:

- i. First, residence in a geographical area (or “data zone”) with a high SIMD ranking is assumed to be synonymous with an experience of *individual* deprivation. That is incorrect.

SIMD cannot accurately distinguish between deprived and non-deprived individuals living in areas classified as low or high deprivation.

Not everyone who lives in a deprived area is deprived; and many deprived people live in non-deprived areas.

As a result, SIMD routinely produces false positives and false negatives.

It identifies persons as being deprived merely because they live in an area designated as deprived; and it fails to identify genuinely deprived persons merely because they live in an area that is designated as non-deprived.

The unfortunate result is that the admirable policy of widening access to University education becomes akin to a postcode lottery.

Within our own neighbourhood, many pupils at, say, St Ninian’s High School or Williamwood High School, who may well represent a wide spectrum of individual impoverishment or privilege, are at risk being “written off” *as a group* by the blunt SIMD metric, simply because they happen to live in geographical postcode designated as “less deprived”.

Unfairness of this nature undermines public confidence in the policy.

Over many years now, a persistent chorus of informed criticism has been directed at the use of SIMD as the key metric by which to measure progress on widening access.

That criticism, too long ignored, is now overwhelming.

In his final Report (May 2022), Peter Scott, the Independent Commissioner for Fair Access (who reports on the Government's progress on this policy), concluded that:

“... institutional SIMD targets are no longer fit-for-purpose.”

The Independent Commissioner has now recommended that Universities should be allowed to use a basket of measures to assess their progress on widening access, with oversight from the Scottish Funding Council.

Many others have criticised the Government's over-reliance on SIMD, including Universities Scotland.

Critics have called for SIMD to be replaced, or at least complemented, by suitable measures of *individual* disadvantage.

There are at least two credible alternatives.

The first option is assess individual deprivation by reference to eligibility for free schools meals (“FSM”). Robust data is available. It is already in use by the Scottish Government. It focuses on the individual. Indeed, a Scottish Government Working Group recommended the use of FSM alongside SIMD back in 2019. Since then, UCAS has added FSM as an access metric for University applications in England.

The second option is to develop a measure using the new Scottish Child Payment. This would be novel, but would again focus on individuals.

A wide range of supplementary indicators is also available to identify truly disadvantaged applicants, including by reference to parental income, “first-in-family” applicants, care experience, or participation in access or bridging courses.

Many educational institutions already use these finer-grain, personalised criteria to more accurately assess *individual* deprivation.

However, as yet, there is no sign of the Scottish Government acting upon the Independent Commissioner's recommendation.

Accordingly, higher education institutions continue to be held to account by the Government (through the Scottish Funding Council's Outcome Agreements) by reference mainly to the blunt, *area-based* SIMD20 metric.

- ii. Second, SIMD has a well-recognised “big city” bias.

Rural and island areas are disproportionately neglected by the blunt “area-based” SIMD metric.

According to the SIMD analysis, the majority of the “most deprived” (i.e. SIMD20) school leavers are located across the central belt of Scotland, notably within the

Greater Glasgow area. In contrast, vastly fewer SIMD20 postcodes are located in the North of Scotland. None are found in the three island regions.

Again, this illustrates the inadequacy of the SIMD “area-based” approach.

Genuine individual deprivation (which undoubtedly exists in regional and island communities) is masked and overlooked by an over-reliance on a simplistic and generic “area-based” statistical tool.

This has created significant challenges for Universities serving the north-east of Scotland, such as the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and North East Scotland College.

They tend to underperform in terms of SIMD20 entrants. This reflects the limited pool of potential SIMD20 applicants in their surrounding areas.

As a result, in order to meet their quotas, these institutions have to fill places – which might otherwise have been available to local, under-privileged applicants - by recruiting students from far-flung SIMD20 postcodes elsewhere in Scotland.

iii. Third, SIMD fails to “stretch” the ambitions of most Universities.

The Scottish University sector has already met the interim (10%) SIMD20 target, and most Universities (aside from the struggling rural institutions described above) are well on the way to meeting the key target.

But the use of SIMD as the core metric is a classic example of “meeting the target, but missing the point”.

SIMD does not *accurately* measure the widening of access to the impoverished and socially deprived. It merely provides a convenient postcode pool from which Universities can readily select entrants in order to satisfy a bureaucratic target, with little regard to the students’ actual individual experiences of deprivation.

If a more accurate metric (or series of measures) were adopted, wider university access would be afforded more efficiently to those who are genuinely deprived.

The risk of displacement

Secondly, there continues to be a real concern as to the extent to which the admission of students from socially deprived communities merely “displaces” equally deserving students from other socially deprived communities, because the total number of places in universities for Scottish domiciled students is capped (or, to be more precise, the budget for funded places is limited).

In his final report (May 2022), the Independent Commissioner for Fair Access observed:

“There has been a persistent and nagging concern that SIMD20 applicants may ‘displace’ better qualified applicants from other SIMD quintiles. In particular, the fear is that applicants in the middle quintiles will be squeezed between SIMD80 applicants, with the qualifications and connections that effectively guarantee them university places, and SIMD20 applicants, who are the focus of fair access efforts.”

Along with criticism of the inadequacy of SIMD as the core metric, the perception that well-qualified Scottish students (from modest and deprived backgrounds) are being “displaced” by the admission of less qualified students (from marginally more modest and deprived backgrounds) are two of the most powerful arguments likely to undermine the current public and political consensus in favour of the widening access policy.

As a result, the Commissioner has acknowledged that the risk of displacement “deserves the most serious consideration”.

The reason is obvious.

There is no merit in substituting one inequity for another.

It is illogical and unfair for deserving students (from one under-privileged strata of society) to be excluded from University access in favour of other equally deserving students (from another under-privileged strata). Of course, some small element of displacement may be an inevitable consequence of the policy, but the issue is one of degree.

Public concern about “displacement” arises most keenly in the context of a reducing number of publicly-funded Scottish University places.

The fewer the number of places, the greater the competition for them, and the greater the risk that an inequitable degree of displacement occurs.

Unfortunately, funded places have indeed reduced.

The overall number of publicly-funded higher education places was cut by the Scottish Government - from 123,225 (in 2021-22) to 121,797 (in 2022-23); and though overall numbers of applications for entry in 2022 were lower, the number of applicants from SIMD20 data zones increased.

In his final report (May 2022), the Independent Commissioner acknowledged that “a small amount” of displacement may be taking place in certain subjects, but not on the scale suggested by public debate on this issue.

This tentative conclusion sits uncomfortably with the recent revelation that not one applicant from a State school was granted a place on the Scots Law Degree Course at Edinburgh University in the 2022 academic year, unless that applicant resided in an SIMD20 data zone or otherwise attracted a widening access “red flag” (BBC, 12 January 2023).

These circumstances offer a sobering illustration of displacement in action.

It is virtually inevitable that high-achieving children from genuinely deprived backgrounds were refused access to that major University by reason mainly, if not solely, of their postcode. That is arbitrary and inequitable. The outcome has been described as “an extraordinary act of injustice”. Tackling one injustice by creating another is “foolish, morally wrong and counterproductive” (Scotsman, 12 January 2023).

Nor is University selection fairly based on the historic performance of the school which an applicant happens to attend. Many schools (like Royal High or Boroughmuir in Edinburgh; or Woodfarm or St Ninian’s in East Renfrewshire) have pupils from poor and wealthy catchment areas.

Lumping all children together in one homogenous group, based on nothing more sophisticated than a postcode or school rating, ignores individual experiences of deprivation.

No doubt in recognition of the perversity of this extreme outcome, and the resulting public furore, the Principal of Edinburgh University (Sir Peter Mathieson) announced that the University would “adjust” its selection criteria to ensure that the same thing did not happen the following year (The Herald, 10 May 2023). The outcome of this adjustment remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, the risk of displacement remains a live issue due to a combination of (i) limited publicly-funded University places and (ii) the continuing inflexible application of the blunt SIMD20 criterion, which treats whole groups of applicants with very different personal circumstances as a homogenous group, simply because they live in the same geographical area.

Recognising this, the Independent Commissioner has formally recommended that the Scottish Government must provide an adequate number of fully funded places in higher education. He concluded that a failure to do this, or a perception of failure, could lead to an increase in competition for places, and thereby revive fears that better qualified (though marginally less deprived) students were being “displaced” by SIMD20 entrants.

Justified or not, these fears act as a drag on efforts to achieve fair access, and must be addressed.

ANNEX 2

SHOULD MOBILE PHONES IN SCHOOL BE BANNED?

ENCLOSED PAPERS FOR PC MEMBERS

1. UK Government Press Release dated 2 October 2023
2. Article, SecEd Journal, 20 September 2022
3. Article, UNESCO Forum Agenda, 4 August 2023
4. Article, The Guardian, 2 October 2023

PRESS RELEASE FROM UK GOVERNMENT

Mobile phone use to be banned in schools in England

Mobile phone use to be banned during the school day, including at break times, new guidance recommends.

From: Department for Education and Gillian Keegan MP
Published: 2 October 2023

Mobile phone use should be banned in schools across England to improve behaviour, the Education Secretary Gillian Keegan announced today.

New guidance from the Department for Education will back head teachers in banning mobile phone use throughout the school day, including at break times, to tackle disruptive behaviour and online bullying while boosting attention during lessons. It aims to support the wider work the government is doing to raise standards in schools by increasing students' focus and reducing distractions.

This ban supports the hard work of teachers and education staff – and continues to build on government's reforms backed up by the highest level of funding for schools in history, in real terms, of nearly £60 billion by 2024-25.

The move will bring England in line with other countries that have already implemented a ban, including France, Italy and Portugal. It follows warnings from the United Nations on the risks of smartphones in schools and government data that found around a third (29%) of secondary school pupils reported mobile phones being used when they were not supposed to in most, or all, lessons.

If schools fail to implement the new guidance, the government will consider legislating in the future to make the guidance statutory.

Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Advisor said:

“This is a fantastic move forward for ensuring that students are able to work, learn and grow in a place free from the distracting influence of mobile phones. Schools that have already banned them report that students are safer, happier and able to focus far more than they were before- and it's popular with them too.

And heads should now be reassured that their efforts to keep schools mobile-free will be backed by the DfE. This is a positive and progressive step forward.”

The guidance will set out limited exemptions where necessary - for example, where children require their phones for medical reasons.

The ban builds on a £10 million investment in behaviour hubs which support up to 700 schools to improve behaviour alongside the appointment of a new behavioural taskforce led by DfE's Behaviour Tsar Tom Bennett.

PRESS ARTICLE (1)

The growing case for banning mobile phones

Article: SecEd Journal:
Author: Andrew Jones
Published: 20 September 2022

The rapid development and increasing use of technology, accelerated by the pandemic, has seemingly dampened the case for banning mobile phones in schools. Andrew Jones offers 10 evidence-based arguments for a total school mobile phone ban

Why ban mobile phones in school?

Mobile phones have revolutionised our lives in many positive ways, such as keeping in contact with distant family and friends, facilitating e-commerce and allowing us access to vast quantities of information.

Their use in school has also been advocated, the impact of mobile phone bans disputed, and the child's "right" to digital technology championed (Graham, 2020; Campbell & Third, 2020; Livingstone & Third, 2017).

Nevertheless, there is a danger that children are becoming overly dependent on their devices, which are hindering learning at school. This is why headteacher and chair of the government's Social Mobility Commission, Katharine Birbalsingh, told the Association of School and College Leaders' annual conference in March: "If we genuinely want things to be fairer, and we want our disadvantaged children to be socially mobile, the best thing I can do for them is getting them not to have a smartphone" (see Mumsnet, 2022).

Although I do not always agree with Ms Birbalsingh, I would side with her on this.

There is increasing evidence, despite the objections cited above, that mobile phone bans in schools have a positive overall impact on academic attainment and pupil wellbeing (Beland, 2021; Lemov, 2022).

As my own school moves from a partial to total mobile phone ban, here are 10 additional reasons why I think we are right to do so.

Distractions and interruptions: Aside from all the fun on offer via various apps, pupils are regularly distracted in lessons by social media messages, texts and occasionally calls from friends and, sadly, family. Not only does this negatively affect the flow and focus of learning, but the knock-on effects of comment, gossip or even distress – if the news is in any way upsetting – can create classroom commotion. Moreover, studies have shown that overuse of mobile phones can lead to a more general problem of inattention, especially among young people, which inevitably impacts on learning (Zhang et al, 2014).

Less face-to-face interaction: Despite having so much opportunity to interact and enjoy each others' company, some pupils choose to simply spend 50 minutes staring at a screen. This can have a detrimental effect on pupils' ability to socialise and make friends in and out of school as well as in later life (Twenge, 2019).

Cyber-bullying: Online bullying, or simply hurtful behaviour, impacts on pupils' wellbeing at school and is made all the easier by access to mobile technologies (Mendez et al, 2020). Of course, any teacher reading this, particularly pastoral leads, would be able to back this up with a whole host of anonymised anecdotal evidence. Importantly, further research suggests that adolescents who overuse mobile phones are more exposed to cyber-bullying (Sheinov, 2021). Additional concerns related to cyber-bullying include sexting, infringement of privacy and worries about reputation and image.

Mental health: Researchers have known for some time that excessive use of mobile phones can increase the risk of anxiety and depression, particularly – but not exclusively – in those prone to these conditions (Rosen et al, 2013). Furthermore, studies show that increased mobile phone use can trigger these mental health issues, particularly among young people (Wacks & Weinstein, 2021).

Smartphone addiction: Mobile phones can trigger the release of dopamine in the brain that, in turn, affects our emotions and alters our mood. It will come as no surprise that many mobile phone apps are designed to keep users coming back repeatedly for positive rewards or social reinforcement, which some psychologists see as contributing towards a “behavioural addiction” (Alavi et al, 2012). Perhaps more worryingly, some studies are now demonstrating a clear correlation between adolescence and so-called smartphone addiction and that one in three young people surveyed in the UK admit to problem use (Shoukat, 2019; Sohn et al, 2021).

Sleep deprivation: Studies have found that night time mobile phone use is prevalent among young people and that this impacts on both their physical and mental health if not kept in check (Schoeni et al, 2015). Although pupils don't sleep at school, it could be argued that overuse of mobile phones during the day leads to a dependency that affects pupils at night.

Lower grades: All of the above can impact over time on pupils' attainment. Large scale studies have started to link overuse of mobile phones to lower grades – in that time spent on these devices correlates with lower exam results among various demographics of children in numerous countries. This includes pupils sitting their GCSEs in England and Wales (InnerDrive, 2022).

Cheating and exam irregularities: The Guardian reported that there has been a 42% rise in cheating cases involving gadgets such as mobile phones in the UK over a five-year period (Marsh, 2017). Smartphones and watches make cheating all the more tempting. Of course, pupils and parents should be aware that pupils may well be disqualified from exams even if they simply forget that their device is on them.

Bans work: An overview of mobile phone bans by the London School of Economics found there was an improvement in pupil performance of 6.41% in a number of UK schools that have introduced a mobile phone ban. Moreover, for low prior-attainers, this positive impact rose to 14%, which led the report's authors to state: “Banning mobile phones could be a low-cost way for schools to reduce educational inequality.” (Beland & Murphy, 2015). Bans seem to have the same effect elsewhere, including in Spain (Beneito & Vicente-Chirivella, 2020).

You can still contact your child: Lastly, I would point out that if anything serious happens in school, we would undoubtedly call home straight away. Furthermore, if there is an emergency outside of school, parents can call in and we can relay the message or get the pupil to a phone.

UNESCO calls for a ban on phones in schools. Here's why

Article: UNESCO Forum Agenda

Author: Charlotte Edmond, Senior Writer, Forum Agenda

Published: 4 August 2023

**UNESCO recommends that phones be banned from schools
as they distract students
and have a negative effect on learning**

Technology should only be used when there is a clear benefit to learning

Smartphones need to be banned from classrooms to avoid distracting students and disrupting learning, a new report from UNESCO recommends.

The United Nations' education, science and culture agency says that even having a phone nearby when notifications are coming through is enough to break students' concentration, with one study showing that it can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on learning.

Large-scale international testing data like the Programme for International Student Assessment suggests there is a negative link between excessive technology use and student performance, UNESCO argues in its Global Education Monitoring report.

Proximity to a phone was found to have a negative impact on learning in 14 countries. And removing smartphones from schools in Belgium, Spain and the UK improved learning outcomes, according to studies cited in the report. But less than a quarter of schools have banned them.

There needs to be clear guidelines for technology's use in educational settings to ensure it avoids harm to students' health and to society at large, says UNESCO. And countries need to make it clearer which technology devices are allowed in schools and which are not.

Technology – but not in excess

The report recommends that technology as a whole should only be used in classrooms when it supports learning outcomes: "Some technology can support some learning in some contexts, but not when it is over-used or inappropriately used," the body says.

Since the pandemic, there has been an influx of technology into the classroom in many settings. However, this technology should "support, but never supplant, the human connection on which teaching and learning are based".

As well as being distracting, digital technology can take away human contact and, unregulated, can invade privacy and stoke hatred, says the report. Just a handful of countries explicitly guarantee data privacy in education by law. And the majority of governments that provided online education during the pandemic "fostered uses that risked or infringed on children's rights".

Higher screen time has been associated with poorer wellbeing; less curiosity, self-control and emotional stability; higher anxiety; and depression diagnoses, according to research the report leans on.

PRESS ARTICLE (3)

Mobile phone ban in English schools

Article: The Guardian
Author: Sally Weale, Education Correspondent
Published: 2 October 2023

Glyn Potts, head teacher at Newman Roman Catholic College in Oldham, could not hide his irritation at the morning headlines announcing a government ban on mobile phones in state schools in England.

His school, like the vast majority, already has a mobile phone policy. "All banned and have been for 10 years," he said, dismissing the announcement by the education secretary, Gillian Keegan, as a "smokescreen" to distract from the real challenges facing schools, such as underfunding, teacher recruitment and providing for pupils with special educational needs.

At Newman RC College, there's a zero tolerance approach towards mobiles. Pupils can have their phones with them for the journey to and from school, but as soon as they cross the threshold into the school grounds phones must be switched off and kept out of sight for the duration of the school day.

Pupils are banned from even holding them in their hands, whether it's lesson or break time. If mobiles are seen they are confiscated and not returned until the end of the day. It is a measure of the effectiveness of the policy that although the vast majority of the 1,502 pupils carry mobiles, staff will only see two or three a week at most.

"My goal here is to make sure there's no disruption to learning," said Potts. Bullying and sharing of inappropriate material on mobiles are also big issues for young people. "It's about the common good which has to be young people focusing on learning and their teacher, not on their mobile," he said.

Other schools have different policies. Some ban mobiles altogether so children are not allowed to bring them to school at all, which can be difficult to enforce if pupils hide their phones. Others require phones to be handed in at the start of the day and returned as pupils leave, while some schools allow restricted use at lunch and break times or for schoolwork in class.

"I agree with minimising the use of phones in school for anything other than learning-based activities; however, our school uses phones as part of those learning activities," said one Guardian reader who wished to remain anonymous, warning a ban "will impact the kids' in-class research, management of homework tasks and timetabling and team collaboration on project work".

Some argue for exceptions, for children with special education needs, mental health issues and caring responsibilities, for example. Carers Trust's CEO, Kirsty McHugh, said: "It's vital that the hundreds of thousands of young carers in England are exempt from any complete ban on mobile phones in schools, which will make their lives even harder. An outright ban would make it impossible for them to stay in touch with the family members they look after."

While many parents want their children to be allowed to carry phones to school so they can stay in touch, many are happy to see them banned from the classroom. Nick Smith, a sales account manager from Cheshire, has three children. "This is a catch-22 for me but in the main I would not want to see them banned completely," he said.

"My 11-year-old has just started high school and in light of this, and his new independence, walking home, arranging his own after-school activities and to keep in touch with his parents, we bought him a phone for the first time.

"I don't approve of them in a classroom but if they ban them from school completely, rather than just insist they are off and in a bag during the school day, that would cause more problems than good."

There was a mixed reception to the ban, announced on Monday as the Conservatives gathered for their party conference in Manchester. "Classic conference announcement this," policy expert and former Department for Education adviser Sam Freedman said.

"Something nearly all schools already do and that the government can't force them to do anyway," he posted on X, formerly Twitter. Although it may have been reported as "a ban on mobile phones", it will in fact take the form of non-statutory guidance and is therefore not a legal requirement. Downing Street indicated yesterday the government could legislate on the issue.

"If it sounds familiar," Freedman goes on, "that's because it was also announced in 2021." Gavin Williamson, the education secretary in 2019-21, also sought a ban on mobile phones as part of a consultation on pupil behaviour and discipline in schools, which concluded last year that a blanket ban was not necessary as most schools were already taking action.

The government's behaviour adviser Tom Bennett was, however, delighted. "From a safeguarding, learning, and growth point of view, this is absolutely the right decision. The schools that do this never look back, and never regret it," he posted on X.