

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT COUNCIL MEETING

9th SEPTEMBER 2024

- Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")
S. Reid (Joint Chair) ("SR")
A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair) ("AW")
Michela Pagliocca
Mo Wright
Joanne Logan
Julie Flaherty
Lynsey O'Dwyer
Iltaf Dean
Mairead Brophy
Meenal Poddar
Mukesh Poddar
Anne Marie O'Brien
Lorna McIntosh
Samantha MacConnell
Katrina Adams
Dougie Wilson
- Apologies: Christopher McLaughlin
Elizabeth McHaffie
Jennifer Clare Abalo
- School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")
J. Cumming
M. Gallagher
C. Boyle
J. Wilson

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. Adoption of amended PC Constitution

The OB tabled an amended PC Constitution (Annex 1). The OB reported that this document had been intimated to the Parent Forum and that the requisite consent to the adoption of the amended Constitution had been duly obtained from the Parent Forum.

The OB proposed that the amended PC Constitution now be adopted.

A vote was taken. The PC unanimously adopted the amended PC Constitution.

4. Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes

The draft Minutes of the Parent Council Meeting on 20 May 2024 were proposed and approved with minor corrections (to the named attendees).

5. Exam Results

Mr O'Neil gave a detailed presentation to the PC explaining the results of the recent exam sittings. The results were reported to be excellent across the board. Informative comparisons with previous years were provided.

The PC members extended their sincere gratitude to Mr O'Neil and the whole teaching staff for their tireless hard work and dedication to the children, and commended them (and the children) on their accomplishments.

6. Smartphones in School: Should questions be asked about it?

The OB tabled a draft letter to ERC (Annex 2) seeking a review of ERC's current policy on smartphone use by children in ERC's schools. A lively discussion ensued.

Mr O'Neil reiterated his opposition to a ban on the use of smartphones by children in SNHS.

A vote was taken as to whether the draft letter should be sent. By a majority, the PC voted not to send the draft letter.

7. Head Teacher's Report

Mr O'Neill reported a busy start to the new academic year, with multiple ongoing trips and activities.

8. AOCB

No further business was intimated.

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting is on Monday 7 October 2024.

ANNEX 1

PC CONSTITUTION

1. Amended PC Constitution (as approved by requisite consent of Parent Forum)

CONSTITUTION

of

**THE PARENT COUNCIL
OF
ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL, GIFFNOCK**

(As adopted on 9 September 2024)

PREAMBLE

St Ninian's High School is a Roman Catholic secondary school.

The Parent Council is the representative of the Parent Forum.

The Parent Forum comprises the parents of the pupils in attendance at the School.

Among other things, the Parent Council has a vital role:

- (i) in providing a voice for parents, guardians and carers on School issues;
- (ii) in supporting the School to raise standards of education in the School, to secure improvements in the quality of education there, and to develop to their fullest potential the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the pupils in attendance at the School;
- (iii) in supporting the School to develop as an exemplar community of Catholic faith, through the promotion of Gospel values, through celebration and worship, and through service to the common good.

1. The name of the Parent Council

The full name of this association shall be "The Parent Council of St Ninian's High School".

2. The functions of the Parent Council

The Parent Council is established in terms of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act"). Its functions are as set out in the 2006 Act.

For the avoidance of doubt, the functions of the Parent Council shall also include the following:

- (i) To promote the School as an embodiment of the highest standards of learning, scholarship, personal growth and attainment;
- (ii) To promote the School as an exemplar community of Catholic faith through the promotion of Gospel values, through celebration and worship, and through service to the common good;
- (iii) To promote the moral and social teaching, faith tradition and sacramental life of the Catholic Church and its ethos within the School, including respect for different beliefs and cultures, and the promotion of inter-faith dialogue;
- (iv) To promote close cooperation and communication between the School, the Archdiocese of Glasgow, the Diocese of Paisley, the proximate Roman Catholic Parishes of St Cadoc's (Newton Mearns), St Joseph's (Clarkston), St Vincent's

(Thornliebank) and Holy Name (Mansewood), and the families of all pupils at the School;

- (v) To act as a community advocate for Catholic education (including the promotion of respect for different beliefs and cultures, and the promotion of inter-faith dialogue);
- (vi) To promote the visions, aims and values of the School, including the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland;
- (vii) To identify, discuss, and to ascertain and represent the views of the Parent Forum on, issues of interest or concern relating to the School and/or its pupils;
- (viii) To facilitate and promote the involvement of the Parent Forum as active participants in the life of the School;
- (ix) To facilitate and promote close co-operation and communication between the School and the Parent Forum;
- (x) To communicate and engage with the School, the education authority, and all other such persons, entities, agencies and associations as the Parent Council may consider appropriate, for the purpose of supporting, advancing and promoting the views of the Parent Forum and functions of the Parent Council;
- (xi) To participate in the process of recruitment of senior staff at the School;
- (xii) Without prejudice to the foregoing, to engage in all activities which, in the view of the Parent Council, support, advance or promote:
 - (1) the physical, mental and spiritual welfare of pupils at the School,
 - (2) the happiness and well-being of all pupils at the School (including by way of the provision of facilities, benefits, and curricular and extra-curricular experiences and activities, for the pupils), and/or
 - (3) the views of the Parent Forum on issues of interest or concern relating to the School and/or its pupils;including, among other things, to engage in fund-raising, social, charitable, educational, political, or lobbying activities.

3. The Powers of the Parent Council

- 3.1 The Parent Council shall have the power to do anything considered by it to be in furtherance of its functions, subject to the limitation that its principal aim and function is to represent the views of the Parent Forum.
- 3.2 Without prejudice to the foregoing generality, in pursuance of its functions, the Parent Council shall have the following powers:
 - (i) To raise funds by any legal means, except borrowing;
 - (ii) To expend those sums to carry out its functions, at its discretion, and in a manner consistent with the Catholic ethos of the School.

4. Membership of the Parent Council

Who may be a member of the Parent Council?

4.1 Only the following persons may be members of the Parent Council:-

- (i) Self-nominated members: Any member of the Parent Forum whose self-nomination (per rules 4.4 & 4.5, below) as a member of the Parent Council is approved by a majority of the members of the Parent Forum in attendance at the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") of the Parent Council.
- (ii) Co-opted members: Any person who, in order to assist the Parent Council to carry out any of its functions (whether generally or in relation to a specific task), is co-opted as a member of the Parent Council by virtue of a majority vote of either (i) the members of the Parent Forum in attendance at the AGM, or (ii) the members of the Parent Council at an Ordinary or Extraordinary Meeting of the Parent Council.

A co-opted member need not be a member of the Parent Forum.

The Parent Council should seek to achieve, in its composition, a broad and diverse representation to reflect the rich diversity of the Parent Forum.

Maximum number of self-nominated and co-opted members

4.2 The number of self-nominated members of the Parent Council shall not exceed 20 at any one time. The number of co-opted members shall not exceed five at any one time. Therefore, the aggregate maximum number of Parent Council members is 25.

4.3 At any AGM, if the number of self-nominations received from prospective members exceeds 20, then the self-nominated Parent Council members shall be selected by means of a simple open ballot carried out as follows: the names of all the self-nominees shall be written down and concealed in a batch, and the first 20 names randomly selected from the batch by the Head Teacher shall be deemed to be appointed as the self-nominated Parent Council Members.

Procedure for self-nomination

4.4 Any member of the Parent Forum who wishes to nominate himself or herself for election as a member of the Parent Council may do so as follows: either (i) by attending, in person, at the AGM to declare that self-nomination, or (ii) provided that person was, in the preceding year, already a member of the Parent Council (and neither clause 4.12 nor clause 4.14 applied to that person), by appointing a

proxy to attend in person at the AGM for him or her, to declare that self-nomination.

- 4.5 All self-nominations (whether declared in person or by proxy) shall be voted upon at the AGM.

The self-nominees shall be elected by a simple majority vote, on a show of hands, of the members of the Parent Forum in attendance, in person, at that AGM (which show of hands shall include the vote of the self-nominee, if that self-nominee or his/her proxy is in attendance, in person, at the AGM).

- 4.6 However, in order that the AGM has fair notice of the identity of all self-nominees, any member of the Parent Forum who wishes to nominate himself or herself for election as a member of the Parent Council must deliver to the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Parent Council, no later than five days in advance of the AGM at which that person seeks such election, written notice of his or her intention to seek such election disclosing (i) the full name, permanent residential address, and telephone contact number of the self-nominated member and (ii) the identity of the pupil (or pupils) at the School of whom that person is the parent or guardian; which failing, that self-nominated member shall be precluded from being elected to membership of the Parent Council at that AGM, unless permitted to do so by a simple majority vote, on a show of hands, of the members of the Parent Forum in attendance at that AGM.

Mandatory co-opted member (Church nominee)

- 4.7 The membership of the Parent Council must always include one co-opted member who is, for the time being, the Church representative nominated by the Archdiocese of Glasgow or Diocese of Paisley, as may be agreed between them.

When are members elected, and for how long?

- 4.8 All self-nominated members of the Parent Council shall be appointed at the AGM. Such members shall be elected for a term of one year only, but shall be eligible for re-election thereafter.
- 4.9 Co-opted members shall also generally be elected at the AGM (by the members of the Parent Forum), again for a term of one year only, subject to re-election thereafter. However, co-opted members may also competently be elected (by the Parent Council itself) at any Ordinary Meeting or Extraordinary Meeting of the Parent Council, if the need so arises.

- 4.10 For the avoidance of doubt, all Parent Council members (self-nominated and co-opted) shall be deemed to have demitted office automatically upon the convening of the first AGM held after the date of their respective appointments.
- 4.11 All members of the Parent Council should aim to attend every meeting of the Parent Council.
- 4.12 Any member (with the exception of the Church nominee, co-opted in terms of paragraph 4.7, above) who fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the Parent Council, whether or not apologies for such absence are tendered in advance, shall be deemed to have resigned his or her membership with immediate effect.

Summary termination of membership

- 4.13 All members of the Parent Council must conduct themselves properly at Parent Council meetings.
- 4.14 If a member of the Parent Council fails to so conduct himself or herself, that person's membership of the Parent Council may be terminated at that meeting of the Parent Council, with immediate effect, by a unanimous vote, on a show of hands, of all the other members of the Parent Council then in attendance at the meeting PROVIDED THAT the number of Parent Council members then in attendance and so voting represents not less than three quarters (75%) of the total membership of the Parent Council.

5. **Officer Holders**

Who are the office holders?

- 5.1 The Office Holders of the Parent Council shall be the Chair and the Vice-Chair, together with such other office holders as the Parent Council may determine from time to time (for example, a Treasurer and/or a Secretary); and, in each case, a joint, shared, part-time, acting, ad hoc, temporary or other flexible, appointment shall be competent.
- 5.2 The Chair and Vice-Chair must be members of the Parent Forum.
- 5.3 Office Holders must nominate themselves for office at the AGM. Each nominee must then be seconded by one other elected member of the Parent Council at the AGM. In the event of a competition for an office, the Office Holder shall be elected by a simple majority vote, on a show of hands, of the Parent Council members

elected at that AGM (which show of hands shall include the votes of the competing nominees for that office).

- 5.4. Every Office Holder shall be elected to that office for a term of one year only, but shall be eligible for re-election thereafter.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Office Holders shall be deemed to have demitted office automatically upon the convening of the first AGM held after the date of their respective appointments.

- 5.5. In the event of there being any vacancy in the role of any Office Holder, for any reason, temporary or otherwise, that vacancy may be filled at any subsequent Parent Council meeting, by the procedure set out above.
- 5.6. The Chair, assisted by the Vice-Chair (i) shall act as the spokesperson for the Parent Council; (ii) shall act as the principal liaison (on behalf of the Parent Council) with the Head Teacher, the School, all proximate Roman Catholic parishes and the Parent Forum (as well as with all third parties, including the local education authority); (iii) shall have particular responsibility to ensure that the Parent Council acts in a manner consistent with its functions and powers including, without prejudice to the foregoing generality, by promoting and encouraging the teaching and practice of the Catholic faith and its ethos within the School (including respect for different beliefs and cultures).
- 5.7. The Office Holders shall be responsible for keeping account of all income and expenditure of the Parent Council, they shall present a financial report to all Parent Council meetings, and they shall present written accounts for approval by the Parent Forum at the first AGM following their appointment.

6. Meetings of the Parent Council

Openness

- 6.1 All Parent Council meetings (and the Annual General Meeting) shall be fully open and accessible to the entire Parent Forum, unless the Parent Council is discussing an item that it considers to be confidential.

The Head Teacher

- 6.2 The Head Teacher of the School shall have both a right and a duty to attend, or to be represented at, all meetings of the Parent Council, and shall be entitled to receive due notice of the same.

The Head Teacher shall be also entitled to be accompanied at any such meeting by any member (or members) of the School's teaching or administrative staff as the Head Teacher may choose.

The Head Teacher shall have no voting rights at any such meeting of the Parent Council.

How often are meetings to be held?

- 6.3 The Annual General Meeting ("AGM") of the Parent Council shall be held each year during the first term of the School year (in either August or September).

Notice of the calling of the AGM shall be advertised to the existing Parent Council members, and to the Parent Forum, no less than two weeks prior to the AGM.

The business of the AGM shall include (i) a report on the activities of the Parent Council in the preceding year, (ii) approval of the accounts, if any, (iii) any resolutions submitted by the Parent Council and (iv) election of Office Holders and members to serve on the Parent Council.

- 6.4 Thereafter, Parent Council meetings shall be held at least twice in each School term (referred to as "Ordinary Meetings").

- 6.5 Additional meetings of the Parent Council shall forthwith be arranged, as and when considered desirable or necessary, upon submission to the Chair of a written request to that effect by either (i) no fewer than two or more Office Holders or (ii) no fewer than one third in number of the current Parent Council members (referred to as an "Extraordinary Meeting"). If the Chair is unavailable for any reason (or if the office of Chair is vacant for the time being), such a request should be submitted to the current Parent Council members.

- 6.6 Not less than one week's notice must be given to the Parent Council members and to the Head Teacher of the calling of all such meetings (that is, any Ordinary Meeting and any Extraordinary Meeting); and the holding of all such meetings shall be notified in advance to the Parent Forum.

Who decides the agenda of the meeting?

- 6.7 All Parent Council members, and all members of the Parent Forum, shall be entitled to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of, and for discussion at, any meeting of the Parent Council.

All such proposed agenda items must be notified to the Chair or Vice Chair no less than one week prior to the meeting.

The Chair shall decide whether or not to include the suggested item on the agenda for that meeting.

However, in the interests of openness and transparency, all proposed agenda items received by the Chair, but which are not included in the agenda, shall be logged and disclosed to the Parent Council at the meeting by way of an appendix to the agenda.

Quorum

- 6.8 At all meetings of the Parent Council, the quorum shall consist of seven members (which number must include either the Chair or Vice Chair).

Voting rights

- 6.9 At all meetings of the Parent Council, each member of the Parent Council shall have one vote.
- 6.10 All resolutions at a meeting of the Parent Council shall be passed by a simple majority vote of those members of the Parent Council who are present.
- 6.11 The Chair shall have both a deliberative and casting vote: one (deliberative) vote as a Parent Council member and one (casting) vote as Chair.

The Chair's casting vote shall be used only in the event of a tie.

Exclusion of personal liability

- 6.12 No member of the Parent Council shall incur any personal liability (to the Parent Council, or to its members or any member thereof, or to any member of the Parent Forum, or to any third party whomsoever) for any act or omission in the exercise or purported exercise of any function of the Parent Council, provided that member acted (or omitted to act) in good faith.

7. Sub-Committees

- 7.1 The Parent Council may appoint any number of its members to a sub-committee or sub-committees of the Parent Council as and when it deems it desirable or expedient, and shall be entitled to determine the terms of reference, powers, composition and duration of any such sub-committee.
- 7.2 Any such sub-committee shall be accountable, and obliged to report when required, to the Parent Council.
- 7.3 In the discharge of its remit, the sub-committee members shall be at liberty to seek and obtain, from time to time, *ad hoc* advice and assistance of whatever nature from any suitable person, whether or not that person is a member of the Parent Council or Parent Forum.

8. Finance

- 8.1 The funds, if any, of the Parent Council shall be lodged in a bank account in the name of the Parent Council.
- 8.2 Any member of the Parent Council who incurs a necessary and reasonable expense on Parent Council business, on the authority of the Parent Council (or as subsequently ratified), shall be reimbursed for such incurred expense (always provided sufficient funds are available) on provision of satisfactory proof of such expenditure.
- 8.3 All proposed intrusions with Parent Council funds must be notified to, and approved in advance, by the Parent Council. All intrusions with Parent Council funds must be approved in advance by at least two Office Holders.
- 8.4 With the express approval of the Parent Council, the Parent Council may in its absolute discretion elect, upon the provision of satisfactory proof of expenditure, to reimburse a third party, in whole or in part, for reasonable expenses incurred by the third party in the provision of a service or activity which, in the view of the Parent Council, is consistent with the functions of the Parent Council; but in so doing the Parent Council shall not assume any liability for acts or omissions of the third party in carrying out any such service or activity.
- 8.6 The Office Holders shall be responsible for keeping accurate records of the financial transactions of the Parent Council. The books shall be brought to balance no later than four weeks before the AGM and the accounts shall be reviewed at the AGM.

8.7 The Parent Council shall be responsible for ensuring that all property and money received by or for the Parent Forum or Parent Council shall be applied solely for the purposes, aims and functions of the Parent Council.

9 **Review, Amendment and Replacement of Constitution**

9.1 The Parent Council may, at any time, authorise a review of this Constitution.

9.2 The Parent Council may, at any Parent Council meeting, with the requisite consent of the Parent Forum (as defined by the 2006 Act), amend (or replace) the Constitution of the Parent Council, whenever it appears to the Parent Council to be necessary or expedient to do so.

10. **Reports to Parent Forum**

10.1 The Parent Council is accountable to the Parent Forum and will make a report in writing to the Parent Forum at each AGM on the activities undertaken by it in the preceding year.

10.2 In addition to the foregoing, minutes of the meetings of the Parent Council will be taken, approved, and promptly made available to the Parent Forum.

11. **Dispensing Power**

11.1 Any failure to comply with a time limit or other formality or requirement specified in this Constitution (other than in relation to the quorum) shall not, by itself, thereby invalidate any meeting or any action or decision taken by the Parent Council or Office Holders PROVIDED THAT any such non-compliance is waived or excused by the Parent Council (at that meeting or subsequently).

12. **Cessation or Dissolution**

In the event that the Parent Council ceases to function or exist, any property or funds held by it shall transferred to the Head Teacher to be used for the benefit of the School and its pupils.

DATE OF ADOPTION BY PARENT COUNCIL:

9 SEPTEMBER 2024

DATE OF REQUISITE CONSENT OF PARENT FORUM:

28 JUNE 2024

ANNEX 2

SMARTPHONES IN SCHOOL: SHOULD QUESTIONS BE ASKED ABOUT IT?

1. Draft letter to ERC (proposed by the Office Bearers)

THE PARENT COUNCIL
OF
ST. NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

Joint Chair:

J. Stewart

S. Reid

Vice Chair

A. Wilmott

c/o St Ninian's High School

Eastwood Park

Rouken Glen Road

Giffnock

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The Director of Education
Education Services Department
East Renfrewshire Council
Rouken Glen Road
Glasgow
G46 6UG

[DRAFT ONLY]

Dear Sir,

"Smartphone-free" Schools

We refer to our exchange of correspondence dated 20 & 28 February 2024.

The use of mobile phones (specifically, smartphones) in school by children is a subject of increasing public concern.

Such devices have certain benefits; but they are also associated with harms; and, increasingly, parents are beginning to question whether schools and education authorities have struck the correct balance in promoting their use in schools.

What is ERC's current mobile phone policy?

Currently, East Renfrewshire Council ("ERC") positively encourages (and supports) the use of smartphones in school by children.

Under a scheme known as "BYOD" ("Bring your own Device"), ERC actively encourages children to bring a mobile device to school by enabling them to access the internet on any personal device through the Council's filtered network. The policy is subtly fortified by practical arrangements, such as the necessity to order lunches online, the use of QR codes to access research resources, and the use of Google classroom.

All ERC secondary schools, and around half of ERC's primary schools, utilise the BYOD scheme.

However, recent developments have cast doubt on the wisdom and scientific rationale of ERC's current Policy.

What has changed?

A groundswell of reputable research has emerged which now supports the conclusions that (i) the use of smartphones in schools is damaging to academic attainment, and (ii) more generally, smartphone use can be positively harmful to the mental well-being of young children.

In summary:

The LSE Study (2015)

1. In 2015, the London School of Economics investigated the relationship between school mobile phone bans and educational attainment in four cities in the UK.

The study found that, following a ban, student test scores improved by 6.41%, provided there was wide compliance.

Significantly, banning mobile phones improved outcomes for low-achieving students the most (by 14.23%), with no significant impact on high achievers.

In other words, banning mobile phones is a low-cost, low-risk way for schools to reduce educational inequality.

The OECD PISA Report (2022)

2. In 2022, in its PISA Report on educational standards, the OECD observed a consistent decline in educational standards in Scottish schools over a 14 year period.

The PISA Report explicitly identified mobile phones in school as a "damaging distraction" for pupils.

The Report disclosed that almost one in three 15 year olds in Scotland (and across the OECD countries) reported being distracted using digital devices in most or every maths class; and around a quarter of pupils were distracted by other pupils using digital devices.

Pupils were found to be less distracted when they switched off notifications from social networks and Apps on their digital devices during class; when they did not have their digital device open in class to take notes or search for information; and when they did not feel pressured to be online and answer messages while in class.

Smartphone use in schools was observed to be “quite clearly linked in Scotland, but also in other countries, to greater student anxiety, to more disruption, to less concentration” (Andreas Schleicher, OECD, Directorate of Education & Skills.)

The UNESCO Report (2023)

3. In 2023, UNESCO called upon all countries to ban mobile phones in schools.

Following a review of 200 education systems worldwide, it concluded that the ban would reduce classroom distraction, support children’s learning, and protect children from online bullying.

International Developments

4. Almost one in four countries globally has already introduced mobile phone bans in schools, with more joining suit. By way of illustration :
 - In 2018, France banned the use of mobile phones by children in school. French law stipulates that children cannot use their mobile phones within school grounds. The ban allows for specific exceptions for children with special educational needs and disabilities, where devices can be used to support their needs. The French ban continues to enjoy widespread support.
 - By July 2023, all the Australian States had banned mobile phones in state schools.
 - In 2024, the Netherlands introduced a mobile phone ban in secondary schools. (The ban will be extended to primary schools from September 2024.)
 - In February 2024, the UK Government issued non-statutory Guidance to ban smartphones for under 16s in schools in England and Wales.

The House of Commons Education Select Committee Report (2024)

5. In April 2024, the House of Commons Education Select Committee (a cross-party committee) published a significant Report entitled "Screen Time: Impacts on Education and Wellbeing".

Its findings are damning.

The Committee concluded:

- The risks associated with increased screen time for children and young people "significantly outweighed its benefits";
- There had been a significant rise in screen time in recent years, with one in four children now using their mobile phone "in a manner resembling behavioural addiction";
- Almost all children own a phone by the age of 12 – and 79% had encountered violent pornography before the age of 18;
- The Committee heard "shocking statistics on the extent of the damage being done to under 18s" by smartphone use;
- The Committee's recommendations included the possibility of a total ban on smartphones for under 16s;
- The Committee recommended a statutory ban on smartphones in schools if the current (English & Welsh) non-statutory ban was not implemented effectively.

The Chair of the Select Committee stated:

"Without urgent action, more children will be put in harm's way.

From exposure to pornography, to criminal gangs using online platforms to recruit children, the online world poses serious dangers. Parents and schools face an uphill struggle and Government must do more to help them meet this challenge. This might require radical steps, such as potentially a ban on smartphones for under-16s.

Whilst there can be some benefits from the online world and sharing information or interests with peers, ready, unsupervised and unrestricted access to the internet leaves children vulnerable, exposing them to a world for which they are not equipped.

Their safeguarding and protection must be our priority".

The Scottish Government's Guidance on mobile phones (2024)

6. In August 2024, the Scottish Government published updated Guidance on the use of mobile phones in school.

The Guidance acknowledges “a growing body of evidence to suggest that over-exposure to mobile phone use can result in limited concentration, unhappiness and isolation”.

It acknowledges “increased concerns” over disruption caused by the misuse of devices in class (as evidenced by the Government’s own Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023).

It acknowledges “an increase in more serious behaviours”, including the abusive use of mobile phones to bully or harass pupils and staff.

It commits to support any head teacher who decides to institute a ban on mobile phones in their school.

It then leaves it up to individual head teachers to take whatever decision they consider most appropriate for their individual schools.

What is the scientific rationale for the current ERC Policy?

According to UNESCO, the use of mobile phones by children within school should be permitted only if there is an evidenced educational benefit in doing so.

Therefore, the proper questions (for parents, teachers and education authorities) are:

- Is there any evidenced educational benefit in promoting the use of mobile telephony in school by children, and
- Does that evidenced educational benefit outweigh the evidenced harms presented to children by such devices?

Those evidenced harms to children are now incontrovertible. They include:

- reduced concentration skills;
- increased class disruption;
- increased social isolation,
- increased levels of anxiety, depression, and mental ill-health,
- the development of addictive behavioural traits,

- increased exposure to cyber-bullying, extremist opinion, misogyny, pornography, criminality, and sexual exploitation.

Three recent deaths tragically illustrate the risks presented to young people: Molly Russell (who committed suicide having been fed extreme “self-harm” content by social media algorithms); Murray Dowie (who committed suicide after falling prey to a “sextortion” gang on Instagram); and Brianna Ghey (who was murdered by two teenagers influenced by extreme violent content on encrypted internet sites).

Statistically, young girls are particularly vulnerable to the risk of harm.

The correlation between smartphone use and an upsurge in anorexia (and other eating disorders) in girls is well documented.

Interestingly, in August 2020, in written Guidance issued to Head Teachers, ERC candidly acknowledged the positive harms associated with mobile telephony in schools. The Guidance stated:

“Regretfully, there is a growing portfolio of examples of issues arising from inappropriate use of such devices and technologies by a minority. Some examples include:

- mobile phones ringing during lessons;
- young people “texting” during lessons;
- devices being used to take and send images inappropriately;
- using mobile technologies to connect to internet sites with inappropriate content;
- using mobile technologies to store unacceptable content, either pornographic, sectarian or racist;
- bullying by text or phone.”

Yet, despite recognising the occurrence of these harms, ERC decided that it was “not appropriate” to implement an outright and universal ban on such devices, because of (i) the “perceived benefits” of mobile phones in school and because (ii) a ban was thought “likely to generate complaints from young people and parents” who were thought likely to “quote child safety requirements...”.

With respect, a policy that is based merely upon “perceived” benefit, as opposed to an evidenced educational benefit vouched by robust data, would be inadequate.

Likewise, a policy that is based merely upon a vague apprehension about speculative “complaints”, on dubious grounds, would be inadequate.

Regrettably, the published rationale for the current ERC policy does not bear close scrutiny.

The UNCRC obligation to protect children from injury

Lastly, section 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force on 16 July 2024.

It imposes a new legal duty on local authorities (among others) to:

“... take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child” (Article 19, UNCRC).

When a child attends a local authority school, the local authority acts *in loco parentis* – and has “care of the child”.

Therefore, local authorities are obliged to take “all appropriate administrative... and educational measures” to protect those children from the evidenced harms presented by smartphone use in schools.

It might be suggested that such obligatory “measures” necessarily include a ban on smartphone use in schools (with reasonable adjustments for individual pupils with special needs), in the absence of robust evidence to establish any genuine educational benefit in permitting their use within the school environment.

Conclusions

In light of the foregoing, the need for an urgent review of ERC’s current policy on smartphone use in its schools is compelling.

The current policy on mobile telephony in schools would appear to be unscientific and unvouched by robust and disclosed empirical data.

Even the terminology of the current policy (“BYOD”) is, at best, trivialising and ill-judged, in the context of devices that are well-recognised to be seriously addictive and potentially harmful to the mental well-being of children.

That apart, the lawfulness of the policy may now be open to challenge, in light of the incorporation of the UNCRC (Article 19) into Scottish law.

Therefore, we would be obliged if you would consider the following:

1. Please confirm that ERC will initiate an urgent review of its policy on smartphone use in schools.

2. Please provide us with details of the independent scientific research and empirical data upon which ERC bases its current policy of promoting mobile phone use by children in schools.

Specifically:

- 2.1 Please identify the independent scientific research and empirical data upon which ERC relies to support the conclusion that the use of smartphones by children in schools provides any genuine educational benefit(s).
- 2.2 Please identify any such genuine educational benefit(s).
- 2.3 Please identify the independent scientific research and empirical data upon which ERC relies to support the conclusion that any such educational benefit outweighs the evidenced harms associated with such smartphone use.

Depending upon the science, a change of ethos may have to be contemplated.

Far from promoting mobile phone use in school by children, ERC may require to consider whether the weight of scientific research now favours the creation of “smartphone-free” schools within East Renfrewshire - as safe havens for learning - liberated from the avoidable distractions, disruption, and harmful effects commonly associated with such devices in the hands of children.

Depending upon the science, it may even be suggested that a culture of “smartphone-free” learning and social interaction at school would go some way to stemming the current societal epidemic in mental ill-health within younger age groups generally.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

J. Stewart

Joint Chair

S. Reid

Joint Chair

cc. Councillor Anderson, Chair, Education Committee, East Renfrewshire Council