**Smartphone Survey Results**

**June 2024**

Parent Council would like to extend our thanks to all the respondents to our survey on Smartphones and children. We received 87 responses, which is a very large number compared to other recent parent surveys. We believe this reflects the importance of this issue and the strong feelings around it in our government, schools, media and wider culture today.

As we expected, opinions varied widely on the use of smartphones by children. Many respondents generously shared personal and detailed written responses to our questions, offering up hopes and fears from their own families. In reading the data overall, a large sense of unease is clearly palpable, while still reflecting a variety of opinions on these complex issues.

**Results**:

An overwhelming 76% of respondents said their children had no mobile phone of any kind. A further 14% said their children owned a dumbphone which can only call and text, or a smartphone with very limited functionality and no sim card. This is a total of 90% of Lawhead children of respondents who do not own a fully functional smartphone. This is an interesting statistic to keep in mind when children complain that ‘everyone’ else has one!

Of the children who do own a phone of some kind, the most cited use for the phone was basic communication (texts and calls) with parents, guardians and friends (67%). 23% of children who own a phone are using it for photos, the same again for gaming apps. Only 13% of children are using their phones to do homework or access Glow. An even smaller percentage (10%) are using their phones to access social media apps. A number of respondents offered other examples of things their children were using the phone for i.e. listening to music or audiobooks and using the phone as an alarm clock.

Of the respondents whose children did not already own a phone, replies varied about the age at which parents intended to get them a phone. 1 respondent replied they had no plans to buy their child/ren a smartphone. 3 replied that they would like to delay as long as possible. 25 respondents supplied a specific age or school year. If we take S1 to mean (on average) age 12, then we can present the replies in a cleaner way. 32% of respondents replied that they would give their child a phone at age 12/S1. 28% replied 16. The mean age provided across the responses was 13.2.

87% of respondents replied that they were concerned about their children being exposed to inappropriate material through a smartphone. Some respondents expanded on this in the offered text box. Age-inappropriate material was cited multiple times, as well as concerns about bullying and photographing/filming without consent.

60% of respondents said they would be interested in additional support (i.e. workshops) on these issues for parents. 25% said they would not be interested. A few respondents replied that they would not attend personally but thought the support would be valuable to others. A few replied that they had already attended a session on online safety at Madras College and found this to be valuable. Approximately equal numbers of respondents expressed interest in the following topic for potential workshops: Online Safety, Supporting Children to Use Smartphones and Social Media in a Positive Way and Child Development in Relation to Screen Use and Social Media.

Concerning a school-based voluntary pledge to delay smartphone ownership, 64% said they would like the opportunity to make a voluntary pledge, 22% were unsure but wanted more information and 8% replied they would not be interested in this. A few respondents stressed the importance of exact age in this conversation, as well as not making children who already had a phone feel penalised in some way.

In the final free text box offered to respondents we received a variety of contributions. Here I include a selection of anonymous quotes which are representative of the overall mood of the survey results:

*“I don't think they need a smartphone. They could have dumb phone in case of communication with parents. They could have tablets at home for learning and entertaining.”*

*“I would be delighted for a full ban until the age of 16 for smart phone, happy for a call/text phone from 1st year of secondary school.”*

*“I would love some intervention from the Government - introducing an age limit for a phone (aged 15 as an example). Not sure how that could be policed but I think it is very necessary. I notice a huge difference in my child when she is/has been using her smartphone: grumpy, snippy, rude. They have lost interest in things they used to love and would spend all the time on their phone if they could. Peer pressure from others their age makes it hard to minimise use, I don't want them to feel left out but I hate letting them use it so much.”*

*“The biggest issues with smartphones (as opposed to the internet more generally) is bullying and also a lack of focus on other activities and a lack of personal and non phone related communication. Kids who spend too much time on phones have no ability to communicate with people.”*

*“This is the biggest threat our children face - we are fools if we underestimate it. We have no idea the effect that these devices have long-term on children's eye sight, brains, learning outcomes, physical and mental health, and overall development as a person. I know someone who works high up in Silicon Valley: it is a fact that most parents in big-tech send their children to schools that minimise devices, and do not allow social media. They know the harm, and that it does not produce the best learning outcomes or development. Tim Cook, head of Apple, has spoken openly about it, and said that he would prefer his (only) nephew not to have a smart phone or social media account. We seriously need to wise up and protect our children, before any more damage is done.”*

*“Monitoring use is essential, however there are many benefits if used safely - location tracking, change of collection plans, communication with wider family and friends through social media.”*

*“Delaying phone as long as possible. Siblings got phones for high school, where peer pressure is much greater but I haven’t let them use any social media yet and they have limited data allowance as well as daily time restrictions. It’s still too much though. Their friends all have them and they see far too much and have had photos taken and passed around online without permission. They are more tech savvy than us and I do worry what they are reading online and who they might be communicating with. It’s impossible to make it completely safe so we have conversations and there is a level of trust between us. They’re asked to use their phones in class for certain things like taking photos of notes or to use Google. It really annoys me and I wish this was stopped. If it were up to me there would be a ban in high school as well as primary. There are benefits to having phones - being able to communicate with them being the most importantly thing. No matter what restrictions are in place mobile phones are a huge problem - bullying, addiction, pressure to have good iPhones, cost of running them etc.”*

*“The longer we can delay a phone, the better. Of course it is important that they are not too different from their friends, so the only solution is a collective delay. Thanks for bringing this up!”*

*“They use a smart phone with no sim. Mainly for music, games and alarm clock (and soon the weather). We use the family link app and got a tip from a Madras meeting on the subject about something particular about the app to ensure we can use it for a long time. I can remotely see what she is using. Browser function is blocked. so currently, it's not causing a problem. For calls and texts, we might get a dumb phone, but having GPS is useful with a smart phone (which also you get with the family link app).”*

*“Really glad that this is being taken seriously. There are so many harms from children having smart phones too young.”*

*“Pledge for no phone until secondary school would probably be successful and I would support this”*

*“I would like to delay smart phone use - I would be happy for my son to have a functional phone for ‘calling’ if away from us as getting older but not for social media use and the addictive side of it. I would prefer it was not used for learning at all when they get to secondary age as understand some schools encourage them to be used for learning , and I do not agree with this.”*

*“I firmly believe that this is a parent’s decision. My child does have a smart phone but only has access to it for calls and text messages. No one is aware of everyone’s different circumstances and maybe that child needs to have a phone for certain reasons. It is for a parent to educate their children about appropriate smart phone use, screen time usage and monitoring. I believe the school should play a part in educating the children in being responsible digital citizens but the rest is just parenting.”*

*“I feel some children are given smart phones too early and they don't really need the until at least secondary school. I have a worry about bullying through chat forums such as snapchat.”*

*“I think social media/internet should be part of the curriculum. I think Lawhead do a really good job of trying to weave in wider topics within the traditional curriculum...well done to you!”*

*“I would fully support a smart phone ban for under 16's. I feel that SmartPhones encourage bullying, exclusionary behaviour within groups, retarded development, mental health issues, access to inappropriate material (parents can block their own child’s smart phone, but there will always be one child who still has access and shares the material), finally, lots of big-tech owners limit or ban their kids smartphone use (see Bill Gates and Steve Jobs), this should be a red-flag to us all!”*

*“My child does not currently own a phone but I am keen to find out more. As my child gets older I am sure we will eventually get them a phone in order to keep in touch/ safety when they are out with friends or walking home from school. It would be good to find out more information about how to limit use and protect them online. It is a worry for the future.”*

**Conclusions**: Since this was a survey carried out amongst parents and guardians of primary aged children, we did not expect high proportions of smartphone ownership in children. According to Ofcom this rises sharply as children go through secondary school, with 100% of 17-year-olds in the UK owning a smartphone.

Opinions differed on the roles and responsibilities of public bodies on this issue. Many parents openly expressed a wish that the government would do more to regulate access to smartphone and social media, with several respondents expressing that they would support a government ban on under-16s owning smartphones. An equal number of parents expressed a desire to see smartphones kept out of primary and secondary schools entirely. One respondent emphasized that this was an issue primarily for parents to regulate, within families, and not for outside regulation from government or schools.

**For the future**:

The results from this survey provide us with a clear mandate from the Lawhead community to take this issue forward and continue this conversation in the school and our wider community.

At the AGM in the beginning of the next school session, I propose we present a series of recommendations off the back of these survey results. My suggestions are as follows, and I am very happy to bring these recommendations to a larger discussion group (Parent Council and School leadership) for more ideas and input.

1. A short series of evening information sessions for parents on 3 topics, as mentioned above. These could be run in or out of school, depending on preference. Online safety input from police could be an option. I am happy to run a session, as is Liz Peacock.
2. Producing a two-sided document for families.
   1. One side would present some alternatives to smartphone ownership. For example, radios and kids’ smart speakers to play music. Alarm clocks. Dumb phones for texting and calling. Digital cameras. Tracking devices. These items could be used as an alternative to smartphones, fulfilling many of the functions which parents tell us are useful to their children, without some of the attendant dangers associated with smartphones.
   2. The other side would be a non-binding, voluntary pledge for parents and children to sign. This could include talking points to help parents have a useful conversation with their children about the harms and benefits of smartphones and a place for parents and children to sign, if they wish. My recommendation for a pledge to delay smartphone use would be to wait until age 14 for smartphones and age 16 for social media. This is based on the most current research (Jean Twenge, Jonathan Haidt and many others) on children and adolescents use of smartphones. It is also not far off from the results of this survey, where many parents expressed support for smart phone bans until 16, and the average age at which parents said they planned to give their child a phone was 13.2 years.
3. Present our findings to the other schools in St Andrews and invite them to carry out their own surveys to see if this is a matter of concern for their parent bodies.

I look forward to carrying on the conversation.

Yours Sincerely,

Melati Cox