



Smartphone policies in schools: What does the evidence say?

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Preface

Seen through a media lens, school smartphone ‘bans’ may seem the obvious policy to address the concerns of parents and school leaders about the impact of digital technology on education. But what is meant in practice, and do policies to restrict students’ access to their smartphones at school actually work?

This research report gathers evidence from around the world where smartphone ‘bans’ – or, more accurately, ‘partial restrictions’ – have taken place in schools. The findings suggest that such policies can benefit learning, particularly for those who struggle most. There is little research on whether such bans make children happier, although when consulted, children tend to agree on the benefits of keeping smartphones out of class.

However, further research and greater policy imagination is urgently needed. What do we mean by banning phones? Do we just mean smartphones, or do we include any connected device? Should we embrace the use of technology in the classroom on school-owned and school-configured devices? Is it the device that matters, or should policy instead address certain categories of products and services, particularly those designed to maximise attention, such as gaming, social media or shopping? And how does age and development impact on the answers to each of these questions?

Different audiences may have different answers. Consultation by 5Rights Foundation shows that *parents* are confused by the apparently conflicting calls for tech-savvy children to participate in a technological future but also to deal with the problematic impacts on wellbeing, learning, social and personal relationships that they experience. *Teachers* are frustrated by the failure to protect children from the risky-by-design apps that interrupt children’s sleep, lessons and social cohesion, and by parents’ unwillingness to ensure their children observe age limits, bedtimes or rules about phones in bedrooms. Meanwhile, children are clear that meeting and learning ‘in person’ is far preferable, and that unless everyone is ‘off’, they cannot be ‘off’. They are positive about the digital world, but find that the algorithmic demands of products and services exacerbate social pressures just at the time when they are learning and building their relationships.

This lack of clarity spills over into the larger question of who is responsible for the problems linked to children’s use of smartphones at school? For many, legislation for better, safer, less attention-grabbing digital technologies has been too slow, circumscribed and timid; many also want governments and regulators to be bolder and quicker; others suggest that simply delaying access to smartphones is the answer. This report calls for more research, more accurate use of language and greater sophistication in how the problem is analysed. It also recognises that, while current evidence shows there is a benefit in restricting personal devices in schools and, simultaneously, in investing in digital literacy, the problem of tech and children neither starts nor ends at the school gate. Governments and regulators have responded narrowly to demands for protections for children and responsibilities to be attributed to

the companies that design and deploy consumer products and services to children.¹ And they have failed to tackle the quality and privacy afforded by educational technology (EdTech),² leaving anxious parents calling for phone bans and children exposed to the full gamut of extractive tech policies, even when at school.

What we need is an informed tech policy that supports individual child development and enables them to learn, access personalised information and express themselves in environments designed for their rights and needs rather than the maximisation of tech companies' profits.

¹ www.digital-futures-for-children.net/EdTech-needs-a-code-of-practice

² Kidron et al. (2023); Livingstone et al. (2024).

Executive summary

As mobile phones have become smartphones, and with the rapid expansion of social media and other attention-demanding products, concerns are growing that children's mobile access in school (and elsewhere) is undermining their academic learning, along with their mental health, social relationships and personal safety. In response, we need researchers to extend the available evidence base to understand children's digital lives and inform policymaking.

In recent years, schools around the world have been embracing a range of educational technologies (EdTech). In contrast, one in seven countries has recently introduced policies to limit or prevent pupil access to smartphones at school, and more are debating such policies. While these shifts are part of wider societal dilemmas about how best to manage the unfolding digital environment and meet children's needs, this report focuses on schools' smartphone policies.

The Digital Futures for Children centre (DFC) supports an evidence base for child rights-based advocacy, facilitates dialogue between academics and policymakers, and amplifies children's voices. Several children's rights are at stake in the debate over schools' smartphone policies, beginning with children's right to a good quality education, and including their rights to development, safety, privacy, agency and expression, leisure and play, non-discrimination, freedom from commercial exploitation, and the right to be heard on matters that affect them.

Our review of the most up-to-date international evidence regarding the efficacy of smartphone policies that restrict use in secondary school suggests that:

- Despite considerable media attention, remarkably few studies have examined the effects of school smartphone policies on students' academic performance or other outcomes.
- Despite the word 'ban' being widely employed, school smartphone policies vary considerably in content and implementation. Few, if any, schools have implemented outright bans, and research on the views of educators and students shows they favour nuanced policies

'successful' take a stricter approach than other schools in limiting students' access at school.

- Singapore has promoted the use of students' personal digital devices at school for educational benefits, while also operating strict school management software (to prevent misuse). To ensure digital inclusion, The Ministry of Education has recently insisting that everyone who is able to pay for their device, but for students who require financial aid, the government will provide subsidies to cover the entire cost of the smart device. Schools also actively promote wide-ranging digital literacy education and teacher training to ensure the benefits are realised. Nonetheless, there is public discussion of the possible need to 'ban' student access to their own smartphones at school.
- In Colombia, an association of colleges and schools has determined its own policies for students' smartphone access at school. The government's legal framework, however, prioritises students' right to access digital services, so schools are required to clarify the risks involved in smartphone use at school, as they seek a balance between beneficial and problematic outcomes for children.

Most studies in this field are subject to a degree of methodological criticism, including inconsistency in descriptions of school smartphone policies and implementation. To underpin effective government policies, it would be timely to conduct robust before-and-after evaluations (or experiments on the implementation of contrasting policies) in contexts where policy change is planned.

Eschewing the term 'ban' for its top-down and simplifying implications, this research report uses instead the word 'restriction' to more precisely delineate both the policies examined in research and the policies called for by many educators and families, as part of a wider rethinking of both the benefits and risks of smartphone technology in children's lives. We conclude with evidence-based and child rights-respecting suggestions for policymakers and educators.

1. CONTEXT

Déjà vu, what's new?

'Put learners first': Unesco calls for global ban on smartphones in schools. *The Guardian* (26/7/2023)¹

'Much easier to say no': Irish town unites in smartphone ban for young children. *The Guardian* (3/6/2023)¹

This Florida school district banned cellphones. Here's what happened. *The New York Times* (31/10/2023)¹

Cellphones banned in Catalan primary schools and restricted in secondary schools. *Catalan News* (30/1/24)¹

One school's journey with phone free policies. *The International Educator* (14/8/24)¹

In 2005, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced a ban on smartphones in all public schools.⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, it has taken nearly 20 years for nations across the globe to consider similar actions. Following a 2023 assessment by UNESCO⁶ of technology in education, there have been worldwide calls for school smartphone "bans"⁷. However, the language of 'bans' is too simplistic to explain school practice, which varies significantly across (and within) countries in its conceptualisation, implementation and enforcement. The most restrictive policies do not permit smartphones at school at all, although it is more common to require students to hand in smartphones on arrival at school or put them in storage lockers. Less restrictive schools may permit smartphones as long as they are turned off and kept in bags. Some schools allow limited use (e.g., during lunch or break time, but not in class). Few schools have no rules at all.

⁵ Bloomberg (2024).

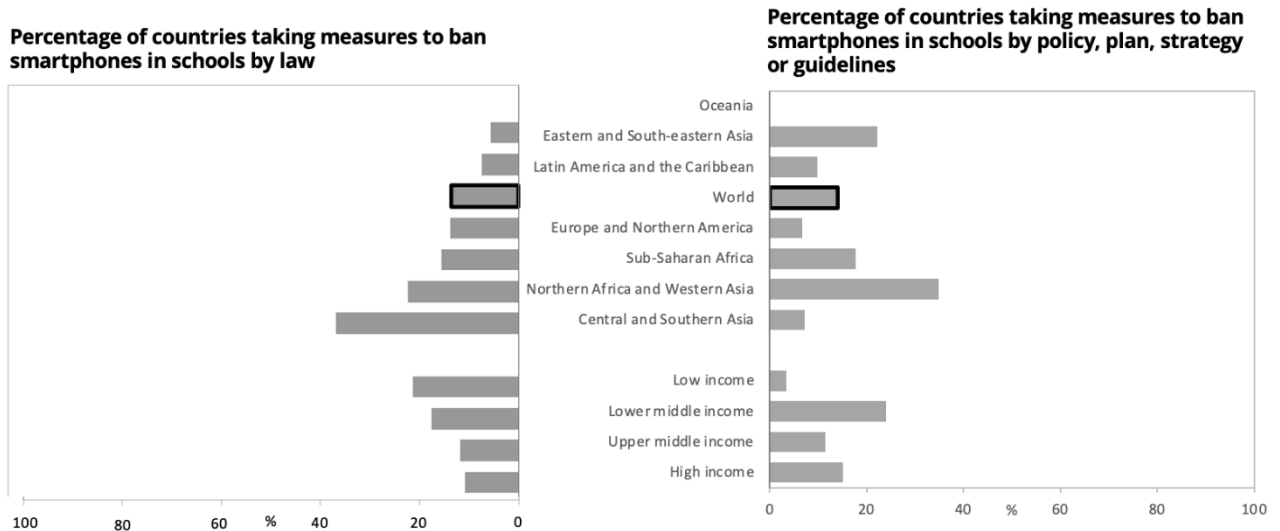
⁶ UNESCO (2023).

⁷ The number of online news articles referring to a 'ban' doubled from 2023 to 2024 – and the year is not yet over (Google News, 2024); cf.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/09/dutch-school-that-banned-mobile-phones-calvijn-college> or <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/27/france-to-trial-ban-on-mobile-phones-at-school-for-children-under-15>

A recent UK study suggests that outright bans are rare.⁸ Globally, one in seven countries has introduced laws, policies, strategies or guidelines that mandate or advise public schools to limit or prohibit student smartphone use during the school day,⁹ notably in Central and Southern Asia, North Africa and Western Asia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of countries taking measures to ban smartphones in schools by law or by policy, plan, strategy or guidelines (UNESCO, 2023)



The way that these policies are formulated, evidenced, implemented and enforced varies greatly across and within countries. Such variation allows this report to ask, *what can be learned from research on school smartphone policies regarding beneficial or detrimental outcomes for children?*

Why now?

Since its debut in 2007, the smartphone has rapidly become the primary way in which millions of individuals around the world, including children, access the internet. Upward trends in children's and young people's access to mobile phones, increasingly smartphones, are evident around the world.¹⁰ In many developing countries, phones

⁸ Mansfield et al. (2024).

⁹ Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, China, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Greece, Guinea, Hong Kong, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and the United States, as well as Ontario (Canada) and Scotland (UK), have full or partial bans.

¹⁰ Pew Research Centre (2023); see also Livingstone et al. (2022).

have been adopted at greater rates because they are more convenient and affordable than personal computers.¹¹

Among the many contexts and consequences to be examined, smartphone ownership at school creates new challenges for school leadership teams, teachers and policymakers. Smartphones and their supported apps may be valued educational resources for student performance and engagement both in class¹² and in connecting school and home environments.¹³ This became especially evident during the global Covid-19 pandemic, when millions of students had little choice but to use personal devices to continue their studies during school closures.¹⁴ Yet research also shows that smartphone use at school is linked to the disruption of student concentration,¹⁵ with concerns also about cheating¹⁶ and safety,¹⁷ among other adverse outcomes.¹⁸ Indeed, in recent years the smartphone has gone from being a 'lifeline' to a 'catalyst' for the 'dramatic decline in mental health' among children.¹⁹

Why publish this research report now? It responds to the urgency of concerns expressed by politicians, schools, parents, teachers and students. It also addresses the criticism that smartphone 'bans' are an attempt to distract the public from deeper problems faced by the education system, such as acute teacher shortages, a high student-teacher ratio, and a record increase in the achievement gap between the poorest students and their wealthier counterparts:²⁰

We have lost count of the number of times that ministers have now announced a crackdown on mobile phones in schools. It is a non-policy for a non-problem. (Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, 19 February 2024)²¹

In what follows, an objective assessment of the available evidence is conducted with a view to offering pragmatic guidance that better informs school communities tasked with the formulation of smartphone policy.

¹¹ Zambrano et al. (2012).

¹² See, for example, Supandi et al. (2018).

¹³ Ito et al. (2020); see also Greenhow & Lewin (2015) and Rutledge et al. (2019).

¹⁴ UNESCO et al. (2020).

¹⁵ Chen & Yan (2016); Kates et al. (2018).

¹⁶ Birdsong (2017); Gentina et al. (2018).

¹⁷ Stoilova et al. (2023).

¹⁸ Common Sense Media (2023); Fox et al. (2009); Levine et al. (2007); McCoy (2016)

¹⁹ Haidt (2024); although see also Odgers (2024).

²⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2022/12/14/record-increase-in-gap-between-uks-poorest-students-and-their-classmates/>

²¹ See <https://edexec.co.uk/news-schools-in-england-given-new-guidance>

2. SCOPE AND METHODS

This research report presents the results of a ‘review of reviews’ regarding the efficacy of school smartphone policies. The aim is to offer a timely overview and assessment of the available evidence, drawing on research available internationally. The gold standard would have been to conduct a systematic evidence review, but the considerable time required would have mitigated against informing policymakers in a timely manner on a live issue and, importantly, insufficient sources met the quality threshold for inclusion. Specifically, the absence of longitudinal studies, along with differences in research design, sample sizes and operationalisation, and the differing nature of school policies, made it difficult to systematically review the evidence in any meaningful way.²²

Most of the research identified in this report concerns secondary school students. The lack of research on primary school students, many of whom are using products and services primarily designed for adults, should also be addressed. While much of the research in this area concerns university level students, we exclude findings on tertiary education since our concern is with children and young people up to the age of 18.²³ More significantly, we exclude research on children’s use of smartphones outside school, or in settings that overlap school and non-school (such as the vast literature on cyberbullying²⁴), despite renewed interest in the relation between social media²⁵ and a range of youth mental health outcomes (such as anxiety, depression, insufficient sleep or physical activity, and excessive social media use).²⁶ This is not to say such research is uninteresting. For example, in Chile, a multimethod study found that the more hours a child spends on their phone, and the earlier they receive their first phone, the lower their grade point average.²⁷ Indeed, we would suggest that this report be considered in the broader context of understanding the overall impact of digital products and services on children’s emotional, physical and cognitive development.

Most of the research discussed here addresses the relation between school smartphone policies and student educational attainment. The majority of it relates to policies designed to improve learning by limiting student access to their smartphones, although some relates to pedagogic efforts to deploy them for educational purposes.

²² For other recent reviews, see Amez & Baert (2020); Amez et al. (2023); Baert et al. (2020); Campbell et al. (2024); Kates et. al (2018).

²³ For research specifically on tertiary level students, see Amez & Baert (2020); Goumi & Guéraud (2023); Kates et al. (2018); Sunday et al. (2021).

²⁴ Rose et al. (2022).

²⁵ Orben (2020); Jacobsen & Forste (2011)

²⁶ For contrasting views on this point, see Haidt (2024); Odgers (2024); Wood et al. (2023).

²⁷ Leiva & Camusetti (2024).

3. FINDINGS

Academic benefits of limiting smartphones in school

A recent scoping review of the global literature of the effects of smartphone use in schools on academic outcomes as well as mental health, wellbeing and cyberbullying, concluded that,

In some circumstances there are some negative, although small, impacts of mobile phone use on academic outcomes.²⁸

Moreover, the link between school smartphone policies and academic benefits was more evident among disadvantaged students. This recent review supports the findings of an early and widely cited study by Beland and Murphy (2016) on the impact of restricting smartphone use in schools on student productivity. Researchers combined survey data on school policies (across four cities in England) with administrative data on student achievement to create a history of student performance in schools from 2001 to 2011. Significantly, students in the lowest quintile of academic achievement (prior to the new restrictions) made gains in exam scores (after implementation), although no change was observed for students in the top quintile. Note, however, that these results cover a period when smartphone ownership was lower and social media was less prevalent. This was also a period when national and school-based policies regarding EdTech (including learning apps often only available on tablets or smartphones) were much less developed.

Subsequent research has investigated how smartphone restrictions affect student test scores. In Sweden, Kessel et al. (2020) used a similar empirical design to Beland and Murphy, employing a quasi-experimental design to investigate the consequences of restricting use of smartphones. The findings showed no improvement in student performance in schools that had introduced restricted smartphone use, and thus do not confirm Berland and Murphy's results.²⁹

Abrahamsson (2024) combined detailed administrative data with survey data on middle schools' smartphone policies in Norway together with an event study design to provide

²⁸ Campbell et al. (2024, p. 15).

²⁹ At least for early years education, it seems that Sweden may be rethinking its promotion of digital learning: <https://connectedlearning.substack.com/p/swedens-digital-learning-pullback>

evidence on academic test scores, as well as on whether introducing restrictions affected other outcomes. The findings suggest that the policy change increased girls' grade point average and their chance of attending an academic high school track (as opposed to vocational training), especially for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Note, however, that the reporting of this study has been critiqued outside the field of economics for overstating the small effect sizes, statistical significance and the conversation around the type of 'ban'.³⁰ However, like Beland and Murphy, Abrahamsson concluded that restricting smartphones at school could be a low-cost policy tool to improve student outcomes, but it is only effective when implemented as a clear prohibition to bringing the device into school. Their findings also suggested that smartphone restrictions reduced in-school bullying, and girls' take-up of mental health care provision decreased.

An autonomous region in Spain restricted smartphone access at primary and secondary levels in 2015. To conduct analysis on the effect of the policy, Beneito and Vicente-Chirivella (2022) created a region-level panel using official sources of data for all 17 Spanish regions before and after the policy change. For the analysis of academic outcomes, they used the scores obtained by Spanish school students in the PISA instalments from 2006 to 2018. They found that within two years of the policy's enforcement, students' PISA scores improved substantially by 10 points in maths and 12 points in science as compared to before the intervention. These estimated effects are equivalent to 0.6–0.8 years of learning in maths and around 0.72–1.0 years of learning in science,³¹ further adding to the evidence base suggesting that the restriction of smartphones in schools can improve students' academic performance.

Initial analysis of the dataset from the OECD's 2022 PISA test with 15-year-olds suggested that restricting smartphone access might help reduce student distraction in school. However, when the authors further explored the results, they found that, when social class, gender and behaviour were controlled for, students in schools with smartphone restrictions had *lower* achievement across their PISA test scores than schools that permitted smartphone use – although in all models the effect sizes were low.³² While there may be unexplored factors that explain the academic outcome, these results suggest that the evidence base is neither robust nor sufficiently nuanced to dictate which policies work best for students of varying demographics.

³⁰ Ferguson (2024).

³¹ In 2024, the Catalan Education Department banned mobile phones in primary schools, and only permits their use in secondary schools for 'educational purposes' (Catalan News, 2024).

³² Kemp et al. (2024).

Educational uses of smartphones in school

Some research suggests that, used appropriately, schools can harness students' access to smartphones for educational purposes.³³ There is a sizeable literature, from which we select a few illustrative studies here. Note, however, that the trend, at least in wealthier countries, appears to be for schools to increasingly provide EdTech (computer suites, personalised laptops or tablets) rather than relying on using students' own devices for learning at school.³⁴

Examples include that of Howlett and Waemusa (2019), who found that high school students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) believed that the use of student smartphones increased learning and learner satisfaction in the Thai classroom context. Thai students are traditionally taught English through a teacher-directed rote-learning method, so while the researchers anticipated resistance to the model of creativity and innovation offered by EdTech, the students responded positively to a new method of teaching.

Barbetta, Canino and Cima (2023) analysed the impact of using micro-blogging as a teaching tool on high school students' literature skills. The study was based on a large-scale, randomized controlled trial that involved 70 high schools in Italy and 1,500 students. The control group used traditional classroom teaching methods to read and study a selected novel, whereas the treatment group adopted Twitter to discuss it, allowing and encouraging the use of students' personal smartphones at school for this purpose. Findings suggest that using Twitter to teach literature had an overall negative effect on students' average achievement, reducing standardised test scores by about 25 per cent of a standard deviation. The negative effect was stronger on students who usually perform better, possibly because the interface lessens the attention students give to the text, inducing skim reading, and therefore hampering a full understanding of what they read.

Supandi, Ariyanto, Kusumaningsih and Aini (2018) wanted to determine the role of design and an e-learning tool using mobile phone application in maths learning. They employed a pre- and post-test quasi experiment to understand initial capability and changes in ability after the integration of the smartphone learning tool. Students across five schools in Indonesia participated; they were encouraged to use their own smartphones to do so, as part of a wider EdTech strategy for digital learning. Results from the questionnaire indicated the students' high level of interest in the application.

³³ Roblyer & Doering (2010)

³⁴ UNESCO (2023).

Learning results showed significant improvement in student achievement and learning behaviour.

Porter et al. (2016) conducted mixed-methods field research in 24 sites across Ghana ($n=707$), Malawi ($n=501$) and South Africa ($n=1,026$) to understand the effect of smartphone use on African students in primary and secondary schools. There were two central components to the data collection: interviews and questionnaires. The field data, coupled with the researchers' associated discussions with mobile phone network providers, educational institutions and policymakers, suggest that where textbooks and desktops are sparse, there are some positive aspects of smartphone use for African students, such as assisting with teaching or accessing material and websites for specific information; however, the negative effects (most notably, class disruption, bullying and harassment) have also become increasingly apparent, especially in urban and peri-urban areas.

Perceptions of policies

Selwyn and Aagaard (2020, p. 10) suggest 'that phone bans offer an unexpected opportunity to advance understandings and sense-making around the increased presence of digital technologies in classrooms and schools' among policymakers and the public. While not against a 'ban', they argue that the current attention to smartphones can be used to raise attention to the rise (and risks) of EdTech, and to clearly distinguish the possible outcomes at stake, popularly named as technology addiction, digital distraction, cyberbullying, surveillance capitalism, and the environmental sustainability of digital education. Meanwhile, Smale, Hutcheson and Russo (2021) reviewed the literature and litigation on the risks associated with smartphone use in schools, and offer suggestions for educators to consider when devising or revising policies balancing students' individual rights with their safety and wellbeing. Research shows that a key challenge for schools is to design smartphone policies that restrict use in ways that support learning and elicit 'buy-in' from all members of a school: administrators, teachers and students.³⁵ Several studies have examined stakeholder perceptions of or consultations about school policies. These suggest broad support for carefully contextualised limits or even prohibitions on smartphone use at school.

Gao et al. (2017) surveyed 1,226 K-12 schoolteachers, parents and students in China, finding that students were more likely than teachers to perceive the smartphone as a tool to support learning for school. However, the students, teachers and parents were

³⁵ Randhawa et al. (2024).

aligned on wishing to prohibit smartphone use during class and exams, and considered current school policies as insufficiently effective.

Using surveys and focus groups, Ott et al. (2017) explored the way Swedish secondary school students perceive the use of smartphones in school. The students take a nuanced approach that recognises both the affordances and limitations of the device in the classroom by suggesting that the smartphone serves as both a tool that facilitates their schoolwork as well as a distraction.

Gath et al. (2024) used a cross-sectional survey design to examine educator ($n=217$) and student ($n=332$) perspectives on students' smartphone use in New Zealand schools through a mixed-methods approach. Their findings suggest that both educators and students were in favour of regulating students' phone use at school level, but were less likely to be in favour of a total ban. Most participants thought that students should not be allowed to have smartphones during class time, a rationale that was derived from prioritising student learning and safety. Smartphones were viewed not only as a distraction to student learning, but also as compromising student safety through inappropriate use (e.g., photos and videos being taken at school and shared), cyberbullying and social media-related issues.

In the UK, research by Randhawa et al. (2024) provides a descriptive analysis of the content and implementation of smartphone policies across 30 secondary schools, comparing schools that do or do not allow smartphone use during recreational time. School policy documents were collected, along with survey data from pupils ($n=1,198$), teachers ($n=53$) and the senior leadership team ($n=30$). The findings show that most schools restrict how students use their smartphones, with very few schools permitting them to be used at any time within the school day. There is variation in the policies to restrict smartphone use as some schools prohibited smartphones on the premises, while others required students to turn smartphones off in their bags or place them in commercial pouches and lock their smartphones away. Some schools permitted their use at certain times during the school day (e.g., at lunch or break). However, the trend in the past few years is that schools have been introducing policies that restrict smartphone use to improve attainment, behaviour and safeguarding. This restriction was positioned by the senior leadership team, teachers and students as benefiting safety, learning and communication by minimising risks to attainment, reducing incidents of disruptive behaviour and safeguarding adolescents. Educators 'in schools with restrictive smartphone policies perceived that teachers were more supportive of the school phone rules compared with permissive schools', but on the other hand, 'Students in restrictive school policy contexts were less likely to agree that pupils in their

school supported and followed the school phone rules compared with pupils in permissive school policy contexts'.³⁶

Walker (2013) conducted research in two English academies: one provided smartphones for the students, and the other restricted their use. Questionnaires, observations and student interviews were used to determine the extent to which students used smartphones to help their learning and which features they found useful for their schoolwork. Students were also asked about some of the common barriers to using a smartphone in school, such as bullying, cheating and disruption. Results show that students at both schools use smartphones for learning, with significantly more use at the school that permits them. However, usage was also significant in the school that currently restricts devices. Findings suggest that students use their smartphones for a wide range of activities (searching for information, watching educational videos, keeping track of homework, and more), and the way in which pupils use their devices raises important questions for schools considering not only the adoption of smartphone technology for teaching and learning, but also the implementation of appropriate measures and policies.

Nikolopoulou (2020) investigated Greek secondary school teachers' perceptions of smartphone use in classrooms, focusing on their perceived benefits, constraints and concerns. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was given to 64 teachers of different specialisations. Findings suggest that the perceived benefits were associated with students' engagement, motivation and active participation, along with easy access to information. Teachers' primary concerns related to students' abusive behaviour and the difficulty in controlling them, noise disruption in class and students' distraction. In addition, other notable barriers involved the lack of equipment and ambiguity around current legislation regarding smartphone use in schools.

Rose, Gears and Taylor (2022) investigated English parents' and children's co-constructed views of smartphone use at school. A total of nine parent-child dyads were interviewed (children between the ages of 10 and 11). Thematic analysis of the data suggests that parents and children share views of the importance of having phones to keep in contact alongside an awareness of the risks. Hearing the children's and parents' co-constructed views and solutions highlight the potential positive impact of their involvement in co-developing school smartphone policies. This supports the approach followed in Ireland that requires schools to consult with parents, children and teachers regarding smartphone use,³⁷ which has recently resulted in the Minister of Education

³⁶ Randhawa et al. (2024, p. 14).

³⁷ Department of Education and Skills – Ireland (2018).

pushing to introduce an outright ban at secondary level,³⁸ the intention being to promote a shared understanding of the appropriate use of digital technologies.

One of the most recent research studies on the perception of smartphone policies was conducted in the Netherlands to determine how students, teachers and parents felt prior to and after the implementation of the (leave it) 'at home' or (in a) 'locker' smartphone policy.³⁹ A total of 984 students, 302 parents and 42 teachers were initially surveyed in December 2023 about the advantages and disadvantages of the policy. Researchers coded the data based on answers to open-ended questions, and found six themes that describe the core dimensions of the policy: practical, cognitive functioning, autonomy, social emotional, wellbeing and entertainment. The follow-up survey was conducted in the spring of 2024 to assess how students felt following the introduction of the policy, for example, whether they were more or less distracted, had more conversations with friends, or were more apt to use smartphones outside of school hours. The results suggest that there are diverse perceptions. However, although there is a group of students and parents who are completely resistant to the policy, most students, parents and teachers understand that leaving smartphones at home or in a locker has both benefits and limitations.

³⁸ See O'Brien (2024).

³⁹ Pouwels et al. (2024).

4. COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

The United Kingdom

In the UK in 2023, smartphone ownership was near-universal (98%) by the age of 12,⁴⁰ accelerated by the transition from primary to secondary school.⁴¹ There have been periodic calls to provide schools with evidence-based guidance to inform the development of school policies on smartphone use.⁴² Recent non-statutory guidance put forward by the Department for Education (DfE) states that:⁴³

All schools should develop and implement a policy that creates a mobile phone-free environment by prohibiting the use of mobile phones and other smart technology with similar functionality to mobile phones throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

There is, however, considerable variation across schools in how smartphone policies are applied. A recent reviews of smartphone policies in the UK classified school responses into four categories, and found that, among secondary schools, 11 per cent implemented what they term an 'Effective ban' (where phones are not allowed in school or are stored in lockers or equivalent, e.g., Yondr pouches, at the start of the day); 52 per cent 'Ban, but phone present' (e.g., in school bags); 36 per cent 'Partial ban' (phones banned in class, but allowed at some times, such as break or lunch); and finally, no schools reported having 'No ban'.⁴⁴

When mapped against current school gradings as awarded by Ofsted, the schools' regulator, an informal selection of schools rated 'Outstanding' were more likely to impose wholesale smartphone restrictions on school premises. Schools that 'Require Improvement' implemented a range of approaches, often simply telling students that smartphones should not be used, seen or heard during the school day. Schools rated 'Good' tended to require students to hand in their phone on arrival or ensure they were inaccessible during the school day (e.g., by use of a personal Yondr pouch, or a similar).

Given rising interest in the Yondr pouch (or a similar variant), it is worth noting that these are considered school property, but students are responsible for bringing their

⁴⁰ Ofcom (2023).

⁴¹ Randhawa et al. (2024).

⁴² Science Innovation and Technology Committee (2019).

⁴³ DfE (2024).

⁴⁴ Mansfield et al. (2024, p. 11).

pouch with them to school every day and to keep them in good working condition.

Table 1 illustrates what is involved in their use.

Table 1: Use of Yondr pouches by the school community (adapted from The Hurst School)

Staff should

- Check that all students have securely placed their phone, smart watch and headphones inside the assigned Yondr pouch.
- Remove any phone, smart watch and headphones from a student if they have forgotten their Yondr pouch – the phone and items will be placed behind Main Reception where the student can collect it at the end of the day.
- Confiscate any phone, smart watch or headphones seen during the day, hand it to Main Reception, place the student in a Friday detention (90 minutes) and inform parents/carers that the phone and/or smart watch is there for them to collect.
- Use the base stations at the end of the day/last lesson to release the Yondr pouch so that a student can access their phone, smart watch and headphones.
- Ensure that all phones and smart watches are placed inside the Yondr pouch before the class leave their classroom (whenever the use of phones is required during lessons).
- Keep base stations securely locked away when not in use.

Students should

- Adhere to all the rules in place regarding phones, smart watches and headphones.
- Bring their Yondr pouch with them to school every day.
- Look after their Yondr pouch and maintain a high standard of care towards it.
- Not touch another student's Yondr pouch.
- Not give their Yondr pouch to another student to look after.
- Report any issues with the Yondr pouch immediately to a member of staff, preferably their tutor in the first instance.

Parents should

- Remind their child/ren to bring their Yondr pouch to school every day.
- Ensure their child/ren looks after their assigned Yondr pouch and keeps it in good working condition.
- Support the school in ensuring their child/ren understand the rules regarding phones, smart watches and other electronic devices and follow them once entering the school site.
- Raise any concerns regarding their child/ren and their phone, smart watch or headphones with their tutor so that the school can adequately address any issues.
- Support the school by collecting any phone, smart watch or headphones confiscated from their child/ren due to them not following the rules in place after a second offence.

Singapore

Like their counterparts in the UK, children in Singapore are likely to own their first smartphone between the ages of 9 and 12. By contrast with countries seeking to initiate a ban or restrictions on smartphones, the Singapore Ministry of Education will require all students to have their own digital device by 2028. Students will pay for the device through their Edusave accounts (to which the government makes an annual contribution which is expected to cost in the region of \$75 million). For students who require financial aid, the government will provide subsidies to cover the entire cost of the smart device. Each device, whether a smartphone, tablet or laptop, will be installed with management software to not only prevent misuse but also enhance digital literacy lessons in class.

This initiative is predicated on Singapore's desire to think about digital literacy 'more deeply and holistically'.⁴⁵ Digital literacy will be within the curriculum, rather than making it a standalone subject. The expectation is that, by using their devices, students will acquire skills across domains that, as detailed in the curriculum, should allow them to critically gather and evaluate information from digital resources in a secure, responsible and ethical manner; interpret, analyse and solve problems systematically; use software and devices effectively and productively; facilitate the use of knowledge and skills in new contexts and keep up with technological developments; and produce content and collaborate with others in a digital setting.

The Singapore Student Learning Space is the online learning platform that helps innovate the student experience through purposeful use of technology. Students work at their own pace, and any struggle or issue can more easily be spotted and targeted for early intervention by their teachers. In spite of the optimistic and positive outlook and evidence that such an approach can enhance learning outcomes in the classroom,⁴⁶ recent research has highlighted unfair data practices such as the surveillance and profiling of children, lack of transparency, and complexity around data processing and handling.⁴⁷ Lim (2020, p.106) found that, as their children grew older, gaining more independence, parents were keen to use digital devices and services to stay in touch; however, she concludes that such practices should be undertaken with caution, as the growing incorporation of smartphone communication into parental surveillance practices can introduce problematic tensions into the parent-child relationship.

During Covid-19, online learning clearly highlighted the challenge of the digital divide, as many students did not initially have devices to participate in home-based learning. The

⁴⁵ Speech by Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung (Ministry of Education – Singapore, 2020).

⁴⁶ OECD (2023).

⁴⁷ Atabey & Hooper (2024).

schools loaned students over 20,000 smart devices, and community organisations also donated technology. Since bridging the gap in access, schools in Singapore have been working to close the divide in outcomes, viewing the future of education as being able to leverage the power of technology and smartphones as educational tools. Yet it is noteworthy that, while the avowed policy of the government is to promote the educational benefits of digital devices, some schools are operating smartphone 'bans' or restrictions of one kind or another.⁴⁸ In tuition enrichment centres, smartphone policies are likely to be more liberal than those of regular schools, but do influence students' expectations of what they can or cannot do with smartphones in educational settings.⁴⁹

Colombia

In its commitment to the wellbeing and development of their students, the Unión de Colegios Internacionales (Uncoli)⁵⁰ and the 27 private, international schools (with approximately 17,000 students) that make up the association have agreed to implement a restriction on the use of smartphones during school hours. Each Uncoli partner school can develop and implement its own detailed policy regarding the restriction, tailored to the local context and needs of the students.⁵¹ The rationale presented on their website refers to research claims that the presence of devices:⁵²

- Is linked to a decrease in academic performance.
- Has adverse effects on mental health.
- Reduces the quality of social interactions.
- Increases bullying and cyberbullying.
- Contributes to the development of addictive behaviours.
- Decreases interest in physical activity.

The Ministry of Education responded to the Uncoli joint statement by asserting that the use of screens and smartphones in class should contribute to the development of academic activities.⁵³ Prior to implementing a similar measure for all schools across the country, the Ministry insists that there must be dialogue and agreement within each

⁴⁸ See Tushara (2024).

⁴⁹ See Ting (2021).

⁵⁰ Uncoli (2024).

⁵¹ Uncoli schools are located in the capital city of Bogotá, and cater to families who are able to afford tuition.

⁵² Note that the evidence cited concerns children's mental health in relation to screen time in general (which we do not review in this research report – see instead Livingstone (2023) rather than evidence specifically related to school smartphone policies, our present focus:

<https://uncoli.edu.co/noticias/dispositivos-moviles>

⁵³ See Ministerio de Educación Nacional – Colombia (2024).

academic council, together with principals, teachers, students and even parents, to determine whether the use of smartphones should be restricted.

The Constitution is the most relevant regulation in the Colombian legal system, and any provision must be aligned with its content. Pursuant to Article 44 of the Colombian Constitution,⁵⁴

The family, society and the State have the obligation to assist and protect children in order to guarantee their harmonious and comprehensive development and the full exercise of their rights.

As such, current regulation suggests that smartphones should not be given to minors before the age of 14; however, there are no explicit regulations preventing parents or schools from doing so. Colombia's regulatory approach is framed, on the one hand, by Law 2170, under which each person has the right to communicate with others through the direct use of language, writing or symbols, or through the application of the tools offered by information and communication technologies,⁵⁵ and on the other, by a provision for schools, exceptionally, to limit the use of smartphones as long as it does not infringe on the students' right to communication, which includes: the freedom of expression to spread thoughts and opinions; the free development of personality; and the ability to inform and receive truthful and impartial information, education and access to knowledge, science, technology, and other goods and values of culture. This is to protect the rights of students in risky situations related to the use of technological and communication devices, in line with building the culture of protection in accordance with Law 1098 (the Childhood and Adolescence Code).⁵⁶

Moreover, for those aged between 14 and 18, Article 45⁵⁷ sets out that adolescents have the right to both comprehensive development and protection. The State and society guarantee the *active participation of young people in public and private organisations* responsible for the protection, education and development of youth. Further, in Article

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http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/constitucion_politica_1991_pr001.html#44

⁵⁵ Also, Law 2108 (2021) established internet access as an essential public service in Colombia, which required caregivers and children's advocates to take more proactive measures in ensuring children's digital safety. For example, Vigúías – the first Spanish-speaking Safer Internet Centre in Latin America – runs a helpline (Te Protejo) for reporting violations of children's and adolescents' rights. Regarding the digital environment, 82 per cent of the victims of these situations are adolescent girls and women, with the age of greatest vulnerability being 11 and 14 (78 per cent of cases) (MIT Solve, 2024).

⁵⁶ Safeguarding Childhood (2024).

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http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/constitucion_politica_1991_pr001.html#45

7 of Statutory Law 1581 (2012),⁵⁸ multiple stakeholders are listed as responsible for safeguarding children and adolescents online, particularly as it relates to data and privacy. The Court stated that it should also be understood as follows:

Not only the State and schools must develop actions to prevent the undue use of personal data of minors under 18 years of age, but also:

- (i) **the parents or other persons** in charge of their care **and educators** are responsible for ensuring such guarantee;
- (ii) **the legislator**, who must ensure that, in compliance with its legislative functions, specifically, with respect to the processing of personal data of children under 18 years of age, such legislation does not fail to contain adequate measures of protection to ensure their harmonious and comprehensive development, and the effectiveness of their fundamental rights contained in the Constitution and in the international standards on the matter;
- (iii) **the judicial system**; specifically, public servants must protect the rights derived from the use of personal data of children under 18 years of age, observing international standards or specialized documents on the matter;
- (iv) **the media agencies**;
- (v) **the companies that provide Internet access services, develop applications or digital social networks**, who are warned that they must commit to the protection of the fundamental rights of children and adolescents.

This brief case study highlights the nuanced regulation around online safety that aims for beneficial uses. Because school smartphone policies and provisions must align with the Constitution, the regulations help facilitate a better understanding of the way student, teacher, parent and principal voices must be taken into consideration in the conceptualisation of smartphone policy prior to its implementation in school. Further research is needed to evaluate whether the Colombian approach is effective and beneficial.

⁵⁸ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=49981>

5. IMPLICATIONS

Restricting personal devices at school gives respite from the intense engagement with products and services that constantly demand children's attention, allowing space for learning, particularly for those already struggling. However, after assessing the available evidence, it seems that some broader research and policy work is necessary. This is a fast-unfolding agenda currently in the public spotlight, with a strong media narrative of 'bans.' In the current climate it seems that school administrators and communities may feel overwhelmed by conflicting reports and mixed media messages in which restrictions are proposed even though technology is central to the growth narratives and future society in which children will spend their adult lives.⁵⁹ Moreover, there is a lack of access to pragmatic evidenced guidance to help navigate the complex digital landscape.⁶⁰

To draw out the implications of the present findings for schools – and to understand what 'good' looks like for teachers, parents and children – we conclude with some questions as well as some suggestions:

- **Identify the problem.** Do students have difficulties with concentration, learning, behaviour, mental health or social relationships because of smartphone use or misuse? Would greater limits on student access to their phones at school bring likely benefits to all or specific segments of the student population?
- **Find the right words.** Schools need a clear lexicon to talk about devices, genres of products and services, criteria for learning outcomes and levels of restriction/use that better reflect the complexity of the student experience at school.
- **Develop a holistic approach.** Smartphone policies should be underpinned by a digital literacy curriculum that encompasses privacy, safety, genre, learning outcomes and monitoring, and embedded in wider EdTech policies to bridge school and home use.
- **Be inclusive.** Children have diverse needs and cultural circumstances. Policies should address whether (some) children need access to their smartphone during the school day, for reasons of health, disability, caring responsibilities, or other needs.
- **Consult the school community.** Children's voices are heard in some research and policy development, yet not sufficiently. School smartphone policies will likely be more effective when the views of students, teachers,

⁵⁹ <https://connectsafely.org/mixed-feelings-about-bill-to-limit-smartphones-in-school>

⁶⁰ <https://swgfl.org.uk/services/360-degree-safe>

parents and school leaders have been heard and the policy formulated with them rather than over their heads.

- **Recognise limitations.** Enforcing restrictions is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It is a cost-effective method that may help address and alleviate more immediate anxieties around smartphone use (for specific segments of the population). However, it is worth questioning whether this is being done at the expense of providing every child with a personalised education, tailored to their individual needs.
- **Encourage an annual review.** In a rapidly changing digital landscape, school policies should be regularly assessed and revised to not only meet the evolving needs and interests of the students, but also prepare them for the demands of today and tomorrow.

However, a greater emphasis on gathering robust evidence on the outcomes of different approaches, and ensuring that parents, teachers and crucially, children, are part of the journey is much needed.

The Digital Futures for Children centre will continue its work in this area, and invites collaboration with research colleagues, government departments and other interested stakeholders. Crucially, talk of 'bans' closes down the deeper conversations society needs to have about the best interests of children in a digital age and lets the profit-hungry tech sector off the hook. It remains the case the devices are configured in ways that support the commercial interests of the products and services that they carry. It is a society-wide duty to do more to prevent the design and deployment of services that are deliberately designed to distract.

Rather than restricting children's activities, we should be demanding firmer action from government and regulators, so that children can benefit safely from the digital world, especially at a time when AI is becoming embedded into every area of public and private life.

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7. APPENDIX

The sources used to construct this research report can be found below. Note: the abstracts for academic studies are by the original authors. Summaries in subsequent sections are by the present authors.

Academic studies on school smartphone policies

Abrahamsson, S. (2024). *Smartphone bans, student outcomes and mental health*. NHH Department of Economics, Discussion Paper No. 01. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4735240>

Abstract: How smartphone usage affects well-being and learning among children and adolescents is a concern for schools, parents, and policymakers. Combining detailed administrative data with survey data on middle schools' smartphone policies, together with an event-study design, I show that banning smartphones significantly decreases the health care take-up for psychological symptoms and diseases among girls. Post-ban bullying among both genders decreases. Additionally, girls' GPA improves, and their likelihood of attending an academic high school track increases. These effects are larger for girls from low socio-economic backgrounds. Hence, banning smartphones from school could be a low-cost policy tool to improve student outcomes.

Barbetta, G.P., Canino, P., & Cima, S. (2023). *Let's tweet again? Social networks and literature achievement in high school students*. *Education Finance and Policy*, 18(4), 676-707. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00363

Abstract: The availability of cheap Wi-Fi Internet connections has encouraged schools to adopt Web 2.0 platforms for teaching, with the intention of stimulating students' academic achievement and participation in school. Moreover, during the recent explosion of the COVID-19 crisis that forced many countries to close schools (as well as offices and factories), the widespread diffusion of these applications kept school systems going. Despite their widespread use as teaching tools, the effect of adopting Web 2.0 platforms on student performance has never been rigorously tested. We fill this gap in the literature by analyzing the impact of using Twitter as a teaching tool on high school students' literature skills. Based on a large-scale, randomized controlled trial that involved seventy schools and about 1,500 students, we find that using Twitter to teach literature has an overall negative effect on students' average achievement, reducing standardized test scores by about 25 percent of a standard deviation. The negative effect is stronger on students who usually perform better.

Beland, L.-P. & Murphy, R. (2016). Ill communication: Technology, distraction and student performance. *Labour Economics*, 41, 61-76.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.04.004>

Abstract: This study examined test scores in secondary school students and found that exam scores improved by an average 0.07 standard deviation in schools that effected a smartphone ban. Significantly, students in the lowest quintile of prior academic achievement made a gain of approximately 14.23% of a standard deviation in exam scores, whereas for high-achieving students in the top quintile, their test scores were unrelated to the ban. To account for this discrepancy, the researchers offer that low-achieving students may have poorer self-control and become distracted by the presence of mobile phones, while high-achievers might be more focused in the classroom irrespective of the mobile phone policy.

Beneito, P., & Vicente-Chirivella, Ó. (2022). Banning mobile phones in schools: evidence from regional-level policies in Spain. *Applied Economic Analysis*, 30(90), 153–175.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/AEA-05-2021-0112>

Abstract: The autonomous governments of two regions in Spain established mobile bans in schools as of the year 2015. Exploiting the across-region variation introduced by such a quasi-natural experiment, this study aims to perform a comparative-case analysis to investigate the impact of this non-spending-based policy on regional Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores in maths and sciences and bullying incidence. The authors apply the synthetic control method and diff-in-diff estimation to compare the treated regions with the rest of regions in Spain before and after the intervention. The results show noticeable reductions of bullying incidence among teenagers in the two treated regions. The authors also find positive and significant effects of this policy on the PISA scores of the Galicia region that are equivalent to 0.6–0.8 years of learning in maths and around 0.72 to near one year of learning in sciences.

Campbell, M., Edwards, E.J., Pennell, D., Poed, S., Lister, V., Gillett-Swan, J., Kelly, A., Zec, D., & Nguyen, T.-A. (2024). Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20556365241270394>

Abstract: Public opinions are divided on the relative benefits versus harms of allowing mobile phones in schools. When debating the consequences of mobile phones in schools, politicians often argue that students' use of mobile phones distract from their learning, increase cyberbullying and lead to poor mental health outcomes. We conducted a scoping review of the global literature, followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and meta-Analyses extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) and pre-registered our protocol with the Open Science Framework (OSF). Our search and screening process identified 22 studies that met our inclusion criteria and shed light on our research questions: *whether mobile phone use in schools impacts academic outcomes, mental health and wellbeing and cyberbullying*. We found an absence of randomized controlled trials with evidence resting on a small number of studies with

different designs, samples, operational definitions of mobile phone bans (i.e. partial, or complete bans) and outcome measures, making reconciliation of findings challenging. Nonetheless, we provide a synthesis of the latest evidence for decision-makers tasked with deciding for or against mobile phone bans in schools. Directions for future research are provided and practical implications for schools are discussed.

Gao, Q., Yan, Z., Wei, C., Liang, Y., & Mo, L. (2017). Three different roles, five different aspects: Differences and similarities in viewing school mobile phone policies among teachers, parents, and students. *Computers & Education*, 106, 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.11.007>

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore perceived differences in mobile phone policies among three different groups: teachers, parents, and students, from five different aspects: policy impact, decision, policy implementation, policy assessment, and policy improvement. This study surveyed 1226 elementary, middle and high school teachers, parents, and students in China with a 25-items questionnaire. Significant differences in teachers', parents', and students' responses were found in (1) what motivated students to use mobile phones (2) whether mobile phone use should be banned, (3) whether mobile phone policies were effective, and (4) how to improve the policies. However, the teachers, parents, and students shared similar views that (1) students should not be allowed to use mobile phones during classes and exams, (2) the current mobile phone policies had a rather low level of effectiveness, and (3) the mobile phone policies should be implemented better. Significance and implications of the findings are discussed.

Gath, M.E., Monk, L., Scott, A., & Gillon, G.T. (2024). Smartphones at school: A mixed-methods analysis of educators' and students' perspectives on mobile phone use at school. *Education Sciences*, 14(4), 351. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14040351>

Abstract: As smartphone ownership and use by children and youth has increased over the past decade, so has the presence of phones within the classroom. This has created unique challenges for teachers, school leaders, and policymakers. In this research study, we used a cross-sectional survey design to examine educator ($n=217$) and student ($n=332$) perspectives on students' mobile phone use in New Zealand schools through a mixed-methods approach. The results indicate that both educators and students were in favour of regulating students' phone use at the school level, but they were less in favour of a total ban approach. Most participants thought that students should not be allowed to have phones during class time, with rationale that centred around student learning and safety. Mobile phones were viewed as a distraction to student learning and compromised student safety through inappropriate use (e.g., photos and videos being taken at school and shared), cyberbullying, and social media-related issues. The findings of our research provide insights that are relevant to the development of educational policies around students' mobile phone use at school and contribute to a broader understanding of the impacts of mobile phone use at school on child and youth achievement and well-being.

Howlett, G. & Waemusa, Z. (2019). 21st century learning skills and autonomy: Students' perceptions of mobile devices in the Thai EFL context. *Teaching English with Technology*, 19(1), 72-85. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1204626.pdf>

Abstract: This study examined the extent to which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) high-school students believed mobile devices increase learning and learner satisfaction in the Thai school/classroom context, and whether they are prepared for autonomous learning using these devices. The participants were 277 students in eight high-schools in Southern Thailand who completed a questionnaire constructed around the core competencies of 21st century learning skills and autonomous traits in relation to mobile device use. The findings indicated that students had access/ability to use mobile devices, and either agreed/strongly agreed that mobile devices increase their learning potential and satisfaction, suggesting they are ready for autonomous learning using mobile devices in partnership with their 21st century learning skills. Recommendations are made for teachers and policy-makers to allow students to complement their learning using mobile devices.

Kessel, D., Hardardottir, H.L., & Tyrefors, B. (2020). The impact of banning mobile phones in Swedish secondary schools. *Economics of Education Review*, 77, 102009. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2020.102009>

Abstract: Recently, policy makers worldwide have suggested and passed legislation to ban mobile phone use in schools. The influential (and only quantitative) evaluation by Beland and Murphy (2016), suggests that this is a very low-cost but effective policy to improve student performance. In particular, it suggests that the lowest-achieving students have the most to gain. Using a similar empirical setup but with data from Sweden, we partly replicate their study and thereby add external validity to this policy question. Furthermore, we increase the survey response rate of schools to approximately 75%, although at the expense of the amount of information collected in the survey. In Sweden, we find no impact of mobile phone bans on student performance and can reject even small-sized gains.

Kopecky, K., Fernandez-Martin, F.D., Sztokowski, R., Gomez-Garcia, G., & Mikulcova, K. (2021). Behaviour of children and adolescents and the use of mobile phones in primary schools in the Czech Republic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168352>

Abstract: Today's young people spend most of their time in contact with mobile devices. Their excessive use carries many risks, such as addiction, cyberbullying and social disruption. Based on this, this study analysed the mobile phone use of young Czechs between 7 and 17 years old ($n=27.177$) and assessed the differences in their behaviour according to the mobile device use policies of their schools. The results show that the use of mobile phones was linked to the one of the social networks, YouTube and videogames for the most part. Similarly, those young people who had them at school preferred to use them, instead of practicing sports or social activities. On the other hand, in the centres in which the use of mobile phones was prohibited, they felt

bored and without activities to do. Therefore, it will be necessary for schools to implement educational policies that encourage activities and areas of social interaction in the school, especially during recess. However, at the same time, it is recommended not to prohibit the use of technological devices in the educational centre, since this fact encourages students to use them secretly and increases their desire to use them. To this end, its use in the classroom is advocated from an educational perspective, thus promoting collaborative learning and increasing student motivation.

Leiva, R. & Camussetti, D.K. (2024). Asociación entre el uso del teléfono inteligente y el rendimiento académico de escolares chilenos. *Anuario Electronico de Estudios en Comunicacion Social Disertaciones*, 17(2).

<https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/disertaciones/a.13621>

Abstract: Smart mobile phones, or smartphones, have the potential to disrupt classrooms by diverting students' attention from their teachers, hindering the learning process. Several studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom suggest a correlation between smartphone usage and the academic performance of schoolchildren. However, some argue that the impact is relatively small, and that further research should be done into the personal characteristics of users. To determine the relationship between smartphone usage and the academic performance of Chilean schoolchildren aged 10 to 18, a qualitative-quantitative approach was applied, utilizing focus groups and face-to-face surveys. Our findings revealed three significant variables: the age at which children received their first cell phone, the intensity of daily cell phone use, and socioeconomic status. Gender and smartphone use in the classroom did not show statistical significance. The data obtained from our surveys suggest a relationship between the number of hours a child or young person spends on their phone and their grade point average, as well as between the age at which children start using smartphones and their grade point average. Consequently, it can be asserted that prolonged smartphone usage is associated with poorer academic performance.

Nikolopoulou, K. (2020). Secondary education teachers' perceptions of mobile phone and tablet use in classrooms: Benefits, constraints and concerns. *Journal of Computers in Education*, 7(2), 257-75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40692-020-00156-7>

Abstract: The use of mobile devices in secondary education schools is an emerging issue; however, empirical evidence regarding secondary education teachers' perceptions on mobile technology and mobile learning is still limited. This study investigated Greek secondary school teachers' perceptions of mobile phone and tablet use in classrooms, focusing on their perceived benefits, constraints and their concerns. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered to 64 teachers of different specializations. The primary perceived benefits were associated with students' involvement/motivation and active participation, the interactive-enjoyable lesson, the easy access to information and students' familiarity with technology. Teachers' perceived barriers were mainly related to the lack of equipment and the current legislation (regarding mobile technology usage in school settings). Key concerns regarded students' abusive behavior and the difficulty in controlling them, the noise-

disruption in class and students' distraction. Implications and recommendations for teachers, students, school policy and educational policy makers are discussed.

Ott, T., Magnusson, A.G., Weilenmann, A., & Hård af Segerstad, Y. (2017). 'It must not disturb, it's as simple as that': Students' voices on mobile phones in the infrastructure for learning in Swedish upper secondary school. *Education and Information Technologies*, 23, 517-36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-017-9615-0>

Abstract: Drawing from a survey and focus group interviews, this study explores how Swedish upper secondary students reason about the usage of their personal mobile phones in school. As a contribution to the debate around the mobile phone's role in school, we present the students' own voices relative to the question of regulating mobile phone use. We use the notion of infrastructure for learning (Guribye and Lindström 2009) to analytically approach the social and technological dimensions of the students' narratives on their use of mobile phones in school practice. The students' narratives present an intricate account of students' awareness and concern of the implications of mobile phone presence in school. The students describe that the mobile phone is both a tool that facilitates their school work and a distraction that the teachers pursue. In school, the students are balancing their mobile phone usage with the teachers' arbitrary enforcement of policy. Despite this process, the mobile phone is becoming a resource in the students' infrastructure for learning. The findings from this study add to the limited body of research on the use of mobile phone in upper secondary school from a student perspective.

Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Milner, J., Munthali, A., Robson, E., de Lannoy, A., Bango, A., Gunguluza, N., Mashiri, M., Tanle, A., & Abane, A. (2016). Mobile phones and education in Sub-Saharan Africa: From youth practice to public policy. *Journal of International Development*, 28(1), 22-39. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3116>

Abstract: Young people's use of mobile phones is expanding exponentially across Africa. Its transformative potential is exciting, but findings presented in this paper indicate how the downside of mobile phone use in African schools is becoming increasingly apparent. Drawing on mixed-methods field research in 24 sites across Ghana, Malawi and South Africa and associated discussions with educational institutions, public policy makers and network providers, we examine the current state of play and offer suggestions towards a more satisfactory alignment of practice and policy which promotes the more positive aspects of phone use in educational contexts and militates against more damaging ones.

Pouwels, J.L., Vreeswijk, L.L.M., van den Berg, Y.H.M., & Daalmans, S. (2024). *Telefoons de school uit: Betutteling of broodnodig? Betekenisgeving van leerlingen, ouders en leerkrachten aan het 'thuis of in de kluis'-beleid*, Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/e8v76>

Abstract: A recent study was conducted in the Netherlands to determine how students, teachers and parents felt prior to and after the implementation of the [leave it] 'at

home' or [in a] 'locker' smartphone policy. 984 students, 302 parents and 42 teachers were initially surveyed in December 2023 about the advantages and disadvantages of the policy. Researchers coded the data based on answers to open-ended questions, and found six themes that describe the core dimensions of the policy: practical, cognitive functioning, autonomy, social emotional, well-being and entertainment. The follow-up survey was conducted in the spring of 2024 to assess how students felt following the introduction of the policy, for example, whether they were more or less distracted, had more conversations with friends, or were more apt to use smartphones outside of school hours. The results suggest that there are diverse perceptions. However, although there is a group of students and parents who are completely resistant to the policy, most students, parents and teachers understand that leaving smartphones at home or in a locker has both benefits and limitations.

Randhawa, A., Pallan, M., Twardochleb, R., Adab, P., Al-Janabi, H., Fenton, S., Jones, K., Michail, M., Patterson, P., Sitch, A., Wade, M., & Goodyear, V.A. (2024). Secondary school smartphone policies in England: A descriptive analysis of how schools rationalize, design, and implement restrictive and permissive phone policies. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2024.2363204>

Abstract: This study provides a descriptive analysis of the content and implementation of smartphone policies across 30 secondary schools in England, comparing schools that do (permissive) or do not (restrictive) allow phone use during recreational time. School policy documents were collected, along with survey data from pupil ($n=1198$), teacher ($n=53$), and SLT ($n=30$) participants. Phones were positioned as benefitting safety, learning, and communication. However, most schools adopted restrictive policies, aiming to improve attainment, behavior, and safeguarding. Significant differences were found between pupils and teachers, and between pupils at permissive vs restrictive schools, regarding their support for the rules. Implications are discussed.

Rose, S.E., Gears, A., & Taylor, J. (2022). What are parents' and children's co-constructed views on mobile phone use and policies in school? *Children & Society*, 36(6), 1418-33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12583>

Abstract: Increasing ownership of mobile phones by children increases pressure on schools to create mobile phone policies. This study investigated parents' and children's co-constructed views of mobile phone use at school. Nine parents and child (aged 10 to 11 years) dyads were interviewed. The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Generally, parents and children held shared views of the importance of having phones to keep in contact alongside an awareness of the risks. Hearing the children's and parents' co-constructed views and solutions highlight the potential positive impact of their involvement in co-developing school mobile phone policies.

Selwyn, N. & Aagaard, J. (2020). Banning mobile phones from classrooms – An opportunity to advance understandings of technology addiction, distraction and cyberbullying. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(1), 8–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12943>

Abstract: There is now an emerging worldwide trend for mobile phones being banned from classrooms and schools. While some academics working in the area of educational technology have raised concerns, many others have so far failed to respond to what is a significant shift in the ongoing development of digital education. The paper considers how academic researchers and other educational technology stakeholders can respond to what might be perceived as the curtailment of some forms of digital education. In particular, the paper argues that this current turn away from digital devices offers an opportunity to advance understandings about a number of seemingly problematic issues regarding the continued use of digital technologies in schools. In particular, the paper reconsiders five such areas of concern that are associated with banning phones from school: (1) technology addition; (2) digital distraction; (3) cyberbullying; (4) surveillance capitalism; and (5) environmental sustainability of digital education.

Smale, W., Hutcheson, R., & Russo, C. (2021). Cell phones, student rights, and school safety: Finding the right balance. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy / Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation*, (195), 49-64. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075672ar>

Abstract: Despite the potential instructional benefits of integrating devices such as cell phones into schools and classrooms, research reveals that their improper use can negatively impact student behaviour, learning, and well-being. This paper reviews the literature and litigation on cell phone use in schools due to controversies over cheating, cyberbullying, sexting, and searches of student cell phones. Recent studies suggested that the presence of cell phones and related technologies in classrooms could detract from students' academic performances while contributing to higher rates of academic dishonesty and cyberbullying. The growing prevalence of cyberbullying is especially concerning because it can have severely negative, even tragic, effects on student mental health and safety. However, given the relatively discreet nature of cell phone use, regulations about their use can be difficult to enforce. After reviewing literature and litigation on the potential risks associated with inappropriate cell phone use in schools, this paper offers suggestions for educators to consider when devising or revising policies balancing students' individual rights with their safety and well-being before ending with a brief conclusion.

Supandi, A.L., Kusumaningsih, W., & Aini, A.N. (2018). Mobile phone application for mathematics learning. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 983. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/983/1/012106>

Abstract: This research was aimed to determine the role of the use of Mobile Phone Application (MPA) in Mathematics learning. The Pre and Post-test Quasy Experiment method was applied. The Pre-test was performed to understand the initial capability. In contrast, the Post-test was selected to identify changes in student ability after they were

introduced to the application of Mobile Technology. Student responses to the use of this application were evaluated by a questionnaire. Based on the questionnaire, high scores were achieved, indicating the student's interest in this application. Also, learning results showed significant improvement in the learning achievement and the student learning behaviour. It was concluded that education supported by the MPA application gave a positive impact on learning outcomes as well as learning atmosphere both in class and outside the classroom.

Walker, R. (2013). 'I don't think I would be where I am right now'. Pupil perspectives on using mobile devices for learning. *Research in Learning Technology*, 21, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v21i0.22116>

Abstract: Are pupils in the United Kingdom using mobile devices to help their learning? If so, what are they using and why? This article is based on research carried out by questionnaire, observation and pupil interviews at two English academies. One of the academies provides mobile devices for the pupils, and the other bans the use of mobile devices. The extent to which pupils are using their mobile devices to help their learning and which features they find useful for their schoolwork were examined. Pupils were also asked about some of the common barriers to using a mobile device in school: bullying, cheating and disruption. Results show that pupils at both schools do use their mobile devices for learning, with significantly more use at the school which allows mobile devices. However, usage is also significant in the school which currently bans devices. Pupils use their mobile devices for a wide range of activities, and the way in which pupils use their devices raises important questions for schools considering the adoption of mobile technology for teaching and learning. This article argues that schools should be actively encouraging pupils to make use of mobile devices.

Wikström, P., Duek, S., Nilsberth, M., & Olin-Scheller, C. (2022). Smartphones in the Swedish upper-secondary classroom: A policy enactment perspective. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 49(2), 230-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2124268>

Abstract: This study addresses normative orientations to smartphone use in Swedish upper-secondary classrooms. We present a Nexus Analysis from a policy enactment perspective of a material comprising ethnographic interviews, classroom video observations, and smartphone screen capture, investigating how a cultural conception of the smartphone as a source of disturbance is negotiated in discursive and embodied social action. Three groups of policy actors – head teachers, teachers, and students – balance competing agendas such as digitalization strategies, popular media narratives, and student autonomy and peer relationship maintenance. There is a tension between orientations to the smartphone as a legitimate resource for socialization and learning in the digitalized classroom, but also as an exception to desired digitalization – a potential threat to the social and disciplinary order of the classroom. Notably, the students display considerable awareness of such tensions, in reflective comments made in interviews and in displayed strategies for managing their smartphones in class.

Wood, G., Goodyear, V., Adab, P., Al-Janabi, H., Fenton, S., Jones, K., Michail, M., Morrison, B., Patterson, P., Sitch, A.J., Wade, M., & Pallan, M. (2023). Smartphones, social media and adolescent mental well-being: The impact of school policies restricting daytime use-protocol for a natural experimental observational study using mixed methods at secondary schools in England (SMART Schools Study). *BMJ Open*, 13(7), e075832. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-075832.

Introduction. Smartphone and social media use is prevalent during adolescence, with high levels of use associated with lower levels of mental well-being. Secondary schools in the UK have introduced policies that restrict daytime use of smartphones and social media, but there is no evaluation on the impact of these policies on adolescent mental well-being. The SMART Schools Study aims to determine the impact of daytime restrictions of smartphone and social media use on indicators of adolescent mental well-being, anxiety, depression, physical activity, sleep, classroom behaviour, attainment and addictive social media use.

Methods and analysis. This is a natural experimental observational study using mixed methods. Secondary schools within a 100 mile radius of the recruiting centre in the West Midlands (UK) have been categorised into two groups: Schools that restrict (intervention) and permit (comparator) daytime use of smartphones. We aim to recruit 30 schools (20 restrictive, 10 permissive) and 1170 pupils aged 12–13 and 14–15 years. We will collect data on mental well-being, anxiety and depressive symptoms, phone and social media use, sleep and physical activity from pupil surveys, and accelerometers. Policy implementation measures and data on individual pupil factors will be collected through school staff surveys, and website/policy analysis. Six case study schools will explore individual, school and family/home factors that influence relationships between school smartphone policies, smartphone/social media use, and mental well-being. Economic evaluation will be completed through a cost–consequence analysis from an education sector perspective.

Academic blog posts

Campbell, M., & Third, A. (2021). No, Education Minister, we don't have enough evidence to support banning mobile phones in schools. *Parenting for a Digital Future*, LSE Blog, 21 April.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2021/04/21/banning-mobile-phones>

This is critical of (Australian) government evidence that demonstrates that students' use of mobile phones at school is correlated with lower academic performance. The authors claim that there is not sufficient data, that correlation is not causation, and the results of the survey have not been replicated.

Claro, M., & Santana, L.E. (2024). An outright ban on cellphone means giving up on education. *Fostering Digital Citizenship, Opinion*, 29 April.
<https://ciudadaniadigital.uai.cl/en/2024/04/29/columna-de-opinion-la-prohibicion-total-de-los-celulares-es-renunciar-a-educar>

The authors offer two main reasons to oppose a total ban on mobile phones in schools: the intended goal will not be achieved (because digital experiences transcend the walls of the school), and a ban does not eliminate distraction in class.

Corbett, S. (2018). No, mobile phones should not be banned in UK schools. *The Conversation*, 22 June. **https://theconversation.com/no-mobile-phones-should-not-be-banned-in-uk-schools-98717?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=twitterbutton**

This discusses some of the pros of using phones in the classroom: students will have jobs that rely on technology, and they need to be mature enough to use it wisely, and appropriately. Thus, the solution is not prohibition, but rather, education. However, given the increasing demands on teachers, such as the pressure to keep order in class and ensure students achieve good grades, there is not enough time for surveillance and new strategies to emerge as technologies evolve.

Durden, T. (2024). This is what happened after several schools banned cellphones. *Zero Hedge*, 9 May. **www.zerohedge.com/medical/what-happened-after-several-schools-banned-cellphones?utm_source=daily_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2630**

This overview of a 73-page Norwegian paper found: (1) The number of psychological consultations was reduced by 60 per cent in female students; (2) The incidence of bullying for both girls and boys lowered; (3) Girls made gains in GPA and externally graded mathematics tests; (4) Girls were more likely to attend an academic high school rather than vocational track.

Ferguson, C.J. (2024). Did a new study show that a Norwegian 'ban' on smartphones helped kids? *Secrets of Grimoire Manor*, 12 May.
https://grimoiremanor.substack.com/p/did-a-new-study-show-that-a-norwegian?publication_id=445044&r=ubgoh

This refutes the evidence from a study on the mobile phone ban in Norway. It claims that Norway has not enforced a ban, and the results are misleading. He criticizes Abrahamsson (2024) for focusing on evidence that trended in the direction of her narrative, and the statistics rely on small effect sizes and non-significant results.

Fried, E. (2024). Social media bans don't address youth mental health problems. 23 April. <https://eiko-fried.com/social-media-bans-dont-address-youth-mental-health-problems>

Instead of rash measures that take away young people's agency and opportunities, the author contends that people must focus on addressing the many and multifaceted mental health challenges young people face that are not limited to social media. The author cites large-scale investigations, reviews and meta-analyses.

Kemp, P., Brock, R., & O'Brien, A. (2024). Mobile phone bans in schools: Impact on achievement. BERA Blog, 15 February. www.bera.ac.uk/blog/mobile-phone-bans-in-schools-impact-on-achievement

Initial analysis of the dataset from OECD's 2022 PISA exam suggested that smartphone bans might help reduce student distraction in school; however, the authors' further exploration of the test scores suggest that when social class, gender and behaviour are controlled for, students in schools with phone bans have *lower* achievement across their PISA test scores than schools that permit phone use.

Lebedikova, M., Tkaczyk, M, Mylek, V., & Smahel, D. (2024). Do smartphones really cause mental illness among adolescents? Ten problems with Jonathan Haidt's book. Parenting for a Digital Future. LSE Blog, 15 May. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2024/05/15/haidt>

This critical review of J. Haidt's controversial book *The anxious generation* suggests he engages in: Cherry-picking research; Drawing causal conclusions from (mostly) correlational data; Dismissing alternative explanations; Generalizing beyond the data; Assuming that media effects are the same for everyone; Overstating the scale of adolescents' internet addiction; Depriving adolescents of agency; Downplaying the benefits of technology; Proposing reforms without considering the impacts; and Valuing a good story over responsible science.

Odgers, C. (2024). The great rewiring: Is social media really behind an epidemic of teenage mental illness? *Nature*, 29 March. www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00902-2

The author critiques Haidt's book, noting that while it's a good story, it lacks evidence to support its conclusions. Specifically, she cites a mix of no, small or mixed associations between social media use and mental health problems.

Przybylski, A. (2024). A social media ban for children would actually solve nothing. Here's why – by Prof. A Przybylski. BBC Science Focus, Comment, 27 February. www.sciencefocus.com/comment/social-media-ban-children

This considers a ban on social media sites on account of its (perceived) influence on children's mental health. It questions whether social networking sites are truly harmful to their mental health, and whether a ban could actually even be enforced. It posits that what children need is to establish a healthy relationship with their screens.

Rahali, M., Kidron, B., & Livingstone, S. (2024). Does the evidence support a school ban on smartphones? British Politics and Policy at LSE. LSE Blog, 18 September. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/does-the-evidence-support-a-school-ban-on-smartphones>

In this blog post, the authors summarise the key findings of their larger report, and include links to videos and talks that will be of interest to all concerned about smartphones in schools, and whether the internet is good for children.

Schofield Clark, L. (2018). Banning kids from having smartphones misses the point. Parenting for a Digital Future, LSE Blog, 15 August. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2018/08/15/banning-kids-from-having-smartphones-misses-the-point>

Written in 2018, the author considers that instead of asking about limits (of screen time) and bans (on mobile phones), that parents and stakeholders may want to ask how technology can be used in ways that enhance families' lives.

Education and related sources

Alvarez, H., & Mundial, B. (2024). *Teléfonos inteligentes y su impacto en los aprendizajes? Smartphones and their impact on learning.* Union de colegios internacionales. https://uncoli.edu.co/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Educacion_dispositivos_moviles.pdf

This collates material from across the world, looking at students who use digital devices at school. Meta-analyses show detrimental negative effects of use on academic performance, and this decrease is related to increased distractions and time dedicated to non-academic activities during learning hours. While the impact varies across age groups, the relationship is more pronounced among adolescents.

Arora, A. (2023). Should mobile phones be banned in schools? LinkedIn. www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7096011281245102080?updateEntityUrn=urn%3Ali%3Afs_feedUpdate%3A%28V2%2Curn%3Ali%3Aactivity%3A7096011281245102080%29

This provides a summary of measures currently being taken in Delhi, India.

Common Sense Media (2023). *Constant companion: A week in the life of a young person's smartphone use.* 26 September. www.commonsensemedia.org/research/constant-companion-a-week-in-the-life-of-a-young-persons-smartphone-use

This fills a gap in understanding how teens use their smartphones, combining data from kids' phones themselves with feedback from the Youth Advisory Council. The draw of smartphones is both complicated and powerful.

Connect Safely (2024). Social media and youth mental health – It’s nuanced. 17 May. <https://connectsafely.org/social-media-and-youth-mental-health-its-nuanced>

This starts by providing an overview of the argument of Haidt’s book: that the increased rates of youth depression, anxiety and self-harm can be explained by the widespread adoption of both smartphones and social media by young people starting in the early 2010s. Haidt claims that new technologies have led to a range of negative effects, from loneliness, social contagion and comparison, sleep deprivation, and attention fragmentation. It offers a brief review of the book’s critics: Odgers, Prysbylski and Etchells.

Mansfield, I., Phillips, S., and Webb, N. (2024). *Disconnect: The case for a smartphone ban in schools*. Policy Exchange. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Disconnect.pdf>

This is one of the more comprehensive reports outlining the decline in teen mental health in the UK and the reasons for suspecting that a smartphone-based childhood is a major factor. It presents primary research on what is happening across UK schools ($n=800$). Significantly, only 13 per cent of schools in England and Wales separate students from phones for the duration of the school day. It makes a case for effective bans in schools so children can spend 7 hours each day learning and connecting with their teachers and peers.

SWGfL (South West Grid for Learning) (2024). Online safety: Policy templates – International schools. <https://swgfl.org.uk/assets/documents/international-school-online-safety-policy-templates-sample.pdf>

The SWGfL template policies consist of an overall Online Safety Policy and a series of appendices with more detailed template policies and forms. They can also be found embedded in the links and resources section of the 360-degree safe online safety self-review tool. The policies cover topics such as: Acceptable use policies; Sexting; Social media and technology; Use of cameras and phones; and SEND.

Stakeholders and interested parties are encouraged to note the table of contents for relevant sections. This provides a template for an overall Online Safety Policy and offers suggesting wording. For full (free) access please visit:
www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/537/17241/17242/17250/42962105315.pdf?timestamp=433398713

Department for Education (DfE) (UK) (2024). *Mobile phones in schools: Guidance for schools on prohibiting the use of mobile phones throughout the school day*. February. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cf5f2a4239310011b7b916/Mobile_phones_in_schools_guidance.pdf

This publication provides guidance to individual schools and trusts on how to develop, implement and maintain a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day.

Department of Education and Skills – Ireland (2018). *Consultation with the school community including teachers, students and parents on the use of smart phones and tablet devices in schools*. Circular 0038/2018. www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0038_2018.pdf

The policy advanced by the Irish Department of Education and Skills requires consultation with both students and parents in addition to teachers and school staff, prior to the implementation of any smartphone policy.

House of Commons Education Committee (UK) (2024). *Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing*. 25 May. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45128/documents/223543/default>

The overwhelming weight of evidence submitted suggests that the harms of screen time and social media use significantly outweigh the benefits for young children, whereas limited use of screens and genuinely educational uses of digital technology can have benefits for older children. For this reason, screen time should be minimal for younger children and better balanced with face-to-face socialisation and physical activity for older ones. For children and adolescents alike the rapid rise of the use of screens and devices has come at a substantial cost, and government needs to do more across departments to protect them from addiction, online harms and the mental health impacts of extensive use of devices.

Parliament Education Committee (UK) (2023). *Written evidence submitted to Inquiry on ‘Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing’*. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7912/screen-time-impacts-on-education-andwellbeing/publications/written-evidence/?page=1>

This includes 49 submissions ranging from schools to teachers’ unions, headteachers, parents, academics, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders, such as Yondr.

Safer Internet Centre (UK) (2024). *Social media, mobile devices... What does your policy say?* <https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/social-media-mobile-devices-policy-templates>

This article points to online tools to help schools review and improve e-safety policies and practices. Template policies are free to download and can be accessed via the Online Safety Policy Templates page. The policies can be downloaded together, with or without appendices, or each can be downloaded separately.

UNESCO (2023). *UNESCO issues urgent call for appropriate use of technology in education*. Press release, 19 July. www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/articles/unesco-issues-urgent-call-appropriate-use-technology-education

The report highlights a lack of appropriate governance and regulation with regard to appropriate use of technology in education. Countries are urged to set their own terms for the way technology is designed and used in education so that it never replaces in-

person, teacher-led instruction, and supports the shared objective of quality education for all. It proposes four questions on technology for policymakers: Is it appropriate? Is it equitable? Is it scalable? Is it sustainable?



DIGITAL FUTURES FOR CHILDREN

Research at LSE and 5Rights Foundation ■

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