

PE2106/A: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Scottish Government written submission, 27 June 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Scottish Government's views on the action called for within Petition PE2106, for the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools, to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunchtime.

I share the petitioner's concerns about the impact of mobile phones on children and young people's learning. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) 2023¹ indicated increased concerns over the disruption the misuse of devices caused in class. Eighty-eight percent of secondary staff experience pupils using or looking at mobile phones/tablets when they shouldn't at least once a day. While the increasing use of mobile phones and social media was identified as an area of concern in BISSR 2016 research², this type of behaviour seems to have increased substantially in the intervening years. Young people using/looking at mobile phones or tablets when they shouldn't be was the behaviour most commonly reported as having the greatest negative impact on secondary school staff's teaching experience in 2023.

The evidence from BISSR is echoed by data from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022³, which found that almost one in three 15-year-olds in Scotland (and across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries) reported being distracted using digital devices in most or every maths class, and around a quarter of pupils got distracted by other pupils using digital devices. This research found that pupils appeared to be less distracted when they switched off notifications from social networks and apps on their digital devices during class, when they did not have their digital device open in class to take notes or search for information, and when they did not feel pressured to be online and answer messages while in class.

In light of this evidence, in December I announced my intention to provide refreshed guidance to schools on the use of mobile phones, as part of the joint national action plan on relationships and behaviour in schools. Our existing mobile phone guidance was produced in 2013 and it is appropriate that this be reviewed to take account of updated evidence. The refreshed guidance has been developed in consultation with the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools, which comprises representatives from COSLA, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Education Scotland, the main teaching unions, and parents and carers representatives.

I would ask the Committee to note that the Scottish Government cannot unilaterally ban mobile phones in schools. The decision to limit access to mobile phones in schools is a policy decision resting with head teachers and local authorities. However, our starting position is that headteachers are empowered to take the steps

¹ [Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2023/06/behaviour-in-scottish-schools-research-report-2023)

² [Behaviour in Scottish schools: 2016 research - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2016/06/behaviour-in-scottish-schools-2016-research)

³ [PISA - PISA \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/)

that they consider appropriate, and, if they see fit to restrict mobile phones in schools, the guidance will support that.

I had previously committed to publishing the refreshed mobile phone guidance in advance of summer recess. However, in view of the announcement of the UK Parliamentary election on 4th July I have had to consider whether this action remains appropriate. Publication will now take place after the election, to coincide with schools returning after the summer break.

I would be happy to share a copy of this guidance with the committee once it has been published.

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful, and the Committee is reassured of my commitment to bring forward refreshed guidance on the use of mobile phones in Scottish schools.

Yours sincerely

JENNY GILRUTH
CABINET SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS