

PE2106/B: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Petitioner written submission, 10 September 2024

We would ask the Committee to consider the following, in light of new information regarding mobile phones in schools since the petition was first published.

- a) As of 3rd September 2024, Northern Ireland now joins England in requiring schools to prohibit their pupils from using mobile phones during the entirety of the school day, including break and lunch. This blanket support and guidance from the government takes the pressure off individual Heads to make the decision and ensures an equal school experience for all pupils across these nations. We call on the Scottish Government to do the same, rather than place the onus on Heads to act if they choose to do so.
- b) In August 2024, the Head of Grantown Grammar School in Highland gave a series of interviews on local and national news¹, giving evidence of the changes seen in that school since phone use was restricted in May 2024. The words used included that the change was “transformational”, there were “fewer disruptions”, the whole school was “more social” and there was “more of a buzz”. We ask that the Scottish Government note the growing evidence base of the benefits in schools that have restricted phone use. In many schools across Scotland, there is the need to raise attainment. This would also be a benefit of providing pupils with a phone-free school day, as noted in the 2024 Policy Exchange publication ‘Disconnect’².
- c) In August 2024, the Scottish Government updated its guidance on mobile phone use in Scottish Schools. In the guidance, the Scottish Government chose not to mandate one rule for all, as has been done for English and Northern Irish Schools, but rather offer support to individual Heads who wish to restrict phone use.

We believe that the benefit of a phone-free school experience should be available to all children in the UK, indeed, especially to all children in Scotland. While we welcome the updated guidance from the Scottish Government, we would like to suggest that, by avoiding making a blanket policy (as other UK nations have done) and instead leaving it up to individual Heads to choose to act or not, an unequal school experience for Scottish pupils is created. In schools with a Head who is proactive and supported by his/her staff to enforce and police a restricting of phone use, the benefits above will be seen. Unfortunately, in schools where the Head is unwilling for whatever reason to make the change and restrict phone use at break

¹ Press and Journal (in print and online), also interview on BBC Good Morning Scotland (radio), Aug 2024

² “[there is a] clear correlation between an effective phone ban and better school performance, as measured by both Ofsted rating and Progress 8. Particularly taking into account the strong support given to effective bans by many school leaders who have implemented effective bans, and the wide range of international evidence demonstrating that effective bans on phones in school can have a positive impact on attainment, attention and other factors such as a reduction in bullying or improved mental health, these results offer further support for all schools implementing an effective ban on mobile phones.”

time and lunch time, the negative effects of allowing young teenagers unrestricted access to their phones, including issues of distraction, lack of focus, online bullying, reduced social interaction, exposure to inappropriate content, and a host of by now well documented other issues will continue to be seen. In effect, a postcode lottery will be created with a drastically different school experience in schools with different policies.

Furthermore, the absence of a centrally mandated rule for all schools also creates unequal working conditions for Scottish teachers. In schools where phone use is restricted, the likelihood of a teacher being filmed and the footage uploaded online is significantly reduced. Currently, all Scottish teachers (with the exception now of teachers at Grantown Grammar and most private schools which have already restricted phone use across the school day) work with the possibility that they might be filmed without their consent. Again, we call on the Scottish Government to create a phone-free school experience in all schools in Scotland, for the benefit of pupils and teachers alike.

We close with the words used in the current Scottish Government guidance on mobile phones in schools: "...there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that over-exposure to mobile phone use can result in limited concentration, unhappiness and isolation." We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government recognises this. We now ask it to mandate that Scottish schools join English and Northern Irish schools in giving pupils six hours or so in a day where they do not have access to them.

Thank you for your consideration.