

PE2106/D: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

NASUWT written submission, 30 October 2024

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of petition PE2106: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools.

The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

Introduction

1. The NASUWT does not support petition PE2106 and believes that the existing guidance is sufficient, more details are set out below.
2. The recently published national guidance '*Mobile phones: guidance for Scotland's schools*', negotiated with NASUWT, recognises the duality of mobile devices, such as phones and tablets, in schools. These can:
 - i. 'be powerful tools to enhance learning and teaching, communication and social experiences, and may remove barriers to learning for some pupils';
 - ii. 'also create challenges... causing disruption to pupils' learning and that of their peers'.
3. The Scottish Government in this guidance acknowledges that serious misbehaviours, including the abusive use of mobile phones in schools to bully or harass pupils and staff, is an increasing problem.

Impact on staff and pupils

4. The guidance states that policies on mobile phones in school should 'reflect the need to support pupils' learning, while protecting staff and pupils from bullying, harassment and abuse'. All local policies should 'recognise and respect all such rights, equally':
 - i. 'any decisions relating to the use of such devices in schools should be made acting in the best interests of the child and taking their views into consideration';
 - ii. '[t]here is also legislation which protects the rights of school staff in relation to their employment, health and safety etc'.

Local variations

5. There is no prescribed national approach; rather, individual school policies, developed in partnership with the whole school community (pupils, staff, parents & carers), will determine the extent of the restrictions and limitations in place.
6. For example, schools may choose to ask pupils to hand mobile phones over to a member of staff during class, restrict the use of mobile phones during the school day, or request mobile devices are switched off and out of sight during class, unless the teacher has requested otherwise. Policies may also include instructions that camera and filming functions only be used with the prior consent of the data subjects (pupils or staff) and special permission of school management.
7. Addressing the use of mobile phones must form part of joined-up whole-school strategies on managing pupil behaviour. Any school policy on mobile phones should align with the wider relationships and behaviour policy, relevant legislation (e.g. health and safety legislation for staff and pupils) and existing IT codes of conduct.
8. The guidance is already clear that all school policies on mobile devices should:
 - target pupils’ behaviours when interacting with a range of mobile technology, which can include functionalities of technology, e.g. sending/receiving messages, notifications, playing videos/music, and recording videos/audios in class;
 - set out clear and specific expectations of what standards of behaviour are expected and what action will be taken when such expectations are not met;
 - be clearly communicated with pupils, staff, parents and carers;
 - be applied consistently;
 - be regularly reviewed.
9. In designing a local policy, schools are also directed to note that ‘PISA 2022 suggested that when a school’s written statements or rules were too generally designed, imprecise or lenient, they were unlikely to support effective teaching and learning with mobile technology.’

School-based negotiations

10. NASUWT has created tailored advice to our school representatives alongside prompt questions to support local policy reviews or negotiations which can be accessed on our website using the following link:
 - [Developing a mobile phones in schools policy | NASUWT](#)

Conclusion

11. We know that mobile phones can be used as a tool to bully and harass fellow pupils and teachers, as well as distracting pupils from their learning. We therefore welcomed the guidance from the Scottish Government that school leaders can take steps to limit or ban the use of phones in their schools if they see fit. However, as set out above, in order to be effective, addressing the use of mobile phones must form part of joined up whole-school strategies on managing pupil behaviour.
12. While the Union was pleased to see within the National Action Plan on Behaviour the Scottish Government intends that schools will be offered support to adopt the recommendations within it, including suggested approaches and exemplars, it was nevertheless disappointing that the Scottish Government has not as yet committed any additional funding, time or resources to schools to support this work.
13. Teachers and school leaders are already dealing with excessive workloads and constrained budgets. Implementing the recommendations of this action plan is too important a task to be simply added to schools' already lengthy to-do lists. Ring-fenced time and funding is needed.
14. Some schools already had robust and effective policies in place that pre-empted the Scottish Government's guidance, others used the national launch as an opportunity to refresh or write their own. NASUWT would strongly argue that what is urgently needed is better resourcing and time for teachers and schools, rather than a central mandate to exclude mobile phones in schools.
15. The NASUWT would be happy to meet with the Committee to discuss all of these issues in more detail.