



20th January 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am sure you will have seen news coverage recently about the growing concerns around Smartphones, social media and our children. There is a growing movement of parents and schools across the country who are supporting each other to make informed choices in this area. This movement towards a “Smartphone Free Childhood” is the subject on a documentary on Channel 4, titled “The School that Banned Smartphones”, which aired on December 11th 2024.

Our federation is keen to support the “Smartphone Free Childhood” movement in any way we can. We are reviewing school policies to ensure we are doing what we can to make our schools smartphone free spaces for our pupils, so that they can focus on learning and socializing, away from the distractions of these devices.

By “smartphone”, we refer to phones that are able to access the Internet, as opposed to mobile phones that can only text and make calls. We do understand that many parents will want to contact their child as he/she becomes more independent, particularly when they begin walking to and from school on their own. However, children’s phones do not need to be able to access the internet or other apps in order for you to keep them safe and give you peace of mind.

When children first started getting smartphones over a decade ago, there was no research about their impact. Now, there is and this research is both overwhelming and alarming. Over the last few years, we have seen the age of children owning smartphones has dropped significantly; some of our children in Key Stage 1 now own smartphones. While smartphones can be a very helpful piece of technology for adults, they can equally expose children to a number of negative risks. Smartphones:

- Are **highly addictive**, with lasting effects on young and developing brains; use of them prompts a huge dopamine release, leading to a need for constant gratification.
- Have been linked to **poor mental health, depression and low self-esteem**, especially in young teens.
- Expose children to **harmful content**, including pornography, grooming, bullying and material that is not age appropriate.

- **Reduce attention spans** – they are changing the way children’s brains develop and fundamentally affecting their ability to concentrate.
- **Rob children of their childhood.** Time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting and developing vital social skills. Less time on screens has shown to have a positive effect on behaviour in children and teens across the board.

We would like to encourage all parents to delay giving children a smartphone until at least the age of 14. We also support raising the minimum age to use social media from 13 to 16 years old. Parents can, instead, opt for a text/call phone alternative if necessary. We know that you want the best for your children and that many of you already try to limit your child’s access but this is very easy to bypass, and is highly time consuming to monitor.

It is our ambition to promote our own schools as smartphone free spaces. We want to work together across our local area and join those nationally who are already seeing incredible results, to change the “norm” and delay our children having access to smartphones at such a young age. However, to be successful, this movement relies upon you, our children’s parents and carers to resist the pressure from your children and their peers and say, “No, not yet” when they beg for that smartphone.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

In addition to reviewing our policies, we are planning to build educational sessions about this topic into our PSHE curriculum.

HLF also want to reassure parents that their pupils will not need a smartphone for secondary school. Homework set online can be accessed on a tablet or computer, and pupils will receive a printed copy of their timetable. Although electronic passes are popular at the moment, bus companies can provide traditional physical passes for school transport. We are encouraged by smartphone free secondary schools and optimistic about the positive impact this can have on children’s behaviour, academic development and social interactions.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Already the parents of 189 children at HLF have pledged to delay buying a smartphone until they are at least 14 years old. We are proud to say this is the highest number of children at any school in East Sussex! Across the UK, over 88,000 children are signed up, at more than 10,000 schools. The more parents commit to the pact, the less social pressure there is. If you would like any more information, please contact school or visit the websites below.

You can sign here and see where we are in the national tables:

<https://parentpact.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>.

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Other websites to visit:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>

<https://delaysmartphones.org.uk>

In today's world of rapidly changing technology, we must protect our children's developing brains from the dangers of smartphones. Together, we can help safeguard their futures.

Thank you for your support,

Maddie Southern
Executive Headteacher

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