



Reach Schools

Smartphones

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What is the current problem?

There are significant issues with smartphones, and the growing conversation around the problems in the mainstream media are highlighting that this is a national issue. With Reach Academy Hanworth Park due to open in September 2024, this is an apt time to look at our smartphone policy, which has not been updated since we opened, although there have been significant changes to the smartphone landscape since then.

We feel that there are two separate issues with smartphones.

1) Smartphones are creating long-term, significant issues for our students.

The evidence for this is extensive and increasingly well-documented. This is not an issue that is specific to Reach Schools, but a national concern. We know anecdotally that young people in Reach Schools struggle with lower self-efficacy, increased social pressures, increased loneliness and ensuing mental health problems than in previous years, and that research is suggesting a causal link between this and smartphone usage.

There is also a secondary concern that carrying smartphones can hold an increased risk of being a target for criminals outside school. We currently have three Year 9 students who are testifying against an individual who mugged them at knifepoint for their phones. The area directly around the school has a rate of three times the national average for robbery, theft and anti-social behaviour.

2) Smartphones within school are a proven distraction, and, at worst, misused.

Within Reach Academy Feltham, we have always had a policy that phones should be neither seen nor heard within the school. If they are seen, then they are confiscated until the end of



that week, and the student will receive an automatic detention. If they are used purposefully, then the confiscation remains the same, but the consequence is Step 2.

We generally do not see instances of phone usage within school, and there are few consequences issued relating to phones. However, we know that many students keep their phone on during the day. In the best case scenario, this can lead to distraction (see [The mere presence of a mobile phone](#)), and in the worst, deliberate use when not supervised.

Long-term issues

According to significant research, we know that pupils will suffer with smartphone use. This has been well documented, and can be read about fully in the Ormiston evidence summary in [Appendix 1](#).

As all-through schools, we should be better placed to encourage later uptake in smartphones, as we will be first engaging with children and their families from the age of 4, or even earlier, before they are given their own smartphone. From Year 7, 97.1% of Reach Academy Feltham students already own a smartphone, so this is something that needs to be addressed in Phase 1 and 2. The easiest way to reduce the impact of smartphone usage is by limiting pupils' ownership of smartphones in the first place. We know that if we can get parents as a group to understand the benefits in delaying giving their child a smartphone until Year 10, we will reduce the numbers of pupils impacted.

We want to streamline our communication over the use of smartphones, and therefore have three messages in relation to them:

- 1) Smartphones damage mental health
- 2) Smart phones inhibit learning
- 3) Smartphones make you a target for crime



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Suggested Reach Schools Plan

Pupil education

Team Reach Lessons

We will create 2 stand alone Team Reach lessons for year groups 6 - 10 in preparation for next year.

Lesson 1: Smartphones and the damage on mental health.

Lesson 2: Smartphones and the damage on learning

These will be planned and delivered by SLT during weeks 11 and 12 to ensure that each class is given identical messaging.

Phone Free Days

Over the first term, we will provide opportunities to trade in your phone for an evening, in order to be able to attend an event in school. By encouraging pupils to have phone-free days, we will be aiming to encourage more engagement in

Parental education

We will create a **one pager** that summarises the key research relating to the impacts on mental health and learning.

During all **home visits** for new students, we will stress the importance of not purchasing a phone for Year 7 students. If the student already has a phone, we will discuss the research and the importance of limiting use on a phone.

During the first half-term, we will run 5 **workshops** for parents, one for each phase about phone usage. These will be planned this half-term, and we will seek focus group guidance to support input that is age-related.



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We will send out the dates this half-term (with the one pager), promote on social media, and insist on 100% attendance at these events.

Suggested workshop topics:

- Phase 1: Using your phone around your child
- Phase 2: Choosing an appropriate device
- Phase 3: Limiting phone use for Year 6-8. 50% of parents at Reach Academy Feltham place no restrictions on phone usage, with 80% of parents checking phones less than once a month.
- Phase 4: Controls and parental supervision for Years 9 - 11
- Phase 5: Adult usage of phones for Years 12-13

In-school issues

Research has shown that simply having a smartphone near your person can reduce concentration. We are suggesting a school-wide ban on smartphones across all year groups, excluding Feltham College. We would suggest bringing this in from the first day of the next academic year 2024-25, with communication to be sent this side of the summer holidays. There needs to be a dual pronged approach to this - with a clear plan for parents and pupils alongside each other.

Suggested Reach Schools Plan

We know that we need to have the same system in each school. For the model to work at scale for RAHP, it needs to work at RAF in the current iteration of daily routines.

Logistics:

We considered a number of options:

- Collecting phones on the door in the morning or during form



- Investing in 'phone lockers' for pupils to keep their phones in - too expensive
- Not allowing pupils to bring them on-site at all - not viable (phones as debit cards)

We have decided that the most time efficient way to collect phones will be during morning entrance. This will reduce any negative associations with the form time, and allow teachers to focus on other routines and equipment checks.

During entrance, one head of year for Y7/8 and one head of year for Y9/10/11 will be in the hall, collecting in phones on the door and adding them into the class [phone box](#) (see below). These will then be taken to the HoY office, which can remain locked all day.

At the end of the day, the teacher will dismiss the pupils, and then ensure that they are walking them down the stairs to the gate. They will then hold the box on the gate as pupils are dismissed, collecting their phone from the box. The box will then be returned to Reception, and any pupil that has an after-school commitment will be able to collect their phone on the way out of school from one location.

OR

During focus, the HOY will deliver the phone box to each class. They will hand out the phones to children during Focus.

OR

During focus, the HOY will deliver the phone box to each class. Pupils will be given their phones if they are leaving school at 3.30. If they have an after school activity, they will be kept in the SLT office, and will be able to be collected at 4.30 or 5.30.

Costings associated with this:

Purchasing of boxes with foam dividers to keep phones in. These [phone boxes](#) will cost £62 each, and we will require 10 to 12, at a total cost of £620 - £744



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Concerns and mitigations:

There is a concern that if a pupil finds a way to not hand in their phone (e.g. they have two phones, or they say that they do not have one in school, but actually do), then they have a space to immediately show a level of disregard for the rules. To mitigate against this, we will need to increase the sanction for having a phone on you during the school day. We would recommend that it is immediately a day of Step 2, along with that phone being confiscated until the following Friday (i.e. over a weekend). We will also add mobile phones to the list of items that may be searched for in the school behavior policy.

If a pupil arrives late to school, then they will hand in their phone on the late desk and it will be placed in an envelope. They will then be held in Front Office, putting the onus on the child to have to collect it at the end of the day.

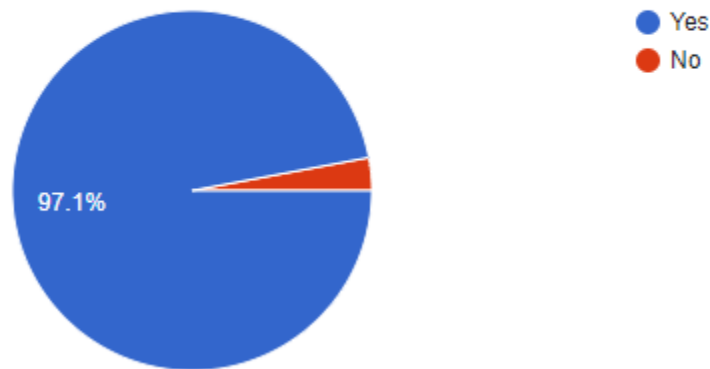
Sixth Form students will be able to have their phones with them, but they must never be visible to any other students. They will be allowed to have them during break times or activity times. They should not be seen during Independent Study or in lessons.



Appendix 1: Reach Academy Feltham survey responses

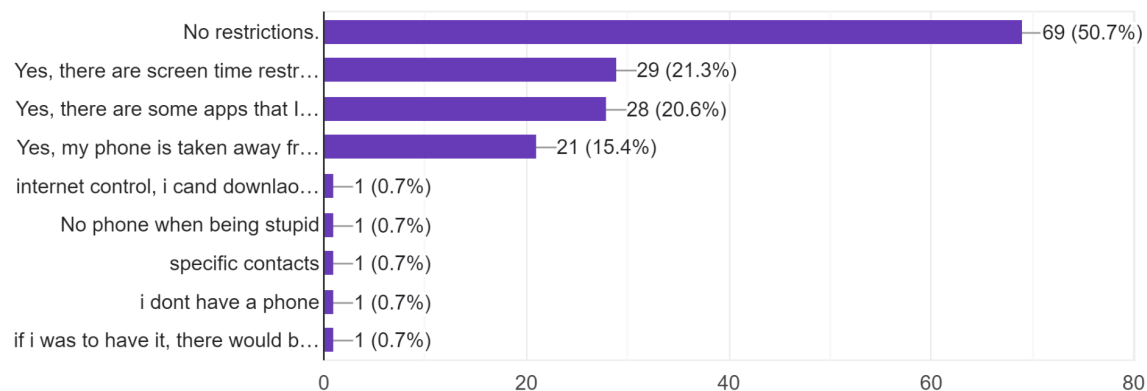
Do you have your own smart phone, with access to the internet?

136 responses



Are there restrictions put on your phone? Click as many as are relevant.

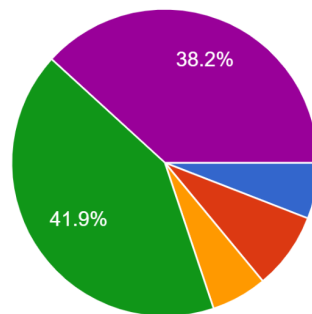
136 responses





How often do your parents/carers check your phones?

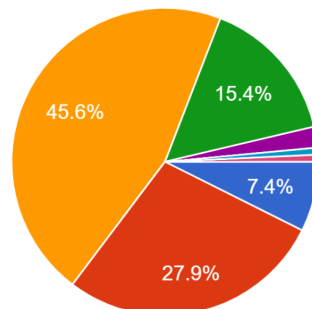
136 responses



- Every day
- Once a week or more
- Once a month or more
- From time to time, but not regularly.
- They never check my phone

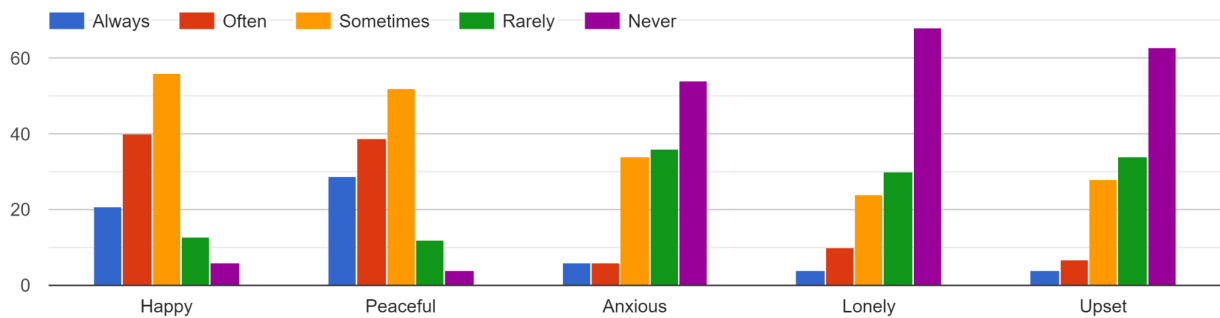
Do you think that you use your phone too much?

136 responses



- Yes, definitely.
- Yes, a bit too much.
- It's just right.
- No, I don't use it very much.
- No, I never use it.
- i dont have one
- if i was to have i would try balance it

How do you feel when you DON'T have your phone with you?



Appendix 2: Evidence Summary (from Ormiston)

The number of smartphone users across the world now tops 4.8 billion (Turner, 2024). Research suggests children are some of the heaviest users of digital devices. For example, children aged 8-12 spend approximately 5.5 hours a day using a screen and children aged 13-18 spend nearly 8.5 hours using devices (Rideout et al, 2022). 35% of 13-14 year-olds and 52% of 15-17 year-olds say they are on line 'constantly' (PEW Research Centre, 2022). The body of evidence about device and social media use is relatively nascent, and one of the key debates about existing literature is whether the evidence demonstrates correlation or causation. Odgers (2024) and Warner (2024) have argued the evidence is equivocal on whether device use is to blame for the rises in mental health, and that the focus on phones could be distracting us from other causes of mental health and poor psychological wellbeing. In return, researchers (Haidt, 2024) have responded to these views to argue that the evidence does suggest correlation. A growing body of research seems to suggest that the influence of digital devices – in particular smart phones and social media – may be problematic for children.



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The problematic impact of smart phone use on pupils seems to fall into two broad categories:

- 1) Learning and academic performance
- 2) Mental health and wellbeing

This paper summarises research into these two areas.

Academic performance:

A study (Kuznekoff and Titsworth, 2013) investigating the impact (during a class lecture) on student learning found that there were differences in the behaviour and performance of students depending on whether they did or did not use a mobile phone. Participants watched a video lecture, took notes on that lecture, and took two learning assessments after watching the lecture. Students who were not using their mobile phones wrote down 62% more information in their notes, took more detailed notes, were able to recall more detailed information from the lecture, and scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple-choice test than those students who were actively using their mobile phones. Another study (Liu et al, 2020) based on survey and academic data from more than 11,000 students in China found that pupils who used a mobile phone for ≥ 2 hours/day on weekdays and ≥ 5 hours/day on weekends were significantly more likely to report poor overall academic performance and scored significantly lower on Mathematics and English achievement tests. A study from Brazil (Felisoni and Godoi, 2018) found that, for every 100 min spent using a device (per day), a pupil dropped 6.3 points in the school's ranking of pupils. When phone usage took place during class time only (as opposed to during free time and weekends), the effect was almost twice as high. The authors describe the magnitude of the effect found as 'alarming', providing evidence of the 'potential harm of excessive smartphone use'. One study (Han and Jeong Yi, 2018) found that the academic performance of older students (of college age) was positively influenced by smartphones, although the authors caution that the way the phones (as learning tools) were introduced

and managed as was crucial to this impact. However, another study of college age students found that the presence of mobile phones led to worse test performance (Mendoza et al, 2018).

The mere presence of a mobile phone:

Thornton (2014) reports that there is considerable evidence – perhaps expectedly - of attention and performance deficits associated with the actual use of a cell phone while multitasking (for example during driving, walking, working, or learning). Thornton goes further however, to show that the mere presence of a phone, even if is not being used, can still 'serve as a distractor and result in attentional and performance deficits.' The deficits noticed in the study were not present during simple tasks, but appeared when participants were asked to engage in more complex tasks – exactly the sorts of tasks we (at OAT) want pupils to be engaging in on a daily basis. The author reasons that, because a smartphone represents 'the potential for contact with a very broad social and informational network' the phone becomes a conditioned stimulus 'capable of creating a distraction from the immediate task or situation at hand and elicit awareness of that wider social network that one is not part of at the moment'. In doing so, the presence of the phone distracts the individual from the task in hand, by depleting the cognitive resource they have available. Results from another study (Tanil and Yong, 2020) corroborate the finding that simply the presence of a smartphone can negatively affect memory and recall.

The effects of a mobile phone ban

A study (Beland and Murphy, 2015) which surveyed schools in four English cities (Birmingham, Leicester, London and Manchester) found that 'student performance in high stakes exams significantly increases postban'. Specifically, introducing a mobile phone ban in schools increased students' GCSE scores. The impact of the ban was especially positive for lower-achieving students. The positive effect the study finds (i.e. on pupil test results) is driven by the most disadvantaged and underachieving pupils whilst students in the top quartile are neither positively nor negatively affected by a phone ban. The results suggest

that low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones, while high achievers can focus in the classroom regardless of the mobile phone policy. The authors conclude that a mobile phone ban 'can be a low-cost policy to reduce educational inequalities' but only if the ban is carefully and widely complied with.

A very recent study (Abrahamsson, 2024) suggests that banning mobile phones could have positive effects on the psychological health outcomes and academic outcomes of girls, especially girls from lower socio- economic backgrounds. The study also finds banning phones leads to a reduction in bullying of both boys and girls.

Relationship between device/social media use and mental health and attainment outcomes:

A study by Jean Twenge found that moderate use of mobile phones (4 hours per day) was associated with lower psychological well-being. Individuals who spent more than 7 hours per day were less curiosity, self- control, and emotional stability and more than twice as likely to:

- Have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety
- Have been treated by a mental health professional
- Have taken medication for behavioural issues in the last 12 months

Research suggests that the context of the use of a device and social media may mediate the impact on the user. One study from Belgium finds both positive and negative impacts of social media on pupils. Another study suggests that certain 'cognitive styles', such as those that involve rumination and brooding, appeared to exacerbate negative effects of social media (Seabrook et al, 2016).

A systematic review (Girela Serrano, 2022) of 25 observational studies published between 2011 and 2019 found 'suggestive but limited evidence that greater use of wireless devices (including mobile phones) may be associated with poorer mental health in children and adolescents'. The relationship between the use of devices and the impact on children's



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wellbeing and mental health is described as complex and depends on a number of different factors. For example, interactive screen time such as the use of a computer has been found to be more detrimental to sleep than passive screen time such as television watching. The paper reports on a new construct: 'problematic smart-phone use' (PSU) which has been categorised similarly to criteria used to describe substance abuse. Although some studies find that smart phone use was beneficial (e.g. to strengthen social connections) it may be that there is a limit to the positive impact of smartphonesmart phone use. The paper stresses the need for further research into the relationship between smartphonesmart phone use and mental health and wellbeing.

Conclusion:

The evidence base about device and social media use is relatively nascent and developing all the time. On balance, research suggests there may be some problematic implications for those who use it, especially children and young people. The evidence is not yet robust enough to convince everyone (although some are convinced) that the impact of phones on negative outcomes is causal rather than correlational and it is clear there is more work to do to understand in what circumstances device and social media use is most harmful. For example, evidence points to differences in the way they affect boys/girls, different ages, different cognitive styles, different socio-economic status and depending on how the device is used.

However, based on the way that evidence has shown that phones compete for the limited attention humans have, the way they can distract us from the task in hand, the way they enable anonymity and distorted social interaction, the potentially harmful content available on them, the way they seem to have more of a negative effect on pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds and on the seemingly positive impacts of banning them in schools, it seems – on balance – that reducing the overall time spent on phones, especially in school environments, is likely to have a positive impact on pupils.



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Smartphones in Reach Schools

At Reach, we have always believed that school should be a smartphone free environment for all children. Although we allow pupils to bring their phones into school with them, it has always been in our behaviour policy that they should be turned off and in their bags.

However, we need to go further than this.

There is abundant research showing the negative impacts of smartphone ownership - especially for teenagers. We believe that there are three main impacts:

- Smartphones, particularly social media consumption, **damages mental health**
- The mere presence of smartphones **inhibits learning**
- Carrying a smartphone makes you a **target for crime**

Moderate use of mobile phones is associated with lower psychological well-being. Individuals who use their phone a lot are twice as like to have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety or taken medication for behavioural issues.	The mere presence of a phone, even if is not being used, can still 'serve as a distractor and result in attentional and performance deficits.' particularly during complex tasks.	The area directly around the school has a rate of three times the national average for robbery, theft and anti-social behaviour. In London, roughly one phone is stolen directly from a person every four minutes.
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With this in mind, from September, we will be taking a number of actions to support our pupils with the rising negative influence of smartphones.

- **Collecting smartphones from pupils** as they enter school and returning at the end of the school day. They will be kept securely during this time.
- **Increasing confiscation lengths** for pupils that are found carrying a phone. .
- Holding **parent events** to support you with managing your childrens' use of smartphones
- Increasing **pupil education** on the dangers associated with smartphones
- Holding **phone free events** for pupils to enjoy socialising outside of school, without their phones,



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