

St Peter's Catholic School

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Headteacher: Mr T Miller



27th June 2024

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Smartphone Usage in St Peter's

I have been interested in the evidence, research and thinking that is emerging from the Smartphone Free Childhood movement, and the role that St Peter's can play in addressing some of the challenges that smartphone use poses for the healthy development of our students. You may be interested to read more about this movement [HERE](#). The views expressed on this website are not necessarily the views of the school, but the sentiments and concerns are certainly ones that we acknowledge.

I am writing to share a change in our Anti-Bullying and Behaviour Policy that has been agreed within school, with our governors and has full support of our Xavier Trust. It has been based upon our own learning and reflection, as we strive to create a school culture that supports our students to thrive in every aspect of their development.

The context

The evidence base for the impact of social media on the mental health, wellbeing and social development of our young people is robust and compelling. There is no doubt that access to handheld technology provides benefits, but these are outweighed by the potential harm. The recent publication 'The Anxious Generation' by Professor Jonathan Haidt is one example of scientific research that presents data and analysis which concludes by advising that a significant shift in our behaviours around phone use are required. You may be interested to listen to Haidt's conversation with Dr Rangan Chatterji for an oversight of the issue [HERE](#).

Our policy has been in place for several years and, in the light of new learning, should be updated. Currently, students are allowed to bring their mobile phone to school, but it must not be seen or heard unless a teacher permits its use in a lesson for an appropriate activity. Most of our students have a smartphone with constant access to the internet and social media. The problems we used to observe in only older students because of smartphone use are now present amongst our youngest learners and are also reported in primary school.

Smartphones and the impact on school life

At school, we constantly deal with issues related to smartphone and social media use. Friendship fallouts and bullying often stem from interactions on phones, and the pressure on young people to conform and be 'present' online is relentless. As educators we see the impact of isolation, inappropriate communication, exclusion and confrontation that results from negative exposure to social media. Access to a computer tends to lend itself to study whereas smartphone use lends itself to social media for most young people.

We experience an increasing impact on concentration levels due to students finding it harder to manage their sleep. Smartphones and social media can have a negative impact on sleep in terms of quality and quantity which has implications for concentration, mood, stress and anxiety within the school day.

Parental/carer responsibility

It is a huge decision to give our children access to a smartphone. In no other context would we provide unregulated access to millions of pages of content that (alongside useful information) is potentially harmful, inappropriate and influential.

I would ask you to reflect on the following:

- Am I happy with how much time my child spends on their phone?
- Am I confident that what my child does on their phone makes them happy and enriches their life?

A frequent parental concern is that their child, who has a smartphone, can join in with friends and 'conform' to the group. We have an opportunity to change the 'norm'. I would wholeheartedly support parents, carers and families who decide that they do not want their child to have a smartphone for the early and middle years of their education. A collective commitment would be transformative.

Next steps: our school's plan

From September 2024, we will introduce a complete ban on smartphones in school for Year 7. A similar ban will be implemented for Years 8 and 9 from January 2025. We are giving an extra term's grace period to these two year groups so families can have a bit more time to adjust. Students in Years 10 and 11 will be allowed to bring a smartphone to school but will continue to adhere to the current policy with one change as outlined below. Sixth Form will continue with their current guidance.

Whilst this letter hopefully clearly explains the rationale for the change, I will be inviting parents to a meeting in late September where you can hear more about the rationale, the research and have an opportunity to ask questions.

You may want your child to have a phone with them for travel to and from school, and therefore suggest you purchase a basic 'brick' or flip phone for texting and phoning, but **without** access to the internet. If your child brings a basic phone to school, the same current policy around use and confiscation will apply (confiscation if seen or heard). Examples of phones that would be compliant with our new policy are in the resources list at the end of this letter.

Many of our primary parents would prefer their child not to have a smartphone but feel that denying one would be problematic and isolating for their child. I hope that our revised position means that these parents can confidently not provide a smartphone for their child as they start St Peter's, knowing that they are not alone.

As a parent, you are still at liberty to provide your child with a smartphone; this is your parental prerogative, but a smartphone may not be present at school if your child is in Year 7 (from September), or Year 8/9 from (January 2025). In response to the increase in smartphone use and misuse in school, we will also be increasing the sanction for when a phone is used or seen during the school day. The current sanction is confiscation and the phone returned at the end of the week (regardless of when the phone is confiscated). **From September, a confiscated phone will not be returned until the Friday of the following week (regardless of when the phone is confiscated). This sanction will be in place for year groups 7 to 11 and apply to all phones.**

We will communicate this new policy to all students before the end of term and I appreciate your support when you have conversations about this with your children.

We fully appreciate that this will be unpopular with your children in the short term but hope that this may help you to delay or change smartphone ownership (if you choose) until at least the mid-teen years and begin to challenge some of the unhealthy habits that have become the norm. You should also be aware that we are monitoring the landscape around smartphone use and social media closely and would be prepared to introduce further restrictions for older students if that is in their best interests.

I would like to finish this communication by thanking you for your continued partnership and I urge you to spend some time engaging with the resources below. I know taking tough decisions that are unpopular, but in the best interests of your child, is hard. However, I also know that these are always worth it.

God bless.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Miller', with a long, sweeping horizontal line above it.

Mr T Miller
Headteacher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-L58niidJM0> – very good presentation and interview

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>

<https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/take-action>

<https://www.humanetech.com/youth>

<https://edexec.co.uk/news-london-schools-ban-smartphones-for-pupils/#>

<https://letgrow.org>

[Basic Samsung Flip Phone](#)

[Basic Nokia 'Brick' Phone](#)