

Friday 21st February 2025 – Anonymous 11

To: Scrutiny Communications <Scrutiny@gov.je>

Subject: Online Harms Review

Dear Panel

As a parent of primary school aged children and a teacher of teenagers, I am particularly concerned about the harm that unrestricted access to online content and social media platforms can cause our children and young people.

While I feel that it is up to parents and guardians to agree the access and parameters that they establish with their own children, I strongly believe that a ban on smartphones in schools would provide the safe space and downtime that so many young people need in order to focus fully and to socialise meaningfully. Although a recent study may have shown that a ban on smartphones does not necessarily increase attainment, my concern lies more with the total absorption in screens that I witness on a day-to-day basis during breaks and lunchtimes - often to the detriment of face-to-face interaction or time spent outdoors or moving. In his 2024 book, *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt presents a compelling case for banning smartphones in schools and, although I am no acclaimed psychologist myself, I see the evidence of the negative effects of a childhood spent online in the high levels of anxiety and low levels of resilience I strive to support young people to overcome each day at work.

School is about much more than securing qualifications, it is a space in which to make friends and to learn how to deal with the interactions, confrontations and negotiations with our peers which equip us to feel ready to move into the adult world. Making every school day phone-free, island-wide, would ensure that children and young people have at least 6 hours a day, most days, where they are not bombarded with attention grabbing content designed to ensure that they are more attached to their phones than to the people and the reality around them.

Before Christmas, I attempted to have a serious discussion about online safety with my 9 year old son who now has several friends his age who have their own smartphones and social media accounts. I was asking him what he would do if someone showed him content he found upsetting when he stopped me and told me to listen carefully as he was sure he had just heard an elf. It really hammered home just how vulnerable and impressionable these children are yet we are opening them up to a world of content we simply cannot control - even if we think we are paying attention and know what they are up to. I can do what I can at home but I am well aware that he will be exposed to all sorts of other content through his peers. While that may be inevitable and we can have open conversations about it, I would love to be able to send my children to school

knowing that they are safe from online bullying and concerning content and are free to be children for at least that part of the day.

I fully believe that any cost and inconvenience in establishing a smart phone ban will be outweighed by the positive effects it will have on the mental health of children and young people. Together, we must apply a long-term view rather than thinking of the short-term steps that would need to be taken. There are many examples of schools in the UK that have implemented this successfully and I am sure that we can too.

Yours faithfully

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