

Friday 18th April 2025 – Anonymous 14

To: Scrutiny Communications <Scrutiny@gov.je>

Subject: Scrutiny Panel - Online harm public review submission

Dear Scrutiny panel,

It is becoming more and more obvious that smart phones / social media / some online content are detrimental to our children's wellbeing and mental health, and this is a huge and fast growing concern for all parents I speak to.

We have a responsibility as a society in terms of legislation to protect our children as far as possible from the dangers of the online world, just as we have a responsibility to protect them from real world harms. If we do not do this now we will look back in years to come and hugely regret not doing more.

There are 4 main areas I would like the government to consider.

1. Smart Phone free schools

Whilst I understand that most schools have a "no see, no hear" rule, there is a lot of evidence to show that this is not enough and I have heard multiple first hand accounts of children at these schools still posting on social media and messaging throughout the school day. We are doing our children a huge disservice allowing them access to phones throughout the day instead of enjoying their childhood, friendships and surroundings, and having space away from their phones to learn and focus on school. Schools are a place for education, for social media/smart phone use, and their presence is preventing them receiving the education they deserve.

I fully support phones being locked away for the whole day, including break time, as has been implemented in multiple schools around the UK already. I have included resources here in terms of how this can easily be achieved (see smart phone free schools web page).

Jersey needs legislation on this so that all schools are all on a level playing field, to empower schools and teachers to take this step, and to ensure all children get to reap the benefits equally.

The negative impact of phones being available (even where the rule is no see no hear) in schools are huge, and include:

- Distraction from learning. We all know that if you see or hear your phone beep/vibrate/flash with a notification, this will distract you from what you are currently working on. This makes it difficult for students to focus on their studies, even if they are not able to check the notification

immediately. This is therefore detrimental to their concentration and learning ability;

- Addiction. Smart phones, social media, and other apps are deliberately designed to be addictive and to steal our attention. Mobile phones are addictive for us all, but I feel this particularly for children who are still developing their impulse controls and habits. If students have their phones in their pockets it is much harder to regulate this;
- Access to phone cameras. If phones are available in children's pockets, they are able to film / take photos of other children and teachers at school, creating an unsafe environment;
- Pressure of constant notifications. There will be a huge temptation to check notifications during learning time whether this be under the desk, or by sneaking off to the toilet etc;
- Physical health. If phones are available at break time this will impact students physical health as they are likely to sit on phones instead of physical activity during break. This will also significantly limit important real life social interactions and activities;
- Discipline. Teachers are having to spend time enforcing the "no see, no hear" rules;
- Child protection. How can schools say they are enforcing sound child protection rules when they are able to access phones with violent/sexual content readily available? Even if as a parent I choose for my child not to have access to a phone, this then becomes out of my control when my child is in a space where they should be kept safe;
- Online bullying. If phones are available during the school day, this can carry on throughout the child's time at school, with children sharing online harassment in the form of photos/videos/messages throughout the school day.

Conversely, please refer to the website below "smart phone free schools" which includes testimonials and details of the benefits, including:

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- Higher grades;
- Increased concentration;
- Reduction in cyber bullying;
- Improved behaviour;
- Freedom to play and interact socially;
- Decrease in anxiety and stress;
- Learning to have time away from the addiction, which will then likely seep into time outside school;
- Children can relax because they know no one has access to their phone, so no one is sending messages . This decreases the feeling of "missing out" as well as the desire to sneak out of class to check messages / social media during school hours;
- No ability to access to violent/sexual content through phones in school grounds;
- Better educated future workforce for Jersey.

There is a solution which has been implemented in other schools already, and to not do this feels like a big risk for our children's welfare. Let's be ahead of the game and bring in the solution here.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/sep/13/academy-chain-with-35000-pupils-to-be-first-in-england-to-go-phone-free>

Smartphone Free Schools

2. Delaying smart phones for children and promoting simple "brick phone" options for under 16s.

The pressure for a smart phone really builds in the lead up to secondary school. I know lots of parents who are feeling very concerned about their children getting smart phones and don't want their child to have one. However, they also worry that their child will be in the minority if they don't have one.

If Jersey can promote the use of non smart phones and the associated benefits, and get the message out there to primary school children and parents that they are not alone, this would be an excellent starting point in supporting real and effective cultural change in the long term for our children.

3. Protection from online harm.

I strongly believe that Jersey should take all steps it possibly can in terms of legislation and controls to protect our children from online harm. This must include:

- The requirement to demonstrate you are over 18 to access online porn;
- A requirement for Social media and algorithms to stop pushing detrimental topics such as suicide, self harm, misogynistic content, eating disorders, violence to everyone, but particularly to children;
- Ensure social media platforms enforce age restrictions and create a regulatory framework encouraging responsible design of digital tools for young users. Social media is particularly harmful in terms of the content it shows, including false news, constant images of perfection which impact mental health, as well as the harmful content listed in the bullet point above.
- Real legislation and controls around the design of apps such as snapchat to control how predators are able to access children online, including their location.

4. Technology and Education

I am not proposing that children have no access to technology. I think having a non smart phone at a suitable age is beneficial and allows children to contact each other and make plans for real life social events, or to talk on the phone when they like, as well as smart phones at a suitable age. I also believe it is important for children to have a good education around technology, such as learning coding / computer literacy / gaming etc. However, I think this is all still possible with the controls outlined above,

and this will lead to a generation of children with better mental health. Accessing smart phones all day and having unrestricted online access without proper controls is not benefitting our children or their rights.

I think it is also important that schools continue to provide evidence-based programmes covering responsible social media use, online safety, critical thinking skills and healthy gaming habits, and to encourage conversations about digital well-being.

Thank you very much for the work you are doing in this field and for considering the points raised.

Kind regards

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