



**BECKET KEYS**

Church of England School

**November 2023**

Dear Parents & Carers

## Safety online

You will have noticed, I am sure, that the Secretary of State for Education has banned mobile phones from school. Her statement and clear intention reflect the view we have held since we opened about the dangers of mobile phones and their inappropriateness for school. This announcement comes at a good time because I usually communicate with parents around this time of year about the need to closely monitor your son/daughter's devices.

Smart Phones have been developing at an exponential rate. Keeping up to date with the current apps and social media trends is extremely important for schools and parents, but very difficult. Smart phones have revolutionised social contact and safety. For example, families often have group chats for ease of communication and parents track the whereabouts of their children to ensure their safety. However, Smart Phones have changed the way society behaves and children are often the most heavily affected whilst the adults around them are struggling to keep up!

Parents sometimes say to me that they feel their children are addicted to their smart phones! However, it has been argued by Bettina Hohnen in the fantastic book *"The Incredible Teenage Brain"* that children are not addicted to their phones – they are addicted to their friends. Research also states that as children hit their adolescent years, they are more influenced by their friends than their family in the desperate desire to make natural social bonds. Andrew Hampton, author and Head Teacher, states that girls fear isolation from each other and boys fear humiliation from their peers.

Perhaps in an ideal world we may prefer it if children did not have smart phones. However, for many of us: "the horse has already bolted"; replacing smart phones with a simpler device is going to be tricky – to say the least. Our job as parents therefore is to educate and engage our children in sensible discussions about smart phone use.

With this desire to be in constant contact with their friends and the need to avoid "FOMO" (Fear of missing out) many young people feel as if they need to be constantly picking up their smart devices after school. With this desire for social interaction, comes the danger of access to certain apps and access to certain people and parts of the internet that we would wish they could be protected from.

There is a high chance your son/daughter will access to pornography, violence, hate, explicit language, and drug use/references and so on. *"As a parent, if you aren't prepared to have the difficult conversations on these topics then you shouldn't give your son/daughter a smart phone"* (Andrew Hampton).

As parents we must look at our son/daughter's phones regularly. We must know what apps they have and what they are used for. Our activity on our phones is often being tracked. As adults this is a concern, for our children it is a significant safeguarding risk.

Algorithms are automatically computer-generated processes that analyse our search/viewing history and through this provide new content/suggestions. TikTok/Instagram algorithms are not designed for safety. The automated algorithms pick up on videos we are watching and feed more into your video loops. Just searching something simple such as “mental health” can open us to extreme, unmonitored content. Why would we put that in the hands of our children?!

Routines and expectations are key to supporting any child through to adulthood. We set bedtimes, curfews and we put boundaries in place to protect against poor choices. Most of us have similar boundaries in place for smartphones and I would encourage you to check these again and see if they are fit for purpose. These should be under the same routines we enforce for all other aspects of our children’s lives. Here are the tips and advice I give parents each year:

- **Whose phone is it?** Without sounding confrontational, children should be reminded that the smartphone belongs to the parents! Parents pay the contract; parents give the privilege of using it.
- **Bedtime routines for phones** – Smartphones should not be in bedrooms. Phones should be ‘put to bed’ an hour before bedtime and left on charge well away from your son/daughter. Phones cause distraction and the light interferes with signals in the brain and hormone levels necessary to sleep. Agree a safe space where phones are stored overnight.
- **Sensible regulation** – Smartphones are not going away. The more we force children away from their phones, out of the house etc, the more they will push back. Children’s brains are hardwired to rebel. Therefore, the more we push them to “put the phone down”, the more they do the opposite. We also need to consider our phone use. Adults use smartphones and rely on them as much as their children. So rather than engage in war, engage in discussion around regulation. Teach them how to regulate. Ask questions such as. What do you think a sensible amount of screen time is? Why don’t you set yourself some targets? You will have more chance of success if your child buys into this process. They will probably want you to put your phone down too – allow them to make this point and agree to improve together.
- **Checking and monitoring** – Open and honest dialogue is key. Checking phones is crucial and a must for all parents. Remember bullet point 1, it is your phone! Random, regular, non-scheduled checks will allow for this transparency. Remember, start with “why”. Explain the reasons, even blame school if you wish. “Experts/the school say I should check your phone”. We are happy to be blamed!
- **Parent set up and protection** – There are various ways in which you can set up mobile devices so that you have complete control over the apps being used. Watch a video like this [one](#) from Family Tech to help you get started with setting up.
- **Internet filters** – Log into your internet service provider and switch on filters for your Wi-Fi. Use your phone network provider and do the same. This will have a huge impact on what your child can access. The more expensive providers offer more control, so if you are not happy with what is provided it could be worth upgrading to a better system. You can get advice on some of the main providers [here](#).
- **Gaming**– There are parent control apps you can download to help keep your child safe when gaming online. Did you know there is an app for the Xbox which allows parents to control who their child can be friends with online, which games they can play and for how long? There are lots of guides for these things on line. For example, [this article](#) talks through how to control X Box.
- **Links to useful websites for parents** – Please see below other links to useful charities and websites that can support you with this topic further:



**The Internet Watch Foundation** (<https://www.iwf.org.uk/>) work internationally to make the internet a safer place. They search for inappropriate images and videos of children, and offer a place for the public to report them anonymously before removing them.



A National  
Crime Agency  
command

**CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre** (<https://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>) is tasked to work both nationally and internationally to bring online **child sex offenders**, including those involved in the production, distribution and viewing of **child abuse material**, to the UK courts.



**Childline** - Call 0800 1111 or visit <https://www.childline.org.uk/>.



**EST E-Safety Training** - <https://www.esafetytraining.org/parent-carers-area>.

internet  
matters.org

**Internet Matters** - <https://www.internetmatters.org/>



**Net-aware** - <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

**Mr A. Scott-Evans**  
Headteacher

**Mr J. Shields**  
Assistant Headteacher