The Church of Scotland

Official Response

Subject:	Restricting mobile phones in Scotland's schools
Requested by:	The Scottish Government
Date:	17 November 2026
Prepared and agreed by:	Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group

The Church of Scotland seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities.

The Church of Scotland is one of the largest organisations in the country. We have around 245,000 members, with more regularly involved in local congregations and our work. We have around 550 ministers serving in parishes and chaplaincies, supported by both centrally and locally employed staff and through our social care arm CrossReach we employ hundreds of staff in the provision of professional social care across Scotland.

Most of our parishes are in Scotland, but we also have churches in England, Europe and further afield. The Church of Scotland plays a pivotal role in Scottish society and works with communities worldwide.

This response has been prepared and agreed by the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group, in consultation with the Education and Schools Group.

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1. The Scottish Government has committed to restricting the use of mobile phones in schools. To what extent do you agree with the following options?:

- Restrictions during class time but access to mobile phones during break and lunch.
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Restrictions across the whole school day: mobile phones must not be used during any part of the school day, including break and lunch.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Restrictions should be left to discretion of the school.
  ☐ Agree

☐ Don't agree
☒ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don't know
☐ Prefer not to say

Please provide details of other types of restrictions which you would support in the box below (information on exceptions to restrictions is sought below, do not provide this information in response to this question)

We support clear and consistent restrictions on personal mobile phone use during lessons. There is also a strong case for extending restrictions across the school day, including break and lunch, so that school offers respite from notifications, social pressures and the risk of incidents being recorded and shared. Restricting use only during lessons would address distraction but would not fully address these wider wellbeing concerns.

2. What is your knowledge of how phones are being used in schools at the moment?
For example, if you are a young person, how do you or your friends use their mobile phones while at school? If you are a parent or carer, how do your children use their mobile phones in school? If you are a member of school staff, how do pupils in your school use their mobile phones?

Please select all that apply

☒ To support transport to and from school, such as checking timetables, paying for transport.
☒ To communicate with family
☒ To communicate with friends in school such as through messaging apps
☐ To buy or order lunch
☒ To support teaching and learning activities, for example researching a topic or question.
☒ To help with accessibility and Additional Support Needs while in school.
☒ During in-school study periods, for example to listen to music on headphones.
☒ To relax during break and lunch times, such as gaming
☒ Using social media
☒ To take photos of others (pupils and/or staff) in school
☐ To allow pupils to discreetly report behaviour incidents, such as bullying or racist incidents, for example through QR codes
☐ None – my school / my child's school does not allow the use of mobile phones.
☐ Other – please provide detail :

n/a

3. Think about the different things young people might use their phone for in school. If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the positive impacts might be?

- Improved concentration in lessons.
  ☒ Agree

☐ Don’t agree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know
☐ Prefer not to say

- Improved in-person interaction and socialisation between pupils.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Opportunity for children and young people to have protected screen-free time while at school.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Reduced disruption in lessons.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Reduced bullying or harassment.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Reduced access to inappropriate content online while at school.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Staff spend less time managing inappropriate behaviour.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don’t agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don’t know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

Are there other benefits or positive impacts you would like to highlight? Please provide detail:

Clear, consistently applied restrictions could also make participation more equitable. Pupils who do not own a smartphone should not be disadvantaged or excluded from school routines, learning resources or social expectations. A shared rule may also reduce pressure to remain constantly available online and give pupils, families and staff clearer, more predictable boundaries during the school day.

4. Thinking again about the different things young people might use their phone for in school, if restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the negative impacts might be?

- Use of school staff time to implement and enforce restrictions, at the expense of other important duties.
  ☐ Agree
  ☒ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Difficulties accessing school-based services on personal mobile phones, such as ordering school meals.
  ☐ Agree
  ☒ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Reduced ability of young people to use phones during the school day to keep in touch with friends and family.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Impact on young people's ability to plan for their time outside school, such as checking bus routes.
  ☐ Agree
  ☒ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

If you think there are other drawbacks or concerns which have not been noted above, please add them using the box below

School-office contact, meal ordering, timetables and incident reporting must remain accessible without a personal smartphone. Our concerns mostly centre around implementation. Guidance should explain the boundaries of the school day and campus, including departures and returns at lunchtime. Collection, storage and return arrangements must be practical, including for pupils who leave the premises during the day.

Some children may experience significant anxiety if contact with home is removed abruptly, particularly where caring responsibilities or difficult family circumstances are not already known to school staff. Restrictions must therefore be accompanied by sensitive pastoral support and workable exceptions, rather than an assumption that every pupil's circumstances are the same.

Young people's views must be heard directly. Particular care is needed in explaining and justifying restrictions for older secondary pupils, who are in other circumstances considered adults/afforded the responsibility of voting and marriage. Staff workload should be considered in the round: implementation takes time, but so does responding to distraction and phone-related incidents under existing arrangements.

5. If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, there would be exceptions to allow certain children and young people to use their phones if they have an important need to do so. This would mean those children and young people would have access to their phones only for the purpose of using them for their specific need.

To what extent do you agree with the following potential exceptions to restrictions on mobile phones in schools?

- Exceptions for children and young people who have medical conditions, like diabetes, that require monitoring using mobile phones.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Exceptions for children and young people who are young carers and who require ongoing contact with family members.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Exceptions for children and young people with additional support needs if access to their mobile phone is used as part of a planned approach to managing their learning needs.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say
- Exceptions for children and young people with disabilities who use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment, including access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) etc.
  ☒ Agree
  ☐ Don't agree
  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  ☐ Don't know
  ☐ Prefer not to say

If you think there are other circumstances where an exemption may be appropriate, and which have not been noted above, please add them using the box below.

An exception for caring responsibilities should not depend on formal registration, receipt of a grant or an existing label of "young carer".

Headteachers should retain discretion to authorise an individual exception for another well-founded welfare or practical reason not captured by the listed categories. The list should not be treated as exhaustive. This discretion concerns individual needs, rather than abandoning a consistent general policy.

At the same time, an exception should not simply leave a young person carrying adult responsibilities throughout the school day. Where appropriate, trusted adult contact and wider family and pastoral support should help provide respite. Such arrangements should be developed with the young person, not imposed as a reason to remove contact that they genuinely need. The Government should listen closely to pupils and specialist organisations with experience of additional support needs, disability and caring responsibilities.

6. **Legislation on restricting the use of mobile phones in schools will reduce parents' direct contact with their children during the school day. Schools which have introduced restrictions on mobile phones currently ask parents to contact the school office if they require to communicate with their child. Is there anything about this approach that you would like to comment on?**

☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know
Please outline the reasons for your response:

We understand this to be a familiar and workable arrangement. It can avoid interrupting lessons and enables a responsible adult to help respond to a concern. For some pupils, particularly those with caring responsibilities or significant anxiety about circumstances at home, routine office contact may not by itself provide sufficient reassurance. Individual arrangements should be agreed sensitively with pupils and families. The aim should be both to maintain necessary communication and to give children respite from responsibilities that should not rest on them alone.

7. **Do you agree that national restrictions on the use of mobile phones should apply to independent and grant-aided schools in addition to schools run by education authorities?**

- Independent schools
  ☒ Yes
  ☐ No

- Grant-aided schools
  ☒ Yes
  ☐ No

8. **Should restrictions on mobile phones also apply to wearable digital devices, for example smartwatches which have notifications enabled?**

☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know
☐ Prefer not to say

9. Which other issues would you like us to be aware of?

Children's participation and older pupils. Policy should be developed with children and young people, not only for them. Their views should inform explanations, implementation and review. The roundtable raised particular questions about proportionality for pupils aged 16 and over and those in S5 and S6. The Government should explain how its approach takes account of young people's growing independence and relevant rights while maintaining a workable, safe environment for the whole school. We do not suggest that reaching 16 automatically creates a legal entitlement to use a phone in school; rather, the justification and practical implications need careful consideration.

Consistency with school-provided technology. Restrictions on personal phones should be accompanied by clear, consistent guidance on the management of school-provided tablets and other devices so that the same distractions or opportunities for inappropriate recording are not simply transferred elsewhere. Participants noted that managed learning devices can differ substantially from personal phones because schools can control applications and functions. Appropriate digital learning and assistive technology should be preserved; this is an implementation interface, not a proposal to prohibit educational devices.

Practical implementation. Schools need realistic arrangements for storage, collection and return, including access to permitted functions and the prompt return of devices needed for travel. The discussion did not establish that one storage model would suit every school. Guidance should distinguish the national expectation from decisions that properly remain local and avoid arrangements whose complexity undermines their purpose.

Adult example. Participants raised the importance of adults modelling attentive and proportionate personal phone use. Although this consultation concerns pupils' personal use, clear explanations of appropriate adult use could help pupils understand the policy and its purpose.

A realistic account of what restrictions can achieve. Restrictions on mobile phones may help create a safer, calmer and more relational school environment, but they are not, in themselves, an answer to behaviour issues in schools. Removing phones does not remove the underlying causes of bullying, distress or disengagement, and behaviour that is harmful face to face will not be resolved simply by limiting the means through which it is recorded or shared. Restrictions should therefore be one part of a wider approach rooted in positive relationships, consistent expectations, effective pastoral support and accessible, trusted reporting routes. Schools also need the staffing, resources and specialist support to respond to pupils' needs. Although wider digital harms fall outside this consultation's scope, the Government should avoid presenting phone restrictions as a substitute for addressing these broader challenges. Success should be judged by demonstrable improvements in pupils' wellbeing, relationships and experiences of school—not simply by compliance with a ban.

10. **Are you a:**

☐ A child or young person currently in primary school
☐ A child or young person currently in secondary school
☐ A child or young person currently in a special school

☐ A child or young person currently in another type of school
☐ A teacher or member of school staff in a primary school
☐ A teacher or member of school staff in a secondary school
☐ A teacher or member of school staff in a special school
☐ A teacher or member of school staff in another type of school
☐ Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in primary school
☐ Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in secondary school
☐ Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in a special school
☐ Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in another type of school
☐ A member of a voluntary sector organisation (please add detail below)
☒ Membership representative body (please add detail below)
☐ Other (please add detail below)

This response has been collated by a group of interested individuals from within the Church of Scotland whose knowledge comes from experience of teaching, school leadership, chaplaincy, youth work and parenting.