



Smartphone and Children's Statement

By the age of 12, a staggering **97% of children in the UK** own a smartphone. (Ofcom)

29% of secondary school pupils reported mobile phones being used without permission in most of their lessons. (The UK National Behaviour Survey 2021-2022)

The average UK 12-year-old now spends **29 hours a week** – equivalent to a part-time job – on their smartphone.

New research shows the younger a child receives their first smartphone the worse their mental health.

It's clear that these devices have become an integral part of life – but at what cost to our children's mental health, wellbeing and future?

Recently there has been a surge of interest, awareness and education around children and smartphone usage globally. In December 2024 alone the Australian government banned social media for under 16's, *Swiped: The School That Banned Smartphones* with Matt and Emma Willis aired highlighting the stark and shocking realities of how smartphones are negatively impacting children, and there has been a groundswell of local parents joining Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) WhatsApp groups and signing the Smartphone Free Childhood pact to delay smartphones until age 14.

Locally over 700 families across Marlow and Cookham have joined SFC WhatsApp parent chats for Bucks and individual schools. The group has created a Smartphones in Schools survey for all Marlow parents, they are actively speaking to local schools about removing smartphones from school and are hosting an educational parents evening on Feb 5th. In response to SFC, Cookham Primary School headteachers released a joint statement supporting the Smartphone Free Childhood initiative, are advising parents to delay buying their children a smartphone until they reach 14, and it is their ambition to promote their own schools as 'smart' free.

While smart devices have been shown to assist with learning, access to online entertainment makes it increasingly difficult for teachers to be 'more interesting than YouTube or TikTok'. Constant notifications and social media distract the entire class and cause a state of continuous partial attention. The mere presence of a silent smartphone on a desk or even hidden in a bag result in significant cognitive performance decline and research shows that students who use their phones for non-academic purposes during class have lower grades, retention, and engagement. Excessive smartphone usage is also linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and poor mental health.



MARLOWTOWNCOUNCIL

As Marlow Town Council, part of our vision is to lead and create a caring environment for all and a wonderful place to bring up children, so we recognise the need to act now to ensure we are delivering our vision and looking after our young resident's wellbeing. Therefore, we can no longer ignore the growing data highlighting the negative impact of smartphones on young people's emotional and social development, mental health, physical wellbeing, and academic success.

This problem can't be solved by parents or schools alone - it needs schools, parents and government to collaborate and support each other to protect our children's mental health, wellbeing and future.

Marlow Town Council would like to pledge our support for all primary and secondary schools in Marlow to create smartphone free learning environments where students can focus, learn, and grow without the constant distractions and pressures that come with these devices.

In addition to this statement of support we would also like to pledge funding initiatives for education and training driven by local Marlow schools with support from MTC for staff, students and parents like but not limited to: effects of smartphones on young people's mental health, digital detox strategies, learning how to successfully manage tech, educational awareness talks from experts and more.

Together, we can build a community that prioritizes wellbeing and academic success for our young people.

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