



Bushey & Radlett Primary School Consortium

21st June 2024

A letter to our parents regarding a smartphone-free childhood

Dear Parents/Guardians

As you may have seen on the news, there is a growing movement amongst parents and schools to support a campaign called "Smartphone-Free Childhood". You can find out more by clicking the links below:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>

<https://delaysmartphones.org.uk/>

We have been inspired by the action taken by our headteacher colleagues in St Albans, as the issues related to the misuse of smartphones and the damage being done to our children, have been a source of worry and frustration within our own local schools for the last few years. In tandem with Headteachers nationally, and with colleagues across Hertfordshire, this campaign has been shared and discussed among our Bushey & Radlett Primary Heads' Consortium. As local primary school headteachers, we all see the issues related to smartphone use continue to permeate our communities, and cause difficulty and damage to our children.

Therefore, a significant number of us are keen to support the aims of this national campaign and raise awareness more widely with our families regarding the risks which exist for our primary-aged children by allowing them access to such technological devices, at increasingly younger ages.

By "smartphones", we are referring to phones that are able to access the internet, AI and a myriad of games & apps, as opposed to mobile phones that are solely used for the purposes of communicating through text and phone calls.

We understand the importance of being able to contact your child as they become more independent, walking to and from school, in order to give you peace of mind, as well as for your children to be able to call or contact you in the case of any emergencies or unforeseen circumstances. However, your children's phones DO NOT need to enable them to have unfettered and unsupervised access to the internet in order for you to be able to contact them. Our concern, and our experience, is that you could be introducing even greater risks into the life of your child, than those you might be trying to mitigate.

The use of smartphones is now a feature of daily life for most adults and over the last few years we have noted that the age at which children are given their first smartphone has dropped significantly. We believe they have no place in the life of a primary-aged school child as our children do not have the developmental understanding to help them navigate appropriate social interactions through apps and social media, all of which were primarily designed for adult use.

Whilst smartphones can be a very helpful piece of technology for adults, we see that they are exposing our children to a number of negative risks. From our experiences and the work we have had to undertake with children and families in our own schools, these risk include the following:

Smartphones.....

- are highly addictive, with evidence to suggest that the lasting effects on young and developing brains are similar to that of gambling.
- have been linked to poor mental health, depression and low self-esteem.
- expose our children to harmful content including pornography, grooming, bullying and material that is not age appropriate. Children often have broken strong parental rules around the use of their smartphones in order to access such content and they are then unable to talk to their parents about what is significantly disturbing or upsetting them.
- reduce attention span – there is research to suggest that the use of smartphones are changing the way children's brains develop and fundamentally affecting their ability to concentrate. We see the impact of children who are on

screens/phones late into the evening, or prior to school, demonstrating reduced focus and attention during the school day.

- rob children of their childhood. Time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting and developing vital social skills. The introduction of a smartphone increases time spent online and draws children further into a wider focus on screens, online gaming and social media interaction.

To show our professional support for this campaign, we are asking all Bushey & Radlett parents to delay giving their child/children a smartphone whilst they are pupils in our primary schools, and opt instead for a text/call phone alternative if necessary.

As Primary Head Teachers, we have committed to promoting our own schools as being '**smartphone free**'.

We believe we can all work together across Bushey & Radlett, and join the growing movement across the county and country, to change the 'normal' age that children are given smartphones, putting pressure on the industry to exercise tighter controls and safety measures for our children.

However, to be successful, this movement relies on you, our children's parents, to resist the pressure from your children and their peers and hold back on giving your children smartphones in their primary school years. In this way you will be working together with a wide network of parents and schools to reset the expectation and remove social peer pressure.

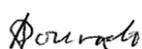
With your child's school taking this stance, we are supporting you in overcoming the fear that your child is 'missing out' due to the belief that all their friends are utilising and accessing social interaction through the use of smartphone technology. We understand this pressure upon parents and we hope our united approach will be supportive to the challenges of parenting in the modern age.

If you would like to find out more about this issue (including the facts listed above and alternative phone options) or would like to become more actively involved, please ask at your school or click on the links in this letter.

Our children's futures are so important, to you and to us. We want our children to understand the power and amazing capacity of exciting and evolving technologies to enhance our lives for the better. We need to root their understanding of the power of technology firmly within the values that will enable them to be good citizens, utilising technology and interacting in the online world in a way that mirrors the integrity, responsibility and kindness that we are forming within our children, whilst fully understanding how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Let's all give our children the time, space and boundaries that are needed whilst they are young to make mistakes and grow in their understanding, within the real world first.

With thanks for your valued support of our schools.

Yours faithfully,



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