



The Welsh Government petition response

To P-06-1482: Ban smartphones in all schools in Wales

16 April 2025

I am grateful to the Senedd Committee for inviting me to respond to their petition report. I welcome this opportunity to respond to their follow up report and recommendations in relation to the Committee's inquiry to Ban smartphones in all schools in Wales (with exemptions for exceptional circumstances).

The Committee has put forward five recommendations, which I have addressed below.

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1. Introduction

A petition on banning mobile phones in schools in Wales was submitted in October 2024 and closed on 7 January 2025. During the time it was open it collected 3,369 signatures, meaning it fell short of the number required to trigger a formal debate (10,000).

The full text of the petition was:

Inspired by the movements Smartphone Free Childhood and Delay Smartphones, as well as recent compelling research on the profound negative effects of smartphones on children, we call on Senedd Cymru to ban them in all schools in Wales, with exemptions for exceptional circumstances. Smartphone use poses significant wellbeing and safeguarding concerns. We are deeply worried about our children's social development and mental health and believe all pupils have the right to a smartphone-free school.

On 6 March 2025, the Chair of the Petitions Committee, Carolyn Thomas MS wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, enclosing a copy of the committee's report which set out five recommendations for the Welsh Government's consideration.

I thank the members of the Committee for their report in response to the petition. I have set out my response to the Committee's recommendations below.

2. Response to the 5 recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee Recommends that:

The Welsh Government should develop a national policy framework and associated guidance that all Welsh schools can use to amend or refine their existing policies on restricting use of smart devices in schools. The Committee strongly encourages the Welsh Government to work with the WLGA and ADEW to review existing policies and best practice.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of a national level policy framework and guidance on mobile phone usage within schools. While we have provided some information in the past, we recognise the need to keep pace with the evolving nature of technology and the increased range of online tools and sites phones enable access to. We have also seen growing calls for more advice.

This is a key area for consideration as part of the wider programme of work on behaviour in schools, being taken forward in support of our national behaviour summit. It is also important that the development of any framework or guidance is carried out in partnership with stakeholders. To enable this, and as part of that wider work programme, I will be bringing together key partners and experts to look at these issues and lead on the development of any guidance or framework, and any wider actions needed.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 2

The Committee Recommends that:

Terminology is important and Welsh Government should discourage use of the word 'ban' in favour of 'restriction(s)'. Describing 'no-phone schools' or using similar constructive language to explain restrictions is more likely to be something that learners, teaching staff and parents can all understand and support. A focus on "right time, right place" for use of smart devices should be emphasised, recognising the needs of students to safely harness digital technology as part of their education and development.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government agrees that the language used to describe policies and approaches is important and needs to be appropriate for the audience involved.

In this case, while any guidance may be aimed at schools, we need to ensure the terminology used is appropriate for children and young people, and parents, and that they understand what is being suggested and why.

We will ensure any future information or guidance we publish in this regard is informed by the views of stakeholders, and particularly the voice of children and young people, and framed appropriately.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 3

The Committee Recommends that:

Any framework and/or guidance introduced by the Welsh Government to support school leaders should take account of the need for exemptions for certain learners' needs, including how to mitigate against any negative impacts that restrictions could have in singling them out from their peers. It should provide clear advice based on best practice. Grounds for exemption should be clearly defined and explained. Before issuing a final framework/guidance, consultation should be undertaken with stakeholders representing neurodiverse learners and those with additional learning needs and/or medical needs, educational and health practitioners, and parents. However, the advice on exemptions should focus primarily on balancing the rights and best interests of learners with the needs of the school to deliver a safe and effective learning environment.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government agree in principle with this approach. We will ensure that the information the Committee has provided is considered by the group of key partners and experts I am establishing to take forward any guidance or framework. However, as the Committee has highlighted, these issues can be complex and nuanced, and this means it may be challenging to set clear expectations nationally, when allowances have to be made in respect of local and individual needs and circumstances. Feedback from school leaders indicates that this should be a matter for school leaders who know their school communities best. We will also consider how best to take forward any consultation, subject to the outcome of the discussions with our partners and relevant experts.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 4

The Committee Recommends that:

Parental engagement by schools should be encouraged in the policy framework and guidance. It should clearly explain the rationale and evidence base underpinning it, to promote and encourage a 'whole school' and 'whole community' approach

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring parents are engaged in their children's education and with their school. We want all schools to be Community Focussed Schools, working with children and young people, their families and the wider community to fully support learning and development. Any framework or guidance will be developed in partnership with stakeholders. In working with our key partners and relevant experts, we will consider how best to support parental engagement by schools a part of that work, as well as consideration of teacher workload.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 5

The Committee Recommends that:

Any national policy framework/guidance should be reviewed regularly to take account of emerging empirical evidence about the impacts of smartphone use on learners in Wales. The Committee recommends that Welsh Government sets out how it will take account of evidence from Welsh schools and from other jurisdictions and parts of the UK where studies have been undertaken or are currently in development).

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government agree that policy frameworks and guidance should be reviewed regularly. In this context the continuously evolving nature of the technology means we will need to reflect on an appropriate schedule. We will ensure that our key partners and relevant experts have access to a range of evidence and data to support them in considering the evolving nature of technology.

Financial Implications: None

