

**P-06-1482 Ban smartphones in all schools in Wales with exemptions for exceptional circumstances Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 07 July 2025**

To whom it may concern;

I want to begin by thanking the Petitions Committee for considering this petition and bringing it forward for debate.

However, I feel compelled to address a key misunderstanding. At no point did my petition call for a ban on smartphones during the journey to or from school. The focus has always been on *use within schools*. So I was concerned to hear the Chair of the Committee, Carolyn Thomas, refer—both in the Siambr and previously on ITV News—to children needing phones for reassurance or for bus passes. While those points may have merit, they do not relate to the actual content of the petition. I believe this misses a critical distinction, and I was disappointed to see that misunderstanding repeated in such public forums.

I also want to express concern about the reluctance to use the word *ban*. If we recognise that something is harmful to children in a school environment, then we must be willing to say so directly. Using softer language like “discourage” or “manage” avoids the issue. Clarity is important—especially when children's wellbeing is at stake.

Finally, I want to reiterate that I do not believe individual headteachers are best placed to make decisions on smartphone policy alone. A consistent national approach is essential. Just recently, my daughter's prospective secondary school—Cardiff High—sent staff to her primary school as part of the transition process. Those teachers proudly told the pupils that students “love it” because they're allowed to use their phones at lunch and break. I was genuinely outraged. That message promotes antisocial behaviour at precisely the time when young people should be encouraged to interact, move around, and take a break from screens. I believe the school—and those staff—should feel ashamed of themselves for endorsing that kind of culture.

Finally, I don't believe I have anything else to add that I haven't already said in my petition and my previous response to the Committee. I simply ask Members to reflect on what kind of school environment we are encouraging, and whether it truly puts children's wellbeing first.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Zena

Dear Petitions Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for a national ban on smartphone use in schools during the school day, aside from exceptional circumstances ('smartphone-free school'). As a parent of two young children, I read with interest the recent Petitions Committee report (CR-LD17055-E) and followed the plenary debate on 12 June 2024 with close attention.

While I commend the attention the Senedd has given to this issue, I am concerned that the case against a ban, as presented in the debate and the report, rests on arguments that do not sufficiently withstand close scrutiny - particularly when weighed against the growing evidence base in support of such a ban.

The following factors should be considered:

- **Mischaracterisation of the evidence base:** The report and some Members described the evidence as "limited", overlooking robust international findings that show measurable academic, wellbeing and behavioural benefits following bans. Large-scale studies from the LSE, UNESCO, and Policy Exchange were cited in the debate but not addressed directly or more closely examined.

- **Overreliance on autonomy and inclusion arguments:** While school-level discretion has value, a patchwork approach creates inconsistency and confusion for families. The suggestion that a ban would exclude vulnerable pupils ignores existing practices where medical and safeguarding exemptions are managed effectively in schools with lock-away policies.

- **Inverted workload logic:** The claim that a ban would increase staff burden is undermined by direct evidence from educators, who report that universal bans actually simplify enforcement and reduce daily conflict with pupils.

- **False equivalence with digital inclusion:** Owning a smartphone is not the same as needing it during class. Arguments referencing digital skills fail to recognise that these can be taught safely through managed devices like tablets or laptops, without the risk of distraction or inappropriate content. The debate also referenced the intention to support digital inclusion by ensuring children are familiar with smartphone functions by the time they leave school and enter the workforce. However, this rationale is flawed. As acknowledged during the debate, the vast majority of children already have access to smartphones outside of school hours. Familiarity with smartphone functions is therefore

not in question. What is needed during the school day is not more exposure, but structured boundaries that prioritise focus, wellbeing, and safe digital habits - none of which are compromised by restricting smartphone use during school lessons.

The debate did not fully engage with a number of crucial pro-ban arguments also:

- Studies consistently show improved attainment - especially for disadvantaged pupils - after smartphones are removed from the classroom.
- Mental health trends among young people have worsened in parallel with smartphone uptake. It is no longer credible to separate school use from this trend, given the addictive nature of the technology.
- Banning smartphones in schools creates time and space to explicitly teach digital resilience and safe online behaviour, rather than simply hoping that guidance will suffice.

I would urge the Senedd to more critically evaluate the evidence and to consider a national baseline policy: a ban on smartphones during the school day, with clearly defined exemptions and funding for implementation (e.g., lockable pouches or lockers), and not tie their own hands through citing the digital inclusion policy. The state of our children's future mental health is at risk, and I strongly believe that a ban would protect children's wellbeing, improve educational outcomes, and support teachers in creating a safe and focused learning environment.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Hargreaves

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Zena Blackwell