# Excelsior Academy credits mobile phone ban for leap in A-level grades amid broader UK debate



In a bold move that has stirred both acclaim and skepticism, Excelsior Academy in Hackney, east London, has implemented a strict mobile phone ban that the school's headteacher, Omar Deria, credits for a significant leap in academic performance. The academy's average A-level grades rose from a C to a B in the past year, prompting Deria to describe the transformation as "miraculous."

Reflecting on the challenges faced upon his arrival at the school in 2022, Deria lamented the pervasive presence of phones among students, many of whom were found "glued" to their screens during classes. This distraction has been linked not only to academic underachievement but also to broader behavioural issues. Deria claims that about 90% of the behavioural struggles arise from online interactions, where students often adopt different personas that lead to conflicts in the classroom.

The UK Government has so far resisted calls for a blanket ban on mobile devices in schools. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson dismissed the Conservative Party's proposals, labelling them a "headline grabbing gimmick." The Government argues that existing policies grant headteachers the necessary authority to manage phone use effectively, echoing concerns raised about the potential ineffectiveness of such policies based on recent studies.

A study by the University of Birmingham published in 2025 challenges the notion that phone bans lead to better academic outcomes or improved mental health. The research involved over 1,200 students across 30 schools, with findings indicating no significant correlation between phone restrictions and improved grades, mental wellbeing, or reduced overall smartphone usage among adolescents. While phone use during school hours was curtailed by about 40 minutes per day, students reportedly compensated for this time later at home.

In contrast, earlier research by the London School of Economics has shown that mobile phone bans can yield significant benefits. A 2015 study noted a 6.4% improvement in test scores among 16-year-olds, particularly benefiting students who were previously lower achievers. This highlights a potential avenue for reducing educational inequalities, suggesting that stringent phone policies may offer a viable strategy to help struggling students improve their academic performance.

Back at Excelsior Academy, students themselves have expressed gratitude for the phone ban. With fewer distractions, they report being more focused and engaged in their studies. Cilen Garip, a 17-year-old student, noted that the absence of phones has allowed him to concentrate more effectively on his work, while Hamz Hussain, 16, acknowledged that the change has helped him maximise his study time and appreciate his phone more during his free hours. Another student, Falma Hashi, shared that their social interactions have improved, as activities like card games have replaced phone browsing during breaks.

Deria's assertion that banning phones not only improves academic performance but also mitigates issues like peer-on-peer abuse and online harassment resonates deeply in the current educational landscape. As schools grapple with the challenges posed by technology, Excelsior Academy's experience could serve as a case study for other institutions contemplating similar policies.

Ultimately, while Excelsior Academy celebrates its achievement, the broader debate surrounding mobile phone use in schools continues, with differing viewpoints highlighting the complexity of the issue. The conversation is likely to evolve as further research emerges and educators seek effective solutions to engage students in a rapidly changing digital world.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-3, 5, 6
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697533/london-headteachers-school-exam-results-phone-ban.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/15/mobile-phone-bans-improve-school-exam-results-research-shows> - A 2015 study by the London School of Economics found that schools implementing mobile phone bans experienced a 2% increase in GCSE pass rates. The research indicated that the ban was particularly beneficial for students with lower prior achievements, suggesting that restricting phone use can help reduce educational inequalities.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/16/schools-mobile-phones-academic-results> - Research published by the London School of Economics in 2015 revealed that banning mobile phones in schools led to a 6.4% improvement in test scores for 16-year-olds. The study emphasized that the positive impact was most significant among students with lower prior achievements, highlighting the potential of phone bans to enhance academic performance.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/feb/05/school-ban-phones-not-improve-grades-health-uk-study> - A 2025 study from the University of Birmingham found that restrictive school phone policies did not lead to better mental health, academic performance, or reduced phone use among students. The research suggested that such bans alone are insufficient to address the negative impacts of smartphone and social media use, advocating for a more comprehensive approach.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-32771253> - A 2015 study by the London School of Economics found that banning mobile phones in schools resulted in a 6% improvement in test scores. The research highlighted that the ban was particularly effective for low-achieving and low-income students, suggesting that such policies can help reduce educational inequalities.
6. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/banning-cellphones-leads-to-higher-test-scores-u-k-study-finds/2015/05> - A 2015 study from the London School of Economics indicated that banning mobile phones in schools led to a 6% improvement in test scores. The study found that the ban was especially beneficial for low-achieving and low-income students, suggesting that such policies can help reduce educational inequalities.
7. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/disconnect/> - A 2024 Policy Exchange report examined the impact of smartphone bans in schools, finding that secondary schools with effective bans were more than twice as likely to be rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. The study also noted that students at these schools achieved GCSE results that were 1–2 grades higher compared to those at schools with less restrictive policies.