# Starmer faces scrutiny over Labour's rejection of mobile phone ban in schools



Sir Keir Starmer faced significant scrutiny in the House of Commons today over the Labour Party's decision to reject a Conservative amendment aimed at instituting a full ban on mobile phones in schools across England. The initiative, primarily advocated by Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch, sought to modify the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, a major piece of legislation from Labour, to mandate headteachers to prohibit the use and carrying of smartphones during the school day.

During Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs), Starmer described the proposed ban as "completely unnecessary," asserting that "almost every school" has already implemented a mobile phone ban. He remarked, "We need to concentrate on what's really important here, which is getting to the content that children shouldn't be accessing." Starmer's comments reflected a belief that the focus should be on regulating inappropriate online content rather than enforcing a blanket ban.

Badenoch countered Starmer’s stance, citing a claim that only one in ten schools are completely smartphone-free and questioned the rationale behind a review initiated by Labour concerning mobile phone usage in schools. She highlighted the assertion by Labour's Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, who had labelled the idea of a ban as a "gimmick." Badenoch noted that numerous teachers and headteachers believe that schools that implement such bans see improved results.

Despite Badenoch's challenges, Starmer reiterated his position during a tense exchange, saying, "We need to ensure that all schools do this – but the vast majority do." This remark was meant to underline his confidence in current school policies concerning mobile phones.

The discussion surrounding mobile phones in schools was further accentuated by a statement from Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector of Ofsted. He voiced strong support for headteachers who feel compelled to impose such bans. Speaking at a recent event, Oliver remarked on the negative impact that smartphones can have in chaotic school environments, asserting that their use could be "harmful" and "damaging" to children's development. He emphasised that schools should be supported by Ofsted in their decisions to ban devices, indicating that positive changes can occur rapidly following enforcement of such policies.

In parallel, officials under Education Secretary Phillipson have been tasked with exploring more effective monitoring of smartphone use in educational settings, aiming to alleviate disruptions caused by mobile devices. Phillipson stressed that the government fully backs educators' actions to eliminate the detection of phones from classrooms.

The exchanges in Parliament today underscore a growing divide between the Labour and Conservative parties regarding how best to address disruptions in schools and the role of mobile technology in education. The debate is likely to continue as both sides consider the implications of technology in learning environments and the responsibilities of schools to manage such challenges effectively.

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