# Experts argue against smartphone bans in schools, advocating for education



A recent publication in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) argues that the current trend of banning smartphones and social media access in schools lacks evidence of effectiveness and is merely a temporary measure. This collective of international experts, including Dr Victoria Goodyear from the Institute for Mental Health at the University of Birmingham, contends that such bans do not adequately prepare children for the healthy use of technology in the future.

The authors from various prestigious institutions, including Harvard, the University of Cambridge, the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, and the University of Sao Paulo, claim that blanket bans hinder rather than help children in their long-term engagement with digital environments. Instead, the experts advocate for a rights-based approach that emphasises age-appropriate design and education. This would allow children to develop the necessary skills for safe participation in an increasingly digital world.

The discourse surrounding smartphone usage in schools is particularly pertinent given recent statements from prominent figures in the UK. On Wednesday, the chief inspector of Ofsted recommended a ban on smartphones in English schools. This recommendation was a focal point during an exchange between Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch during Prime Minister’s Questions, where Badenoch questioned the government's opposition to an amendment in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill aimed at enforcing such a ban.

In response, the Prime Minister argued that the proposal was "completely unnecessary," asserting that "almost every school" already has some form of restriction on phone use. He urged a focus on the content consumed by students rather than the devices themselves. Schools in England were provided non-statutory guidance by the former Conservative government in February 2022 to curtail mobile phone use during school hours.

The academics highlighted findings from a recent evaluation of smartphone policies in schools, which indicated no significant positive impact on adolescent mental health, physical activity, sleep quality, educational achievement, or classroom behaviour stemming from restrictions on phone access. They noted that such restrictions did not correlate with lower levels of overall media use or problematic social media behaviour outside school hours.

While acknowledging the necessity of technology-free moments for children, the authors warned that simply limiting access to devices might infringe upon children’s rights to a balanced education about technology. They suggested that a more comprehensive approach, akin to the regulatory measures adopted for car safety, would be beneficial. Instead of instituting bans, they argue, society should foster an environment with regulations and educational prompts aimed at safer usage of digital technology.

In the context of current media portrayals of the online landscape, including the Netflix drama "Adolescence," which addresses significant issues related to social media and its effects on young individuals, experts underscore the importance of preparing children to engage with technology in constructive ways rather than simply restricting access. Dr Goodyear stated that "schools and families can mitigate potential risks and maximise benefits by supporting the development of foundational skills for healthy smartphone and social media use."

Ultimately, this perspective presents a nuanced understanding of how society might better navigate the complexities of adolescent engagement with digital technology, emphasising education and design over outright bans.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/02/250205131611.htm> - This article discusses a recent study finding that banning smartphones in schools does not significantly improve student mental health, wellbeing, or educational outcomes, supporting the claim that blanket bans lack effectiveness. It highlights the need for a broader approach to mitigate the negative impacts of smartphone use.
* <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/disconnect/> - This publication supports the debate about banning smartphones in schools, citing evidence that effective bans can have positive outcomes such as reduced bullying and improved academic performance. However, it also notes the importance of effective enforcement.
* <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/mobile-phones-in-schools-mandating-a-ban/> - This document from the House of Lords Library addresses the ongoing debate about banning mobile phones in schools, including studies showing mixed effects on educational attainment and highlighting the challenges of implementing such bans.
* <https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/> - Ofsted's website provides information on school inspections and ratings, which is relevant to discussions about the performance of schools with or without phone bans, and the recommendations of the chief inspector of Ofsted regarding smartphone use in schools.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill> - This website contains information about the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes proposals related to mobile phone use in schools, aligning with discussions about legislative approaches to phone bans.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/14ofsted-boss-calls-complete-ban-smartphones-schools/> - This article discusses recent statements by the chief inspector of Ofsted regarding the recommendation for a complete ban on smartphones in English schools, contributing to the ongoing discourse on phone policies in schools.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/keir-starmer-kemi-badenoch-schools-prime-government-b2723006.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data