# Welsh Senedd weighs national guidance on smartphone use amid rising calls for school bans



Debates surrounding the regulation of smartphone use in schools have intensified recently, following a motion led by Carolyn Thomas, chair of the petitions committee, in the Senedd. This discourse surfaces amid rising concerns regarding mobile device distractions and their impact on students’ educational experiences. The petition, launched by Zena Blackwell and supported by over 3,000 signatures, has led the committee to put forth recommendations for the Welsh Government to consider, stressing the need for a coherent national approach rather than blanket bans.

Thomas highlighted that, while the committee found no clear consensus on the matter, Welsh ministers should provide national guidance to schools. This approach mirrors sentiments echoed by various educational leaders. Natasha Asghar, the shadow education secretary for the Conservative Party, advocated for a stringent ban on smartphones, save for exceptional circumstances. “Mobile phones can indeed be a major distraction, taking our students’ focus away from learning, which is exactly what schools are for,” she asserted during the debate.

Asghar backed her call with reference to research indicating that students in schools with a robust ban on mobile devices often achieved significantly better GCSE results—up to two grades higher—than those in institutions with more lenient policies. She expressed frustration over proposals allowing individual schools to set their own rules, citing findings that a substantial number of students reported that policies against phone use were often ignored, with one in eight claiming that their schools rarely confiscated devices.

John Griffiths, another Labour member representing Newport East, added depth to the discussion by stressing the need to consider children's screen time at home. He expressed alarm at how children are exposed to addictive mobile content from an increasingly young age, suggesting that these pressures extend beyond educational settings and into family dynamics. His concerns were echoed by various members of the assembly, further indicating the widespread unease regarding mobile phone use among younger demographics.

In a formal response to the report, Lynne Neagle, the Welsh education secretary, acknowledged the importance of balancing bans with the need for local schools to address their specific student populations. Although she expressed reservations about a national prohibition, the government has committed to evaluating mobile phone use more comprehensively through an expert group tasked with developing nuanced guidelines and identifying exemptions.

The debate in Wales reflects a broader national conversation in the UK about smartphone use among children. Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the UK's largest education union, has called for a legal mandate prohibiting mobile phones in schools, citing emerging anxiety about mental health and social development issues attributed to excessive screen time. He pointed to the example set by Australia, where regulations on social media access for those under 16 have been implemented as a protective measure.

Additionally, a recent study by the Children’s Commissioner for England reinforced the argument for stricter regulations, revealing that a majority of schools in both primary and secondary education already enforce some form of phone restrictions, although these vary widely in their strictness and effectiveness. Alarmingly, it was found that a quarter of children aged 9-16 spend more than four hours daily on screens outside school, underscoring the pervasive nature of technology in their lives.

As conversations continue, UNESCO has endorsed the notion of banning smartphones in schools, spotlighting their detrimental effects on learning and well-being. Countries like Finland and France have already taken steps to implement similar measures, reinforcing the momentum toward reducing digital distractions in educational environments. In France, a law that prohibits mobile phone use among students aged 3 to 15 has been in effect since September 2018, with plans for an extended ban anticipated.

As the Senedd proceeds with these deliberations, the mooted policies surrounding mobile phone use reflect a critical juncture for educational practices in Wales and beyond. The ultimate goal remains the safeguarding of students' educational integrity and mental well-being amidst an ever-evolving digital landscape.

### Reference Map

1. Lead article
2. Daniel Kebede's comments on mental health and social development
3. UNESCO recommendations on smartphone bans
4. Children's Commissioner study on device usage
5. Evidence from Finland and France on smartphone restrictions

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25166678.senedd-debates-call-smartphone-free-schools-wales/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b> - Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the UK's largest education union, has called for a legal ban on smartphones in schools, citing their detrimental effects on children's mental health and social development. He emphasized that such a ban would help reduce pressures on educators and parents and highlighted concerns over children's exposure to harmful content such as pornography. Kebede urged the government to follow Australia’s example, where social media access is restricted for under-16s. While the Labour government prefers allowing headteachers to set their own policies, there is rising public support for stricter regulations on phone use in schools. A recent study by the Children’s Commissioner for England showed that most primary and secondary schools already have phone restrictions, with measures varying from limited classroom use to complete bans. The study also found that 25% of children aged 9-16 spend more than four hours daily on electronic devices outside of school. Despite the government's refusal to enforce a nationwide ban, Shadow Education Secretary Laura Trott advocated for a legal mandate as a protective measure. Children’s Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza supported empowering school leaders with choice while urging parents to set boundaries and maintain open discussions about online content.
3. <https://www.firstpost.com/world/unesco-recommends-banning-smartphones-in-schools-a-look-at-countries-that-dont-allow-cellphones-in-classrooms-12917702.html> - UNESCO has recommended banning smartphones in schools, highlighting the impact of mobile phone use on students' learning and well-being. Several countries have implemented such bans, including Finland, which passed a law in July 2023 reinforcing teachers' and principals' powers to intervene in activities that disrupt the classroom. France has also prohibited mobile phones for students aged 3 to 15 since September 2018, with plans to extend the ban to all students by 2025. These measures aim to reduce distractions and improve educational outcomes by limiting students' access to mobile devices during school hours.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b> - Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the UK's largest education union, has called for a legal ban on smartphones in schools, citing their detrimental effects on children's mental health and social development. He emphasized that such a ban would help reduce pressures on educators and parents and highlighted concerns over children's exposure to harmful content such as pornography. Kebede urged the government to follow Australia’s example, where social media access is restricted for under-16s. While the Labour government prefers allowing headteachers to set their own policies, there is rising public support for stricter regulations on phone use in schools. A recent study by the Children’s Commissioner for England showed that most primary and secondary schools already have phone restrictions, with measures varying from limited classroom use to complete bans. The study also found that 25% of children aged 9-16 spend more than four hours daily on electronic devices outside of school. Despite the government's refusal to enforce a nationwide ban, Shadow Education Secretary Laura Trott advocated for a legal mandate as a protective measure. Children’s Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza supported empowering school leaders with choice while urging parents to set boundaries and maintain open discussions about online content.
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