# Blackhorse Primary enforces smartphone ban after alarm over 9,000 notifications highlights cyberbullying risks



At Blackhorse Primary School in Emersons Green, a decisive move has been made to ban smartphones from the premises, marking a shift in how the school approaches digital safety and student well-being. This decision comes after a disturbing incident where a student's phone was returned the next day with an astonishing 9,000 notifications, leading to concerns over the prevalence of cyberbullying and digital distractions among the pupils. The overwhelming volume of activity on the school's Year 6 WhatsApp group struck a nerve with the faculty, prompting them to engage parents in a meaningful discussion about the implications of smartphone usage in the school environment.

For several years, the school had operated under a policy allowing students to bring smartphones, provided they were handed over to teachers during lesson time. However, the recent discovery of an unattended phone’s notification overload catalysed a more in-depth conversation about the risks associated with mobile phone ownership at such a young age. Executive headteacher Simon Botten reflected on the growing challenges he has seen unfold over nearly two decades in education. He articulated concerns regarding an increase in cyberbullying, inappropriate image sharing, and the detrimental effects of excessive screen time on children's social interactions.

In a blog post detailing the decision, Botten mentioned that parents largely supported the ban, though some expressed reservations about the school overreaching its authority by dictating smartphone policies. He acknowledged that while safety concerns — particularly the ability to contact children walking to and from school — were paramount for many parents, a significant minority of them, including attendees at consultation meetings, argued convincingly against the dangers of digital interactions. They maintained that parents often misjudge the real-world risks their children face compared to those emerging from digital platforms.

To mitigate concerns while establishing the ban, the school has allowed for exceptions whereby children who need to travel to school alone may carry a basic ‘brick’ phone, which limits communication capabilities to calls and texts. Furthermore, the initiative to educate parents has expanded; workshops conducted in collaboration with the Avon & Somerset Police have informed discussions about potential online dangers. These sessions revealed significant risks associated with unsupervised access to social media, leaving many parents taken aback by the stark realities presented by law enforcement professionals.

The sentiment of the parent body at Blackhorse has overwhelmingly shifted in favour of the ban, with surveys indicating 87 per cent support. In contrast, the response has been more mixed at the sister school, Emersons Green Primary, where only 58 per cent of parents favoured the prohibition. The governors at Blackhorse have confirmed that the ban will be enforced starting in September, while Emersons Green's governing body continues to deliberate its decision.

However, the aftermath of the announcement has not been entirely without dissent. Some parents who had previously been encouraged by the school to provide smartphones for their children expressed confusion over the change in policy. For instance, Lee Budd, a father of a Year 8 student, voiced approval of the ban, recognising that smartphones can captivate attention to an excessive degree. Conversely, a mother of a current Year 5 pupil felt neutral about the decision, advocating instead for the earlier practice of securely storing devices for safe return at the day's end.

The broader implications of such decisions are echoed by various studies indicating potential positive outcomes from similar bans. Research has suggested that schools adopting smartphone restrictions tend to see improvements in social interactions, academic performance, and a reduction in incidents of cyberbullying. An article discussing these benefits cites research by Dr. Amanda Lenhart, who champions the significance of encouraging face-to-face communication over digital interaction to foster children's emotional and social skills. This aligns with recommendations from educational experts who stress the importance of teaching digital literacy rather than simply enforcing bans.

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, Blackhorse Primary's decision may reflect a growing trend in educational settings across the UK. As concerns about mental health, safety, and the implications of technology on students’ lives continue to mount, local schools are examining their policies concerning mobile devices. This new stance at Blackhorse Primary School may serve as a crucial step toward fostering a healthier learning environment for children, while also igniting a broader conversation on the role technology should play in their daily lives.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/25224113.blackhorse-primary-school-bans-pupils-using-smartphones/), [[4]](https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2024/12/10/powys-smartphone-school-ban/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/25224113.blackhorse-primary-school-bans-pupils-using-smartphones/), [[2]](https://www.blackhorseprimary.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/), [[3]](https://www.openprivilege.com/lifestyle/technology/banning-smartphones-in-schools-enhances-childrens-social-well-being-and-academic-success-6703814b9bce5c51ad4a1bc4)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2024/08/27/can-a-school-smartphone-ban-work-heres-what-school-principals-and-anti-bullying-researchers-think/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jul/26/distraction-cyberbullying-key-concerns-phones-uk-schools)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/25224113.blackhorse-primary-school-bans-pupils-using-smartphones/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jul/26/distraction-cyberbullying-key-concerns-phones-uk-schools)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/25224113.blackhorse-primary-school-bans-pupils-using-smartphones/), [[4]](https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2024/12/10/powys-smartphone-school-ban/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.openprivilege.com/lifestyle/technology/banning-smartphones-in-schools-enhances-childrens-social-well-being-and-academic-success-6703814b9bce5c51ad4a1bc4), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jul/26/distraction-cyberbullying-key-concerns-phones-uk-schools)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.openprivilege.com/lifestyle/technology/banning-smartphones-in-schools-enhances-childrens-social-well-being-and-academic-success-6703814b9bce5c51ad4a1bc4), [[7]](https://www.edweek.org/technology/can-banning-phones-in-school-curb-cyberbullying/2017/08)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/25224113.blackhorse-primary-school-bans-pupils-using-smartphones/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.blackhorseprimary.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/> - Blackhorse Primary School's 'Keeping Children Safe' page outlines their commitment to safeguarding students through various measures, including Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE), safeguarding and child protection procedures, e-safety curriculum, and pastoral support. The page provides contact details for the Designated Safeguarding Lead and Safeguarding Governor, along with links to relevant policies and procedures.
3. <https://www.openprivilege.com/lifestyle/technology/banning-smartphones-in-schools-enhances-childrens-social-well-being-and-academic-success-6703814b9bce5c51ad4a1bc4> - An article discussing the benefits of banning smartphones in schools, highlighting improvements in children's social well-being and academic performance. It references research by Dr. Amanda Lenhart, who emphasizes the value of direct, personal communication when smartphones are removed. The piece also mentions studies indicating a positive trend in academic performance and a significant reduction in cyberbullying incidents following smartphone bans.
4. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2024/12/10/powys-smartphone-school-ban/> - A report on Powys councillor Gareth Ratcliffe's call for a ban on smartphones in schools, citing concerns over children's safety, mental health, and well-being. The article references a UK Government blog highlighting troubling statistics associated with smartphone use among children and discusses the potential benefits of creating smartphone-free environments in schools.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2024/08/27/can-a-school-smartphone-ban-work-heres-what-school-principals-and-anti-bullying-researchers-think/> - An opinion piece exploring the effectiveness of smartphone bans in schools, featuring insights from school principals and anti-bullying researchers. The article discusses the lack of robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of such bans and suggests that teaching digital literacy and responsible device use may be more beneficial. It also highlights potential unintended negative effects of restrictive approaches, such as preventing children from developing self-regulation strategies for smartphone usage.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jul/26/distraction-cyberbullying-key-concerns-phones-uk-schools> - An article examining the concerns associated with mobile phone use in UK schools, including distractions and cyberbullying. It references research from the London School of Economics indicating that test scores improved in schools that introduced mobile phone bans. The piece also discusses the impact of social media on students' mental health and the varying approaches to mobile phone policies in different countries.
7. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/can-banning-phones-in-school-curb-cyberbullying/2017/08> - An article discussing the debate over banning cellphones in schools to curb cyberbullying. It references instances where schools have implemented bans following incidents of inappropriate online posts. The piece also highlights research indicating that banning phones correlates with better academic outcomes and discusses the challenges and considerations in implementing such policies.