

The King's Church of England Primary School

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Mon 22nd July 2024

Dear King's Families,

Smartphone Free Childhood Campaign

As you may have seen on social media and news coverage, there is a growing movement amongst parents to support a campaign called "Smartphone Free Childhood", which we wanted to bring to your attention. By "smartphones", we refer to phones that can access the internet, as opposed to mobile phones that can only text and make phone calls. This nation-wide movement raises critical questions about the repercussions of social media apps and unsupervised internet use in children - and how this can be unhealthy for their development, both in the short and long terms. You can find out more by visiting these links:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/schools-guide> <https://delaysmartphones.org.uk/evidence/>

We understand the importance of being able to contact your child as they become more independent - walking to and from school as well as allowing older children to enjoy fully the freedoms offered by the summer break. However, while children do need to be contactable, their phones do not need to have access to the internet for you to keep them safe.

While smartphones can be a very helpful piece of technology for adults, research now shows that they expose children to these negative risks:

- are linked to poor mental health, depression, and low self-esteem, especially in young teenagers (National Library of Medicine, 2019)
- expose children to harmful content including pornography, grooming, bullying and materials that are not age appropriate (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2020)
- reduce attention spans - they are changing the way children's brains develop and fundamentally affecting their ability to concentrate (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2021)
- rob children of their childhood - time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting, and developing vital social skills (The anxious Generation by Prof Jonathan Haidt, 2024)
- are highly addictive, with lasting effects on young and developing brains being similar to that of gambling (Pew Research Centre, 2022)

*Encouraging every child to reach their full potential, nurtured and supported
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The use of smartphones is now a feature of daily life for most adults. Yet over the last few years, the age at which children are given their first smartphones has dropped significantly. According to recent research, some of the figures tell us that:

- A fifth of 3–4-year-olds in the UK have a smartphone (The Guardian, 19 Apr 2024)
- Almost a quarter of 5–7-year-olds have a smartphone (Ofcom, 19 April 2024)
- 91% of 11-year-olds have a smartphone (The Guardian, 1 Feb 2024)

We are giving our professional support to the campaign which encourages all parents to delay giving children a smartphone until they reach the age of 14, opting instead for a text/call phone alternative if necessary or GPS tracker. For the campaign to be successful, it is encouraging parents and carers to resist the pressure from their children and peers to hold back on giving children smartphones until they are 14 (the age in which their brains and personalities are largely developed and formed). In this way you will be working together with a wide network of parents across the country to reset the expectations that children should have access to a smartphone and remove the social peer pressure amongst parents to do so.

The use of social media apps and unsupervised access to the internet can be a safeguarding and wellbeing issue (age dependent), and as such we are committed to continue to support this campaign and work towards promoting The King's School as smartphone free in the future. We will be showing our support for the campaign with a new banner outside the school gate in the new school year. If you would like to read more about, please visit the links above. Parents at The King's School also has a WhatsApp group that directly links to the national community of this movement. If you wish to join it, please follow the link here: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/GsSs6qhCdfH61AzvOkmU36>

This campaign has been discussed in our Richmond Primary Heads' Network Meeting last month, and we will continue conversations in September about our joined approach to this as a Borough, which we will update you about in due course.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Corke, Ms Verge and Ms Demir

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