



Stone St. Mary's

Church of England Primary School

Caring, Growing, Shining Together

Registered Office

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Dear Parents / Carers

After lots of reflection and discussion with staff and some parents and growing national concern and increasing robust research, we have made the decision to introduce a new mobile phone policy starting January 2026.

From this date, pupils will no longer be allowed to bring smartphones into school. By "Smartphones", we mean devices that connect to the internet, allow access to social media or apps and come equipped with cameras.

We do, however, understand that a few children may need a phone to travel to and from school. In these cases, children may bring in a basic, **non-smart mobile phone** – for example, a 'brick phone' like a Nokia 3210 – which must be handed in to the class teacher at the beginning of the school day.

Should a smartphone be brought in, it will be kept securely in the school office and must be collected by a parent or carer at the end of the day. The phone will only be released to a responsible adult. Therefore, it will be stored safely until this can take place.

Parent phone use

Alongside the above decision we are also prohibiting the use of mobile devices by any adults coming onto the school site from the beginning of Term 2. There is a growing number of parents who collect their children whilst having a phone conversation and we believe it is important to greet your child fully on collection. Also, we need us all to be role-models for our children in reducing the use of our mobile phones to ensure full social interaction. From the beginning of next term, we will have signage around school and be asking parents to put their phones away as they enter the school site.



Why This Matters: What the Research Tells Us

This decision hasn't been made lightly. The evidence is overwhelming and deeply concerning:

- According to **Ofcom's 2024 Children and Parents Media Use Report**, **69% of 8–11-year-olds now own a smartphone**, and over half are regularly accessing social media – despite most platforms having a minimum age of 13.
- A 2023 study in *JAMA Paediatrics* found that children exposed to more than **two hours of recreational screen time per day** were significantly more likely to suffer from lower emotional regulation, decreased attention spans, and increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety.
- A UK-based study from the **Children's Commissioner** showed that **one in five children aged 8–12** had been exposed to harmful or distressing online content, including cyberbullying, inappropriate videos, and extreme content, through smartphone access.
- A landmark study by **Oxford University** found that delaying smartphone use until age 14 was associated with **better mental health, higher self-esteem, and more sustained academic progress** during the teenage years.
- The **UNICEF State of the World's Children Report (2021)** warns that while technology can enhance learning, **unchecked digital exposure in childhood can impair healthy brain development, sleep cycles, and interpersonal connection.**

Real-World Concerns – From Our School Community

Our staff have seen a growing number of incidents caused by online group chats, social media messages and gaming apps being used at home but carried emotionally into the school day. Arguments, bullying, and misunderstandings often begin in these virtual spaces and have real consequences for our children's wellbeing, learning and friendships.

Equally worrying, I have received several calls from concerned members of the public who have seen children and adults **crossing roads or walking home completely distracted by their phones**, with no awareness of the dangers around them. As parents and carers, we all provide phones out of love and concern – for safety, for reassurance, for independence. But tragically, the very devices intended to protect are statistically creating more risk than security.



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What We're Doing to Support Families

We know this is a significant shift and one that may not be easy for every family. That's why this policy, as soon as we return will begin in January 2026, allowing plenty of time to plan and adapt over the coming weeks. We also want to support you in making informed, empowered choices.

On Thursday 15th January 2026 at 6.30pm, we will be hosting a special after-school event in partnership with **Smartphone Free Childhood**, where an expert will share more of the compelling research behind this movement and offer practical guidance for parents and carers.

Their work highlights a powerful truth: **most parents would prefer to delay smartphone use**, but feel intense pressure from peers, other families or society. In fact, over 70% of parents surveyed by Smartphone Free Childhood said they would hold off longer if others around them did the same.

That's where the **Parent Pact** comes in – an online tool that allows you to unite with other parents in your community who also want to delay smartphones. **The more of us who sign, the more confident and powerful we all become.** You can explore and sign the Parent Pact here: 👉 <https://parentpact.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>

A Childhood Worth Protecting

We believe childhood is precious. It should be filled with face-to-face friendships, imagination, discovery, and play – not pressure to perform online, the endless scroll of content, or constant connectivity. We want our children to grow up grounded, confident and mentally healthy. This policy is a step in that direction.

Thank you, as always, for your partnership and trust. At Stone St Mary's, we will all support each other as we move forward in this vital and necessary bold step, to protect our children. Therefore, let us stand together to protect our children's emotional wellbeing, strengthen their focus in school, and give them the freedom to simply be children for just a little longer.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Jane Rolfe

Headteacher



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SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD



What do the above 'tech-giants' all have in common?

They all limit, or restrict, their children's 'tech' usage. Even though they help create these platforms, many tech CEOs **don't let their own kids use them freely** — a bit like a chef not letting their kids eat fast food every day. It's a sign that **just because something is popular or profitable doesn't mean it's always healthy**, especially for young minds.

Here are some of the reasons behind why we have banned smartphones:

1. Mental Health Concerns:

- **Increased Anxiety and Depression:** Studies have linked early smartphone use to higher rates of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem in children. 74% of girls who got a smartphone aged 6 had mental health issues as adults, compared to 46% who got phones aged 18.
- **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:** The internet can be a breeding ground for cyberbullying and online harassment, which can have severe emotional consequences for children.
- **Addiction and Dependence:** Smartphones are highly addictive and early exposure can lead to dependence on the device and its apps. 1 in 4 children have smartphone addiction, using it to the detriment of other activities.
- **Emotional Dysregulation:** Excessive screen time can disrupt a child's emotional regulation, leading to hyperarousal, changes in mood, and behavioural issues.



2. Social and Developmental Impact:

- **Decreased Social Skills:** Smartphone use can lead to children spending more time online and less time engaging in face-to-face interactions, potentially hindering the development of social skills. 51% of parents of kids with smartphones admit regretting giving them one.
- **Impact on Brain Development:** Early and excessive smartphone use can shape the developing brain in ways that may not be beneficial for children's cognitive and social development.
- **Difficulty with Attention and Focus:** The constant stream of notifications and engaging content on smartphones can make it difficult for children to focus and concentrate on tasks that require sustained attention.

3. Health Risks:

- **Obesity:** Sedentary lifestyles associated with excessive screen time can contribute to childhood obesity.
- **Eye Strain and Nearsightedness:** Long hours spent looking at screens can put a strain on a child's eyes and increase the risk of near sightedness.
- **Sleep Disruption:** Blue light emitted from smartphone screens can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to fatigue and difficulty focusing. Children who use smartphones at bedtime have double the risk of disrupted sleep.

4. Safety and Protection:

- **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** The internet contains a wide range of content that may not be appropriate for children and early smartphone use can increase their exposure to such content.
- **Cyber Bullying:** 764,000 children, in England and Wales, aged 10-15, experienced online bullying in 2020. This is continuing to rise. 8 in 10 young children, aged between 8-17, who have been bullied, have been bullied through a device.
- **Vulnerability to Abusers:** Smartphones can make children more vulnerable to abuse, as abusers can potentially access and exploit children online. Online imagery of primary school children being coached to perform sexual acts has soared by 1000%.
- **Road Safety:** Many children who walk to and from school with their smartphone are not paying attention to the road and this can, and has, led to accidents.



5. Academic Performance:

- Academic Distraction: Access to smartphones and social media can lead to distractions in school and decreased academic performance.
- Reduced Time for Learning and Exploration: Excessive screen time can take away from time for learning, exploration and engagement in other activities that are important for a child's development.



Smartphones weren't designed with kids in mind – but they've reshaped childhood almost overnight. In the UK, 89% of 12-year-olds now own one, and so do a quarter of children aged 5 to 7. On average, kids get their first smartphone aged nine.

Instead of growing up slowly, children are being pulled into a digital world built to keep them hooked. The impact on their development, mental health and relationships runs deep – and we can't afford to look away any longer.

