

South Belfast Primary Partnership



22nd May 2025

Dear Parents/ Carers

At a recent meeting of the South Belfast Principals' Group, we discussed our concerns over the increasing use of smartphones (phones with internet access) by primary school children. We understand that as children have increased independence, perhaps walking to and from school, parents want to keep in touch with their child, and to be contactable in event of an emergency. However, your child's phone does not need to have access to the internet to be able to do this.

As school leaders, we can see the positive benefits the internet brings, however it also exposes the children to many risks. Smartphone usage can be highly addictive, with lasting effects on brain development. There is research that this is also affecting children's ability to concentrate. It has been linked to poor mental health, depression and low self esteem, especially in young teenagers. It provides a gateway for bullying and/or grooming and exposes children to be to harmful content that is not age appropriate. If your child already has a smartphone it is vital that you have parental controls in place and are aware of how your child is using their phone.

The use of smartphones is now a feature of daily life for most adults, however we have noticed that children are owning their own smart phone at increasingly younger ages. Primary school aged children should not have access to social media apps, the platforms all have age restrictions that are at least 13.

There are alternatives to smartphones, and there are organisations which encourage and support parents to delay giving your child a smart phone. What parent has not heard, 'But everyone else has one?' By joining together with other parents, you can resist 'pester power' until you feel your child has the maturity to access these forums designed by adults for adults. As the adults, we all have a safeguarding responsibility for our children.

More information can be found by clicking the links below:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>

<https://delaysmartphones.org.uk>

<https://healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org>

Signed:

Mrs C Roulston, Blythefield PS
Mr P Bell, Botanic PS
Mr P Massey, Donegall Road PS
Mrs H Cunningham, Fane Street PS
Mrs R Corbett, Finaghy PS
Mrs J Foster, Forge Integrated PS
Mr P McAllister, Holy Rosary PS

Ms A Benstead, Scoil an Droichid
Ms C Hunter, St Bride's PS
Ms A Tiernan, St Malachy's PS
Mrs B McCann, St Michael's PS
Mrs L Wilson, Stranmillis
Mrs K Hrabovsky, Victoria Prep
Mrs T Crawford, Rosetta PS