

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 4 June 2025
10th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2106: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Introduction

Petitioner Adam Csenki

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunchtime.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2106>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 25 September 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, COSLA, Association of Directors of Education, Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, and Scottish teaching unions.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Petitioner, COSLA, the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association, Association of Heads and Deputies in Scotland and School Leaders Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 27 June 2024](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 7206 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee

CPPP/S6/25/10/10

May 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2106: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Petitioner

Adam Csenki

Date Lodged

19 June 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunchtime.

Background information

There is a greater recognition of the harm of mobile phone use in schools, shown by a growing number of Scottish independent schools and some state schools prohibiting their use.

Government-led guidance prohibiting the use of phones during the school day has been introduced in France and England.

In a May 2024 staff survey in a high school in Moray:

- 79% said phones are a distraction to pupils
- 62% said misuse of phones disrupts learning
- 59% said phones create conflict between teachers and pupils
- 49% said phones are used to film teachers and pupils without consent.

Staff have written of the pull of the online world which is always on in a child's pocket leading to severe loss in focus, the hostility with which teachers are met when attempting to challenge inappropriate phone use, and also of having to work with the fear of being filmed without permission and the footage uploaded onto the internet.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2106 on 25 September 2024

The Convener: PE2106, which was lodged by Adam Csenki, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunch time.

The SPICe briefing highlights that decisions on the use of mobile phones in schools are a matter for local authorities or schools themselves. Indeed, I know from examples in my constituency that practice is variable. In August, the Scottish Government published new guidance on the use of mobile phones in schools aimed at empowering headteachers

“to take the steps they see fit to limit the use of mobile phones in schools, up to and including a full ban on the school estate during the school day, if that is their judgement.”

Responding to the petition, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills tells us that she shares the petitioner’s concerns about the impact of mobile phone use on children and young people’s learning but states that the Scottish Government cannot unilaterally ban mobile phones in schools. The cabinet secretary added during her statement to Parliament earlier this month that

“the updated national guidance goes as far towards a national ban as I am currently able to go”.—[Official Report, 3 September 2024; c 70.]

We have received a submission from the petitioner that welcomes the updated guidance but raises concerns that leaving the decision up to individual headteachers risks creating an unequal experience for pupils and their teachers across Scotland.

Do members have any comments or suggestions?

David Torrance: Considering that the Scottish Government has recently published new guidelines setting out what schools may wish to consider when developing policy on mobile phone usage and engaging with parents, carers and the wider school community, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has stated that the Scottish Government cannot unilaterally ban mobile phones in schools as that is a policy decision resting with headteachers and local authorities, I wonder whether the committee would consider closing the petition under rule 15.7 of standing orders.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I wonder whether there is just a little bit more in this. I appreciate that the guidance has been updated but, given that this is a new petition, is it worth giving this issue a bit more of an airing to find out more evidence? The petition calls for the most extreme form of a ban, but there may be other variations that produce results. There is probably a gap when it comes to how confident the Scottish Government is that schools are collecting data on mobile phone misuse and understanding the scale of the problem. It would be useful to hear from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland and School Leaders Scotland, in addition to any individual schools that have applied

some form of a ban, which may be state schools or independent schools, and the educational attainment results arising from that.

David Torrance: I bow to Mr Golden's suggestion but, in that case, I wonder whether we could also write to the teaching unions to get their views on the matter. It is their members who will be engaging with it.

The Convener: Anecdotally—and it is only anecdotal, although first-hand anecdotal—I have been told by recent school leavers that, in fact, pupils are being encouraged to use their mobile phone as a working tool in the classroom to support the digital learning of the class. If that is an evolving practice in learning, I am not quite sure how that is consistent with banning the use of the mobile phone. There was talk at one time of every child being provided with an iPad or a laptop or something, but in the absence of that, how would digital learning proceed in the event of a total ban? That was the response of someone who had recently been at school and thought that there was a contradiction in that, albeit that they had been at a school where there were restrictions on when a phone could be used. The restrictions applied variably in different situations within the school.

I am interested in writing to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to understand whether, in a digital learning era, consideration has been given to the phone being a necessary piece of equipment in the same way that a calculator used to be. Can you just say, "Don't use them," or will that prejudice certain individuals' ability to participate in the learning of the class? I do not know, but I would like to be reassured on that point.

Maurice Golden: I agree. Lots of homework is done via mobile phone on Google Classrooms and that is commonly used in classes as well—pupils use it to find out what the homework is and then work off that. It might be interesting to find out how individual schools have implemented restrictions on the wi-fi to limit the apps that pupils can access. As a parallel issue, there seems to be a growing increase in panic attacks among pupils in schools, and one of the ways in which those are mitigated and helped is by calling the parent. Without a phone, that will be difficult to do.

Again, that is anecdotal, but it would be useful to hear more about those issues.

The Convener: I am slightly concerned that this is a minefield and we should perhaps try to get a little bit more understanding and information in relation to the issues raised. Are colleagues content to proceed on the basis of Mr Golden's suggestion and others that followed to ensure that we understand what is happening?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you. That brings us to the end of the open session this morning. We will take item 4 in private. The committee will meet again on Wednesday 9 October.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Petitioner written submission, 10 September 2024

PE2106/B: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

We would ask the Committee to consider the following, in light of new information regarding mobile phones in schools since the petition was first published.

- a. As of 3rd September 2024, Northern Ireland now joins England in requiring schools to prohibit their pupils from using mobile phones during the entirety of the school day, including break and lunch. This blanket support and guidance from the government takes the pressure off individual Heads to make the decision and ensures an equal school experience for all pupils across these nations. We call on the Scottish Government to do the same, rather than place the onus on Heads to act if they choose to do so.
- b. In August 2024, the Head of Grantown Grammar School in Highland gave a series of interviews on local and national news¹, giving evidence of the changes seen in that school since phone use was restricted in May 2024. The words used included that the change was “transformational”, there were “fewer disruptions”, the whole school was “more social” and there was “more of a buzz”. We ask that the Scottish Government note the growing evidence base of the benefits in schools that have restricted phone use. In many schools across Scotland, there is the need to raise attainment. This would also be a benefit of providing pupils with a phone-free school day, as noted in the 2024 Policy Exchange publication ‘Disconnect’².
- c. In August 2024, the Scottish Government updated its guidance on mobile phone use in Scottish Schools. In the guidance, the Scottish Government chose not to mandate one rule for all, as has been done for English and Northern Irish Schools, but rather offer support to individual Heads who wish to restrict phone use.

We believe that the benefit of a phone-free school experience should be available to all children in the UK, indeed, especially to all children in Scotland. While we welcome the updated guidance from the Scottish Government, we would like to suggest that, by avoiding making a blanket policy (as other UK nations have done) and instead leaving it up to individual Heads to choose to act or not, an unequal school experience for Scottish pupils is created. In schools with a Head who is proactive and supported by his/her staff to enforce and police a restricting of phone use, the benefits above will be seen. Unfortunately, in schools where the Head is unwilling for whatever reason to make the change and restrict phone use at break time and lunch time, the negative effects of allowing young teenagers unrestricted access to their phones, including issues of distraction, lack of focus, online bullying, reduced social interaction, exposure to inappropriate content, and a host of by now well documented other issues will continue to be seen. In effect, a postcode lottery will be created with a drastically different school experience in schools with different policies.

Furthermore, the absence of a centrally mandated rule for all schools also creates unequal working conditions for Scottish teachers. In schools where phone use is

restricted, the likelihood of a teacher being filmed and the footage uploaded online is significantly reduced. Currently, all Scottish teachers (with the exception now of teachers at Grantown Grammar and most private schools which have already restricted phone use across the school day) work with the possibility that they might be filmed without their consent. Again, we call on the Scottish Government to create a phone-free school experience in all schools in Scotland, for the benefit of pupils and teachers alike.

We close with the words used in the current Scottish Government guidance on mobile phones in schools: "...there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that over-exposure to mobile phone use can result in limited concentration, unhappiness and isolation." We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government recognises this. We now ask it to mandate that Scottish schools join English and Northern Irish schools in giving pupils six hours or so in a day where they do not have access to them.

Thank you for your consideration.

COSLA written submission of 8 October 2024

PE2106/C: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Thank you for your letter dated 2 October 2024 seeking COSLA's view on Petition PE2106:

"Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunchtime."

COSLA and Scottish Government co-chair the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS). This group developed guidance on the use of mobile phones which was published in August 2024: *Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools*.

The vision contained within the guidance is:

"To enable all schools and local authorities to develop an ethos of citizenship that leads to respectful and responsible use of mobile technology. This will encourage schools to positively embrace mobile technology to enhance learning now and, in the future, whilst helping them protect staff, children and young people from the possible disruptive and harmful consequences of misuse."

It is important to equip students with knowledge and skills in the respectful use of mobile technology, and the use of mobile technology can enhance learning and equip students with skills for their future lives and careers where the use of mobile technology and communications will be important. COSLA supports actions to remove the disruptive and unstructured use of mobile phones but does not support a blanket prohibition on the use of mobile phones in schools. The Guidance allows Head Teachers to make decisions they deem appropriate for their school.

Your letter also asks for any information COSLA has on the impact of the Guidance. Given it was only recently published we do not have such information.

We hope this contribution is helpful in your consideration of Petition PE2106.

NASUWT written submission, 30 October 2024

PE2106/D: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of petition PE2106: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools.

The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

Introduction

1. The NASUWT does not support petition PE2106 and believes that the existing guidance is sufficient, more details are set out below.
2. The recently published national guidance '*Mobile phones: guidance for Scotland's schools*', negotiated with NASUWT, recognises the duality of mobile devices, such as phones and tablets, in schools. These can:
 - i. 'be powerful tools to enhance learning and teaching, communication and social experiences, and may remove barriers to learning for some pupils';
 - ii. 'also create challenges... causing disruption to pupils' learning and that of their peers'.
3. The Scottish Government in this guidance acknowledges that serious misbehaviours, including the abusive use of mobile phones in schools to bully or harass pupils and staff, is an increasing problem.

Impact on staff and pupils

4. The guidance states that policies on mobile phones in school should 'reflect the need to support pupils' learning, while protecting staff and pupils from bullying, harassment and abuse'. All local policies should 'recognise and respect all such rights, equally':
 - i. 'any decisions relating to the use of such devices in schools should be made acting in the best interests of the child and taking their views into consideration';
 - ii. '[t]here is also legislation which protects the rights of school staff in relation to their employment, health and safety etc'.

Local variations

5. There is no prescribed national approach; rather, individual school policies, developed in partnership with the whole school community (pupils, staff,

parents & carers), will determine the extent of the restrictions and limitations in place.

6. For example, schools may choose to ask pupils to hand mobile phones over to a member of staff during class, restrict the use of mobile phones during the school day, or request mobile devices are switched off and out of sight during class, unless the teacher has requested otherwise. Policies may also include instructions that camera and filming functions only be used with the prior consent of the data subjects (pupils or staff) and special permission of school management.
7. Addressing the use of mobile phones must form part of joined-up whole-school strategies on managing pupil behaviour. Any school policy on mobile phones should align with the wider relationships and behaviour policy, relevant legislation (e.g. health and safety legislation for staff and pupils) and existing IT codes of conduct.
8. The guidance is already clear that all school policies on mobile devices should:
 - target pupils' behaviours when interacting with a range of mobile technology, which can include functionalities of technology, e.g. sending/receiving messages, notifications, playing videos/music, and recording videos/audios in class;
 - set out clear and specific expectations of what standards of behaviour are expected and what action will be taken when such expectations are not met;
 - be clearly communicated with pupils, staff, parents and carers;
 - be applied consistently;
 - be regularly reviewed.
9. In designing a local policy, schools are also directed to note that 'PISA 2022 suggested that when a school's written statements or rules were too generally designed, imprecise or lenient, they were unlikely to support effective teaching and learning with mobile technology.'

School-based negotiations

10. NASUWT has created tailored advice to our school representatives alongside prompt questions to support local policy reviews or negotiations which can be accessed on our website using the following link:

- [Developing a mobile phones in schools policy | NASUWT](#)

Conclusion

11. We know that mobile phones can be used as a tool to bully and harass fellow pupils and teachers, as well as distracting pupils from their learning. We therefore welcomed the guidance from the Scottish Government that school leaders can take steps to limit or ban the use of phones in their schools if they

see fit. However, as set out above, in order to be effective, addressing the use of mobile phones must form part of joined up whole-school strategies on managing pupil behaviour.

12. While the Union was pleased to see within the National Action Plan on Behaviour the Scottish Government intends that schools will be offered support to adopt the recommendations within it, including suggested approaches and exemplars, it was nevertheless disappointing that the Scottish Government has not as yet committed any additional funding, time or resources to schools to support this work.
13. Teachers and school leaders are already dealing with excessive workloads and constrained budgets. Implementing the recommendations of this action plan is too important a task to be simply added to schools' already lengthy to-do lists. Ring-fenced time and funding is needed.
14. Some schools already had robust and effective policies in place that pre-empted the Scottish Government's guidance, others used the national launch as an opportunity to refresh or write their own. NASUWT would strongly argue that what is urgently needed is better resourcing and time for teachers and schools, rather than a central mandate to exclude mobile phones in schools.
15. The NASUWT would be happy to meet with the Committee to discuss all of these issues in more detail.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 30 October 2024

PE2106/E: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

Thank you for your letter of 2 October regarding Petition PE2106 on prohibiting mobile phone use in Scottish Schools. The Committee has sought information on what consideration was given to the impact restrictions on the use of mobile phones might have on the digital learning environment when developing the new guidance for schools.

The purpose of our mobile phone guidance is to assist schools and education authorities in introducing or updating their policies on mobile phone use in school, in ways that work best for them, in light of their local context and circumstances.

The guidance, as well as recognising the challenges mobile phones create in many of our classrooms, acknowledges that when used responsibly, mobile devices such as phones and tablets can be powerful tools to enhance learning and teaching, communication and social experiences, and may remove barriers to learning for some pupils. Personal mobile phones can also be used to access some school-based services, such as ordering school meals. The guidance therefore takes into account the potential benefits of personal mobile phones, whilst also considering the risks.

The guidance advocates an approach that promotes the respectful and responsible use of mobile phones in schools whilst encouraging schools to adopt a robust but measured response to their inappropriate use. Therefore, as well as setting out a

clear position on the introduction of any restrictions on the use of mobile phones within the school day, a school's policy should also include clear guidelines on the appropriate use of mobile technology for learning and teaching purposes, and within exam conditions.

I have been clear that head teachers know their learning communities best, and decisions on restriction or limitation of access to mobile phones should be informed by local circumstances and priorities. The flexibility provided within the guidance would, for example, enable a policy approach that says mobile phones should be switched off and out of sight during class times, unless the teacher has requested that they be used in a lesson.

Evidence from PISA 2022 shows that guidelines around the use of mobile devices in school are not in and of themselves sufficient to prevent pupils from becoming distracted. How a school implements and enforces its policy will be critical to determining its effectiveness, for example that subject to any exceptions, there should be the expectation that the policy would be followed by all pupils, and that staff should be relied upon to apply a consistent approach to the implementation of the policy.

Effective implementation and enforcement will rely on the support and cooperation of all members of a school community – including staff, pupils and parents and carers. To ensure this support and cooperation, it is imperative that schools seek to develop their policies in collaboration with their whole school community to develop an approach that is appropriate for its own particular circumstances. Building pupil, staff and parental confidence in the respectful and responsible use of mobile phones in schools will help to lay the foundations for schools to positively embrace technology as another learning tool.

I noted from the Official Report that the Committee had considered whether there was sufficient evidence available to support understanding the scale of the problem of mobile phone use in schools. I would reassure the Committee that the evidence of the concerns arose from the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) 2023. This survey included the views of over 3000 school staff, including headteachers, teachers and support staff. The 2023 survey is the fifth wave of this research, and this report included evidence of a changed pattern of behaviours related to mobile phones in schools. The research report is available from [Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/biissr-2023/research-report-2023-01/pages/1-2023-01.aspx). The establishment of the survey was overseen by the [Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviours in Schools](https://www.gov.scot/publications/biissr-2023/research-report-2023-01/pages/1-2023-01.aspx). The group includes membership from a range of organisations including COSLA and professional organisations.

My decision to prioritise publishing revised guidance was directly in response to this evidence. In undertaking the revision of the guidance my officials considered the BISSR Research and also other research and experiential evidence. This included specific research evidence on the benefits of mobile phones and technology in learning. As a result, the balanced position as set out in the guidance was achieved.

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful and is reassured that sufficient consideration is given within the guidance to the impact restrictions on the use of mobile phones might have on the digital learning environment.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH MSP

Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) written submission, 31 October 2024

PE2106/F: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the country's largest teaching union, representing almost 65,000 members across all sectors of Education and at all career levels, welcomes the opportunity to comment on PE2106: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools.

The Petition calls 'on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update guidance on mobile phones in schools to require all schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, including at interval and lunchtime'.

Misuse of Mobile Phones and Devices in Schools

The EIS understands the concerns highlighted by the Petitioner in the background information accompanying the Petition. The misuse of mobile phones and other mobile devices in schools is a serious issue, and one that has grown steadily in recent years.

The abusive use of mobile phones was identified as one of 'the serious disruptive behaviours' in the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023 (BISSR). The misuse of such devices to abuse or bully pupils or staff is absolutely unacceptable. The impact on learning and teaching, and on the health and wellbeing of students and staff, of mobile device abuse can be devastating and must be tackled quickly and decisively wherever and whenever it arises.

Misuse can also impact on low level disruption. Following a 2021 AGM resolution, the EIS conducted a survey to assess, inter alia, the relationship between mobile phone misuse and low-level disruption. A large proportion of respondents – almost 44% - said that tablets and mobile phones contribute to a lot of low-level disruption in classes, such as students being distracted and using them for purposes unrelated to learning during lessons.

This was confirmed in the 2023 BISSR report, which highlighted using or looking at mobile phones inappropriately as one of the top three contributors to low level disruptive behaviour.

In response to the BISSR report, the Scottish Government's 'Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools' was updated on 15th August 2024. The guidance had been developed in partnership with COSLA and with members of the Scottish Advisory Group for Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS), of which the EIS is a member. The guidance and its impact will be kept under review by SAGRABIS.

Sound Educational Rationale

The EIS has no policy to support a national ban of mobile phone use in schools but is clear that any use of mobile phones in schools should be based on a sound educational rationale, informed by teacher professional judgement with due regard to equity.

Many young people, living in the poorest households, may not have access to a Smart phone, data or internet access and even if a device is supplied by the school/local authority, it cannot be assumed that the family income will stretch to keeping the device fully charged and internet connected.

The reality is that the use of personal mobile devices has increased in schools due to the paucity of digital devices and lack of investment in the IT infrastructure of schools. Implementation of the national guidance should therefore be accompanied by investment of necessary resources to ensure the adequacy of schools' digital infrastructure and that pupils who may not have access to Smart phones or data are not disadvantaged.

Recent reports have referenced the impact that excessive screen time can have on children and young people's learning, especially their reading skills and this must be taken into account when determining local policies on the use of any screen-based devices, including phones.

The EIS is also clear that education is fundamentally based on relationships formed and built through human interaction and would wish to see priority given to human-centred learning, rather than to 'digital by default' approaches as might otherwise be the temptation because of the ready availability of digital devices and the various capacities that they offer. Young people should be well connected to other human beings cognitively, socially and emotionally rather than being focused far too often on their mobile phones.

Developing Guidance in an Empowered School Context

Some media reports on the introduction of the updated Scottish Government guidance have erroneously, in our view, suggested that the decision to ban mobile phone use in school rests with the Headteacher. In an Empowered school context, this is incorrect.

Most schools across the country will already have their own guidance in place and the EIS would expect, in the context of Empowerment, that schools, parents, teachers and school staff, trade unions and pupils would all be involved in the development of policy – to agree what the appropriate use of mobile phones should be for their particular school.

The national guidance reinforces this approach stating:

'Where restrictions on mobile phones in schools are being considered, it is important to ensure that pupils, school staff, parents and carers and the wider school community are fully consulted in relation to the agreed approach on the limitations of mobile phone use in schools.'

In some cases, the outcome of collegiate dialogue might be to adopt a ban on the use of mobile phones, with the implications for schools, including resources, factored in. In other cases, restrictions may be placed on when mobile phones can be used

during the school day. As we have highlighted, any agreement reached must be underpinned by sound educational rationale, informed by teacher professional judgement and underpinned by principles of equity and inclusion.

This collegiate approach to developing guidance ought to provide clarity for all in terms of the appropriate use of mobile phones in the school context and increase the potential success of implementation by ensuring the buy-in of all in the school community.

We hope this information is helpful and would be happy to provide further information if required.

Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) written submission, 11 December 2024

PE2106/G: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

The SSTA conducted a survey of members earlier this year.

Please see results of SSTA members survey (22 March 2024) – <https://ssta.org.uk/92-of-lessons-interrupted-by-pupil-mobile-phones/>

I hope this gives a clear statement from the SSTA.

Association of Heads and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS) written submission, 12 December 2024

PE2106/H: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

The petition was discussed at our National Executive Committee on 3 October where it was agreed that AHDS would not support the petition.

AHDS is a member of the Scottish Government group, SAGRABIS (Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools), which thoroughly examined this issue before delivering the current guidance which enables schools to ban mobile phones if that is considered necessary due to local circumstances. This position recognised that one role for schools is to encourage respectful use of mobile phones. In addition, some schools have 'bring your own device' approaches which mean that mobile phones were used to support learning in some settings. Further, some pupils use phones to support the technology associated with medical conditions such as monitoring related to diabetes medication. For all these reasons, and the need to allow schools to respond to local circumstances, AHDS does not support the petition.

School Leaders Scotland (SLS) written submission, 7 January 2025

PE2106/I: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

It is the agreed view of the SLS Presidential Team that any restrictions on mobile phone use in schools or in classrooms are a matter for individual schools in line with the current Scottish Government policy. With every school being different, we feel strongly that this is up to schools to manage as best suits their school community.

I hope this brief statement is useful to the Committee.

Petitioner written submission, 15 May 2025

PE2106/J: Prohibit mobile phone use in Scottish schools

This submission will outline the fact that Scottish schools which currently allow their pupils unrestricted and unsupervised access to their internet-enabled devices (smartphones) during break and lunchtime are in breach of several Child Protection (CP) and Safeguarding (SG) requirements set out under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We will argue that the only way to ensure that these rights be upheld is to restrict access to personal smartphones during the entire school day.

The UNCRC, which, since 2024, all Scottish Schools have a legal duty to uphold under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, state that parties shall 'take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...' (Article 19), and that parties shall 'encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being...' (Article 17e). Article 13 also states that the right to 'freedom of expression; includ[ing] freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds... through any...media' may be restricted 'for... public health or morals'.

The author put out a call for examples of safeguarding breaches at Scottish schools on several parents' groups and received the submissions below. These recent examples are evidence that children are being denied their rights across Scottish schools, due to being around pupils who have unrestricted access to their smartphones. These smartphones are being used to access the unfiltered internet and expose children as young as 12 to harmful content. In the cases below, schools have been negligent in enforcing and upholding children's rights by allowing this harm to occur.

A school in Edinburgh: there have been at least six incidents of S1 pupils viewing and exposing others to violent pornography at school (in the lunch hall or corridors) this year alone (from Jan 2025). This made national news in March 2025.

An academy in Moray: pupils are exposed to a website called 'watch people die' on mobile phones at break time. (Nov 2024)

A high school in Moray: pupils are exposed to inappropriate pictures that are airdropped from pupils' phones onto school ipads (Jan 2025)

A school in West Lothian: a group of boys take indecent pictures of themselves and then share with others in the school during school time (Jan 2025)

A school in Moray: a parent reports that pornography was shown to her young child during school time over a period of time, leading to 'horrific consequences' at home. The school was unable to do anything about it due to the break and lunch policy of unsupervised access to phones. In the end, the child was moved to England to live with family there. (2024) It should be noted that, having been made aware of these breaches in Moray schools, Moray Council have now decided to restrict smartphones for the entire school day starting in August 2025, the first local authority

in Scotland to do so. However, less proactive councils will continue to fail children by failing to update their policies, and this is why guidance from the Scottish Government is needed: to ensure safety and equity in all schools across Scotland.

In the schools above, as in many in Scotland, guidance around responsible use of mobile technology – aiming to manage inappropriate smartphone use as though it were simply a form of bullying – has been in place for many years now. Although some smartphone misuse may be bullying in nature, the above examples include child sexual abuse, mental violence, and children being exposed to material injurious to their well-being, all of which may well be contributing to problems in public health and morals. Waiting for incidents to occur before sanctions and consequences for misuse are implemented means that by the time an incident is reported, if indeed it ever is reported, the harm has already been done. Reactive policies are therefore insufficient to fulfil the CP and SG requirements set out by the UNCRC, which clearly states that children should be ‘protected’ i.e. by using proactive policies.

Furthermore, as harmful content is shown around groups at the lunch table, in a corner or down a corridor, even children whose parents have not allowed them to have a smartphone are at a daily risk of CP and SG failures in their local school. It is difficult to argue that schools who knowingly allow these devices into the building and allow their unrestricted and unsupervised use do not share some liability when incidents occur, and the potential that legal proceedings may be started where children have come to psychological harm on the schools’ watch should be a serious consideration for school leaders and policymakers.

It is sobering to think that none of the incidents above would have taken place in schools with all-day restrictions on internet-enabled personal devices, such as every single school south of the border, and it is quite upsetting therefore to realise that, in the sphere of mental violence and online content, children are safer in English schools than they are with us.

We recognise that the Education Secretary has stated that she lacks the power to unilaterally ban phones in schools, and we respect her position. However, we call on her to oversee that all Scottish schools take seriously their legal obligation to protect children by issuing guidance requiring all schools to restrict smartphone use for the entire school day, and we believe that this is well within her remit and powers.

If we continue to turn a blind eye to these issues that are taking place in our schools, we are also culpable in not protecting the children and young people of this country.