Consultation on Restricting Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools

August 2026

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Introduction

In 2024, the Scottish Government published guidance to support schools to manage the use of mobile phones in schools. This was updated in June 2026, to further encourage education authorities and school leaders to limit the personal use of mobile phones in their schools. This could include a full ban in schools during the school day.

The guidance is non-statutory. This means that education authorities and schools must consider it but can decide how to apply the guidance. This means that some schools may have full bans in place while other schools may have more limited or no restrictions. Therefore, pupils' experiences depend on which school they attend.

This consultation document uses the term 'mobile phones' to mean personal mobile phones belonging to pupils.

Purpose of consultation

The Scottish Government has said it will make a law to restrict personal use of mobile phones in all of Scotland's schools. This consultation is to inform the development of the legislation. Education authorities have statutory responsibility for the provision of education in Scotland and are responsible for implementing restrictions in their schools.

This consultation seeks views and opinions on:

- The extent and scope of restrictions on mobile phones in schools,
- The impact of restricting use of mobile phones in schools,
- What exemptions should apply to restrictions on mobile phones in schools

Who is this consultation for

This consultation is open to anyone with an interest in restrictions on the personal use of mobile phones in schools. We are especially keen to hear from:

- Pupils
- Parents and carers
- Teachers and other school staff
- Education authorities and education authority schools
- Independent and grant-aided schools.

We have engaged directly with children and young people during the development of this consultation paper, and their feedback has been reflected in this consultation paper. We will continue to work through relevant organisations to support children and young people to participate in the consultation.

What is not within the scope of this consultation

This consultation applies only to the personal use of mobile phones in schools. It is to inform the development of future legislation, and so only asks questions related to this topic. The use of mobile phones by children and young people in all other contexts are outwith the scope of this consultation, for example:

- The use of mobile phones while outside the school campus,

- The use of social media while at home,
- The use of mobile phones or other digital devices with the express purpose of supporting learning

We are not seeking views on the UK Government's plans to ban social media platforms for under-16s, to introduce a social media curfew for 16-and-17-year-olds, and to introduce new age assurance measures.

If a consultation response includes matters that fall outside the scope, those elements will not be analysed as part of the consultation.

Background
It is important that we equip the next generation with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resilience to thrive in the modern age. Used responsibly, mobile phones can provide opportunities for learning and communication and may remove barriers to learning for some pupils. In addition, they can bring a sense of security to parents and carers as their children enjoy more independent activities, such as walking to and from school.

However, it is evident that mobile phones, when used inappropriately, are causing disruption to pupils' learning and that of their peers. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR), published in 2023, showed that mobile phones can cause distraction and loss of concentration. The Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 data, published in December 2023, showed that almost a third of 15 year olds in Scotland and across all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD**)** reported being distracted using digital devices in most or every maths class – and around a quarter reported being distracted by others using digital devices.

BISSR 2023 also highlighted an increase in more serious behaviours. This includes abusive use of mobile phones in schools, for example, mobile phones being used to bully or harass pupils and staff. Such behaviour is unacceptable in any context. The misuse of mobile technology, including the filming of incidents which are posted on social media, is also frequently reported in the media. Many reports show the potentially devastating impact of such misuse on pupils, their families and the safety and wellbeing of staff.

There is also increasing evidence of the risk of these technologies on a spectrum of harms, including:

- Issues with sleep
- Loss of precious childhood time
- Loss of concentration
- Seeing harmful, often violent, misogynistic or radicalising content
- Bullying
- Incitement to self-harm
- Grooming

Current exceptions for restrictions for using mobile phones in schools
The existing guidance sets out certain exceptions to restrictions which may be necessary in order to allow some children and young people access to their phones while at school. Schools usually allow young people to be exempt from restrictions on a case-by-case basis. Exceptions that might apply are:

- For pupils who are young carers and need to have contact with home;
- For pupils who have medical conditions such as diabetes that require monitoring using their mobile phones;
- For pupils with additional support needs, where access to their mobile phone is used as part of a planned approach to managing their learning needs; and

- For pupils with disabilities when they use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment, including access to augmentative and alternative communication.

Links to human rights, Getting It Right For Every Child , and employment rights

Scottish Ministers have committed to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights in Scotland through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. These rights require any decisions on the use of mobile phones in schools to be made in the best interests of the child and take their views into consideration. The rights of pupils under the European Convention on Human Rights must also be respected. There are also laws which protects the rights of school staff in relation to their employment, health and safety. The Curriculum for Excellence and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) recognise that protecting the wellbeing of staff and pupils is essential for creating the right environment for effective learning and teaching. It is necessary to recognise and respect all such rights equally. Any restrictions on mobile phone use in schools must balance these rights and policies with the need to protect children and young people from harm, and the need to facilitate and support learning and teaching.

Consultation questions

1. **The Scottish Government has committed to restricting the use of mobile phones in schools. To what extent do you agree with the following options?:**

Agree – don't agree – neither agree nor disagree - don't know – prefer not to say

- Restrictions during class time but access to mobile phones during break and lunch.
- Restrictions across the whole school day: mobile phones must not be used during any part of the school day, including break and lunch.
- Restrictions should be left to discretion of the school.
- Other – please provide details of other types of restrictions which you would support in the box below (information on exceptions to restrictions is sought below, do not provide this information in response to this question)

2. **What is your knowledge of how phones are being used in schools at the moment?**

For example, if you are a young person, how do you or your friends use their mobile phones while at school? If you are a parent or carer, how do your children use their mobile phones in school? If you are a member of school staff, how do pupils in your school use their mobile phones?

Please select all that apply

- To support transport to and from school, such as checking timetables, paying for transport.
- To communicate with family.
- To communicate with friends in school such as through messaging apps.
- To buy or order lunch.
- To support teaching and learning activities, for example researching a topic or question.
- To help with accessibility and Additional Support Needs while in school.
- During in-school study periods, for example to listen to music on headphones.
- To relax during break and lunch times, such as gaming
- Using social media
- To take photos of others (pupils and/or staff) in school
- To allow pupils to discreetly report behaviour incidents, such as bullying or racist incidents, for example through QR codes
- None – my school / my child's school does not allow the use of mobile phones.
- Other – please provide detail

3. **Think about the different things young people might use their phone for in school. If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the positive impacts might be?**

Agree – don't agree – neither agree nor disagree - don't know – prefer not to say

- Improved concentration in lessons.
- Improved in-person interaction and socialisation between pupils.
- Opportunity for children and young people to have protected screen-free time while at school.
- Reduced disruption in lessons.
- Reduced bullying or harassment.
- Reduced access to inappropriate content online while at school.
- Staff spend less time managing inappropriate behaviour.

Are there other benefits or positive impacts you would like to highlight? Please provide detail:

4. **Thinking again about the different things young people might use their phone for in school, if restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the negative impacts might be?**

Agree – don't agree – neither agree nor disagree - don't know – prefer not to say

- Use of school staff time to implement and enforce restrictions, at the expense of other important duties.
- Difficulties accessing school-based services on personal mobile phones, such as ordering school meals.
- Reduced ability of young people to use phones during the school day to keep in touch with friends and family.
- Impact on young people's ability to plan for their time outside school, such as checking bus routes.

If you think there are other drawbacks or concerns which have not been noted above, please add them using the box below:

5. **If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, there would be exceptions to allow certain children and young people to use their phones if they have an important need to do so. This would mean those children and young people would have access to their phones only for the purpose of using them for their specific need.**

   To what extent do you agree with the following potential exceptions to restrictions on mobile phones in schools?

Agree – don't agree – neither agree nor disagree - don't know – prefer not to say

- Exceptions for children and young people who have medical conditions, like diabetes, that require monitoring using mobile phones.
- Exceptions for children and young people who are young carers and who require ongoing contact with family members.
- Exceptions for children and young people with additional support needs if access to their mobile phone is used as part of a planned approach to managing their learning needs.
- Exceptions for children and young people with disabilities who use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment, including access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) etc.

If you think there are other circumstances where an exemption may be appropriate, and which have not been noted above, please add them using the box below.

6. **Legislation on restricting the use of mobile phones in schools will reduce parents' direct contact with their children during the school day. Schools which have introduced restrictions on mobile phones currently ask parents to contact the school office if they require to communicate with their child.**

   Is there anything about this approach that you would like to comment on?

Yes – no – don't know

Please outline the reasons for your response:

7. **Do you agree that national restrictions on the use of mobile phones should apply to independent and grant-aided schools in addition to schools run by education authorities?**

Independent schools[1] Yes/No
Grant-Aided Schools[2] Yes/No

8. **Should restrictions on mobile phones also apply to wearable digital devices, for example smartwatches which have notifications enabled?**

Yes – No – don't know – prefer not to say

9. **Which other issues you would like us to be aware of?**

[1] "independent school" means a school at which full-time education is provided for pupils of school age. They are not education authority run schools or grant-aided schools. Independent schools are sometimes referred to as private schools.
[2] In Scotland there are 7 grant-aided schools, 6 are grant-aided special schools and 1 is a grant-aided mainstream school. Grant-aided schools receive grant funding from the Scottish Government to support the delivery of education but are independent of education authorities.

10. Are you a: select all that apply

- A child or young person currently in primary school
- A child or young person currently in secondary school
- A child or young person currently in a special school
- A child or young person currently in another type of school
- A teacher or member of school staff in a primary school
- A teacher or member of school staff in a secondary school
- A teacher or member of school staff in a special school
- A teacher or member of school staff in another type of school
- Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in primary school
- Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in secondary school
- Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in a special school
- Parent or carer of a child or young person currently in another type of school
- A member of a voluntary sector organisation [enter organisation name here] _____
- Membership representative body [enter organisation name here] _____
- Other [please enter] _____

Responding to this consultation
Please respond to this consultation using the Scottish Government's consultation hub, Citizen Space. Access and respond to this consultation online at Restricting mobile phones in Scotland's schools.

You can save and return to your responses while the consultation is still open. Please ensure that consultation responses are submitted before the closing date.

If you are unable to respond using our consultation hub, please complete and send the Respondent Information Form to:

Mobile Phones in Schools
Health and Wellbeing Unit
Scottish Government
Area 2B North
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ

Handling your response
If you respond using the consultation hub, you will be directed to the About You page before submitting your response. Please indicate how you wish your response to be handled and, in particular, whether you are content for your response to published. If you ask for your response not to be published, we will regard it as confidential, and we will treat it accordingly.

All respondents should be aware that the Scottish Government is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.

If you are unable to respond via Citizen Space, please complete and return the Respondent Information Form provided alongside this document.

To find out how we handle your personal data you can view the privacy policy here: Privacy - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Next steps in the process
Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public, and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made available to the public at Citizen Space. If you use the consultation hub to respond, you will receive a copy of your response via email.

Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered along with any other available evidence to help us. Responses will be published where we have been given permission to do so. An analysis report will also be made available.

Comments and complaints
If you have any comments about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them to the contact address above or email above.

Scottish Government consultation process
Consultation is an essential part of the policymaking process. It gives us the opportunity to consider your opinion and expertise on a proposed area of work.

You can find all our consultations online: Citizen Space. Each consultation details the issues under consideration, as well as a way for you to give us your views, either online, by email or by post.

Responses will be analysed and used as part of the decision-making process, along with a range of other available information and evidence. We will publish a report of this analysis for every consultation. Depending on the nature of the consultation exercise the responses received may:

- indicate the need for policy development or review
- inform the development of a particular policy
- help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals
- be used to finalise legislation before it is implemented

While details of particular circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body.

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