Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) for Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools

August 2026

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Disclaimer

This document is a point in time assessment of the likely effects of the above-named proposal on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people. This impact assessment should be read in conjunction with other impact assessments prepared for this proposal.

Scottish Government acknowledge the importance of monitoring and evaluating the impact of strategic decisions and legislation on children's rights and wellbeing. Any information gathered during implementation of the legislation or strategic decision to which the impact assessment relates, will be used to inform future determinations of impact. Any new strategic decision or new legislation (including amending legislation) would be subject to a new CRWIA in line with the legislative requirements.

Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment Template

1. Brief Summary

The policy aim is to further encourage and support education authorities and schools to establish or review mobile phone policies in schools. The intended outcome is to improve pupil's engagement with learning and consequently their educational and wellbeing outcomes by minimising the impact of mobile phone use during the school day, within lessons and within the school estate. The guidance was established in 2024 in direct response to the findings of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023 which confirmed an emerging pattern of serious disruptive behaviour associated with inappropriate mobile phone use in schools. The refreshed guidance document continues to address these concerns, but seeks to further encourage education authorities and schools in taking action to implement restrictions on personal mobile phones during the school day and within the school estate.

Type of proposal

Update to decision of a strategic nature relating to the rights and wellbeing of children

Name the proposal, and describe its overall aims and intended purpose.

The aim of the guidance on mobile phones in Scotland's schools is to support education authorities and schools to establish or review mobile phone policies in schools. Previous policy guidance reflects the earlier findings of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research, relating to the inappropriate use of mobile phones in schools. This guidance was revised in 2024 to take account of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023 which confirmed an emerging pattern of serious disruptive behaviour associated with inappropriate mobile phone use in schools. At that time the guidance was revised to include the policy considerations necessary for education authorities and schools in introducing restrictions or limitations on mobile phones in the school estate during the school day. More recently concerns have remained in relation to access to personal mobile phones in schools and the guidance has been refreshed to further encourage limitations on access to personal mobile phones in schools during the school day, in order to maximise the benefits that pupils are able to achieve from learning and to reduce negative impact to wellbeing where possible.

Start date of proposal's development: May 2026

Start date of CRWIA process: May 2026

2. With reference given to the requirements of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, which aspects of the proposal are relevant to children's rights?

The refreshed guidance on mobile phones in Scotland's schools further encourages education authorities and schools to introduce or refresh their mobile phone policies. The refreshed guidance therefore will have a direct effect on pupils who attend school and who are generally between the ages of 5 and 18. There is positive

impact identified in relation to best interests of the child (article 3), respecting the views of the child (article 12), and the right to education (article 24).

Whilst indirect negative effects may have been identified in relation to pupils with additional support needs, young carers and those who require to take and monitor medication, potential negative impacts have been mitigated as part of the policy approach. Consequently, a positive impact in relation to children with a disability (article 23) is also identified. These mitigations were introduced as a result of anecdotal and research evidence, the experiences of those who have implemented policies in schools and the views of stakeholders.

3. Please provide a summary of the evidence gathered which will be used to inform your decision-making and the content of the proposal.

Evidence From:

- existing research/reports/policy expertise
- consultation/feedback from stakeholders
- consultation/feedback directly from children and young people

There is a range of academic research available including new evidence published since the 2024 guidance[i] on the impact of mobile phones in schools. This includes evidence from PISA 2022 that nearly a third of students in Scotland reported being distracted using digital devices in every or most maths lessons, and over a quarter reported being distracted by others' digital device use[ii]. This was found to have an impact on students' educational attainment; on average across OECD countries, students who reported that they become distracted in every or most mathematics lessons scored lower in mathematics than students who reported that this never or almost never happens. However, the purpose of use was important. PISA found a positive relationship between score for mathematics and spending up to one hour per day on digital devices for learning activities in school, whereas the relationship became negative when students spend more than one hour per day on digital devices for learning in school. These findings suggest that moderate use of digital devices is not intrinsically harmful but it is the overuse and/or misuse of digital devices that is negatively associated with attainment.

There is limited research evidence available in relation to the views of children and young people on banning mobile phones in schools. There is one study identified which sets out the combined views of parents and carers and children and young people. The study is of small scale. PISA 2022 reported that in Scotland 20.8% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that students should not be allowed to bring mobile phones to class.

There is significant anecdotal evidence of the views of a range of interested individuals on the benefits or negative impacts of mobile phones in schools and application of limitations[iii].

In preparation for the 2024 guidance. officials benefitted from understanding the application of policies which are in practice in Scottish schools via direct engagement with those schools. This included understanding pupils' views as part of development of those policies.

The development of the 2024 national guidance was informed by the views of a range of organisations as part of the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS). This Group was also responsible for the oversight of the research which established the issue. SAGRABIS was engaged on the proposed amendments to the refreshed guidance in May and June 2026.

4. Further to the evidence described at '3' have you identified any 'gaps' in evidence which may prevent determination of impact? If yes, please provide an explanation of how they will be addressed.

The evidence base is currently limited in relation to the specific views of children and young people's experiences of limitations of mobile phones in schools in comparison to the evidence available on others experiences. It is reported that young people who took part in a consultation on the policy in Edinburgh City Council had mixed views[iv]. Just over half (53%) stated a preference for part restrictions with mobile phones allowed at lunch and breaktimes but not in class, and just 3% in favour of restrictions for the whole school day.

The evidence of pupils views will be further strengthened as a result of the experience in the policy, through additional research and evaluation evidence and as a result of specific planned engagement with young people. Impact is able to be determined via the anecdotal evidence provided through those with experience in schools and interested organisations who raised specific matters relating to children and young people's experiences.

5. Analysis of Evidence

The guidance has been considered through the lens of children's, parents and carers' and employees' rights. There was engagement with the Scottish Advisory Group for Relationships and Behaviour in Schools and with some schools who have implemented policies which limit access to mobile phones during the school day, in the school estate in preparation for the 2024 guidance. The advice which was developed following this engagement remains as part of this refresh. This has been further supplemented by research evidence, including new research published since 2024 highlighted below, which confirmed the negative and positive impact of mobile phone use in schools in relation to attainment, distraction and structured learning opportunities. These have identified that there are clear benefits arising from less disruption to pupils' learning during the school day and some more limited benefits in relation to attainment and achievement.

Anecdotal evidence from those who have experience of developing and implementing policies confirmed that where policies were established in consultation

with the whole school community, including pupils, these have been successfully implemented and have benefitted the whole-school community.

There is published anecdotal evidence from stakeholders in relation to particular issues affecting children and young people, including those with disabilities, additional support needs, pupils who require to monitor medical conditions and young carers. Together, these evidence bases and engagement supported the development of the matters which were included as exceptions to the policy position. This included in relation to young carers, pupils with additional support needs and disabilities, and that young people with medical conditions may require to monitor them using mobile phones. The issue of anxiety as a result of not being able to freely access mobile phone was raised also.

6. What changes (if any) have been made to the proposal as a result of this assessment?

As a result of the assessment of evidence, the refreshed guidance continues to recognise the benefits to learning that mobile phones can bring when used as part of a staff led, organised learning activity. The guidance also recognises the evidence established as part of PISA 2022 and the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023, which indicates that inappropriate use of mobile phones is distracting to the learning of pupils individually and collectively. This is an emergent trend within serious challenging behaviour in 2023. Therefore, the guidance offers advice to education authorities and schools on the limitation of access to mobile phones, during the school day and within the school estate.

As a result of the feedback in relation to particular groups of young people who may be negatively impacted by not being able to access their phones in schools, the guidance recognises the need to consider individual circumstances of some pupils. Therefore the guidance which informs local policy decisions includes the need to consider a range of individual circumstances linked to the representations made. These are already evident in practice within existing schools policies which are in place in some schools in Scotland.

As a result the refreshed guidance document continues to take an approach which seeks to gain the benefits of mobile phone use where appropriate, but also limits the effects of negative or inappropriate use in schools. The guidance is clear that the rights of pupils, parents and carers and school staff all require to be recognised and respected.

Conclusion

7. As a result of the evidence gathered and analysed against all UNCRC requirements, what is the potential overall impact of this proposal on children's rights?

Positive

8. If you have identified a positive impact on children's rights, please describe below how the proposal will protect, respect, and fulfil children's rights in Scotland.

The intended effect of the guidance is to enhance pupil's experience of education, aligned to their right to education (article 28) and goals of education (article 29) . It is established via evidence, that limiting access to mobile phones in schools has a positive impact on pupil's learning outcomes, as a result of limitation of distractions in particular. The guidance is also likely to support reduced experiences of bullying in school, as a result of restrictions on mobile phones.

Further, the guidance contains specific protections for groups of children and young people in particular circumstances, including young carers, pupils with disabilities, additional support needs and mental health and wellbeing needs, who may require access to their phone during the school day for specific purposes. It is for these young people in these circumstances that the guidance provides a positive impact. The guidance is respectful of children's rights and encourages that their views are sought as part of local policy development. The change to the guidance was made as result of evidence that found that these groups couldn't be treated in the same way and therefore turned the potentially negative impact of applying the same guidance to all children and young people into a positive impact by adding these special protection into the guidance. This is explored further in question 9.

Therefore, positive impact is assessed in relation to the best interests of the child (article 3), implementation of the convention (article 4), respect for the views of the child (article 12), for children with a disability (article 23), right to education (article 28), goals of education (article 29). Otherwise, the guidance is considered to have a neutral effect.

9. If a negative impact has been identified please describe below. Is there a risk this could potentially amount to an incompatibility?

Whilst in initial assessment there was potentially a risk identified in relation to groups of children and young people in particular circumstances, including young carers, pupils with disabilities, additional support needs and mental health and wellbeing needs, who may require access to their phone during the school day for specific purposes, this was mitigated during the development of the guidance through the introduction of exceptions for specific circumstances. Consequently, there are no negative impacts established and therefore it is not considered at risk of incompatibility.

Mitigation Record

What options have been considered to modify the proposal in order to mitigate negative impact or potential incompatibility issues?

Whilst in initial assessment there was potentially a risk identified in relation to groups of children and young people in particular circumstances, including young carers,

pupils with disabilities, additional support needs and mental health and wellbeing needs, who may require access to their phone during the school day for specific purposes, this was mitigated during the development of the guidance through the introduction of exceptions for specific circumstances.

The potential issue arose in relation to article 23 particularly.

Action Taken

This was mitigated during the development of the 2024 guidance through the introduction of exceptions for specific circumstances

Date action to be taken or was taken

May 2024 and maintained in the refreshed guidance.

10. As a result of the evidence gathered and analysed against all wellbeing indicators, will the proposal contribute to the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland?

Safe: Yes

Healthy: Yes

Achieving: Yes

Nurtured: Yes

Active: Not Applicable

Respected: Yes

Responsible: Yes

Included: Not Applicable

If yes, please provide and explanation below:

There is some evidence to suggest that reduced use of mobile phones is advantageous to children and young people's wellbeing, both in terms of reduced screen time, a reduction in opportunity to access inappropriate content and reduced experience of bullying behaviours. The approach to restrictions on mobile phone is being taken within a public health approach, therefore positive impact to health is anticipated. This particularly applies to the wellbeing indicators, Safe, Healthy Achieving, Nurtured, Respected and Responsible.

11. How will you communicate to children and young people the impact that the proposal will have on their rights?

The effect on children and young people's rights will arise as a result of local policies and procedures on mobile phone use in schools. The guidance confirms the need to

engage the whole-school community in the preparation of these polices and procedures, prior to their introduction.

Post Assessment Review and sign-off

12. Planning for the review of impact on children's rights and wellbeing.

As part of the decision-making process, plans for reviewing the impact on children's rights and wellbeing need to be developed.

- How will the impact of the proposal on children's rights and wellbeing be monitored?
- When will you review and update the CRWIA if required?

It was originally expected that the policy would be reviewed as part of the next iteration of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools research, being undertaken in 2026 for publication in 2027. It was also anticipated that the CRWIA would be updated following the considerations of the findings of that research and in alignment with any further actions determined, by 2027 at latest. However, following further consideration it has been agreed that further action will be taken in relation to the matter of mobile phones in schools. This includes that the guidance which is the subject of this CRWIA will be refreshed in order to further encourage education authorities and schools to consider restrictions on pupils' use of personal mobile phones during the school day within the school estate. It is also expected that the Scottish Government will bring forward legislation on this topic in due course.

13. Sign off

Policy Lead Signature & Date of Sign Off: Laura Meikle 19 May 2026

Deputy Director Signature & Date of Sign Off: Orlando Mason 10 August 2026

Date CRWIA team first contacted: 10 August 2026

Annex A

[i] What are parents' and children's co-constructed views on mobile phone use and policies in school? - Rose - 2022 - Children & Society - Wiley Online Library
Banning mobile phones in schools: evidence from regional-level policies in Spain | Emerald Insight Ill Communication: Technology, distraction & student performance - ScienceDirect
Secondary education teachers' perceptions of mobile phone and tablet use in classrooms: benefits, constraints and concerns | Request PDF (researchgate.net)
The effects of mobile phone use on academic performance: A meta-analysis - ScienceDirect
The influence of technology on academic distraction: A review (wiley.com)
Technology in education: GEM Report 2023 | Global Education Monitoring Report (unesco.org)
Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
To ban or not to ban – domestic and international experiences of restricting mobile phone ban use in schools. - Record details - EBSCO Discovery Service
restriction-or-resilience_report_june_2025_abc.pdf.pdf DCU Anti-Bullying Centre
What is the evidence for school smartphone bans? | The BMJ
School phone policies and their association with mental wellbeing, phone use, and social media use (SMART Schools): a cross-sectional observational study - The Lancet Regional Health – Europe
Smartphone use and mental health: going beyond school restriction policies - PMC
The Impact of Cellphone Bans in Schools on Student Outcomes: Evidence from Florida | NBER
School Cell Phone Bans: Listen to Researchers and Stakeholders | Shanker Institute
Factsheet Monitoring research National agreement mobile phones and other devices | Report | Rijksoverheid.nl
Student perspectives on banning mobile phones in South Australian secondary schools: A large-scale qualitative analysis - ScienceDirect
"Phones off while school's on": Evaluating problematic phone use and the social, wellbeing, and academic effects of banning phones in schools. - EBSCO
Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review
Policy Exchange - Disconnect The Case for a Smartphone Ban in Schools
Full article: Complexities of Managing a Mobile Phone Ban in the Digitalized Schools' Classroom
Banning Mobile Phones from Classrooms--An Opportunity to Advance Understandings of Technology Addiction, Distraction and Cyberbullying - EBSCO

[ii] How students view themselves and their schools - Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2022): Scotland's results - highlights - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) (Table 5.6). This study uses the terminology of student rather than pupil. This is used in the CRWIA to be consistent with the research.

[iii] For example, ` Young carers advocate for access to mobile phones at school | The Herald (heraldscotland.com); Should there be a mobile phone ban in school classrooms? - BBC News [iv] Mobile phones in schools consultation shows broad support for restrictions during the school day – The City of Edinburgh Council

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