

# **Smartphones in Schools - A Snapshot Survey of Children and Young People in Wales**

**Children's Commissioner for Wales**

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**Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru**  
Children's  
Commissioner  
for Wales



## **Introduction**

During October 2024 we asked children and young people for their thoughts about the use of smartphones in school.

The survey was part of an ongoing series of topical questions we ask children and young people monthly to hear their views on a variety of issues, called Monthly Matters. It was shared directly with all schools signed up to our children's rights schemes for primary and secondary schools, as well as community groups.

As part of the survey pack, children and young people were shown a video introducing the topic, and they were asked to consider some questions, like if they have a smartphone, do they take it to school with them, and whether they think schools should have more rules about using smartphones. We suggested in our session outline that, following this video, children and young people should have a few minutes to discuss their views with each other before answering the survey. Schools and groups had two options for completing the survey; children and young people could either do it independently, or a teacher or group leader could complete the survey on behalf of the group by answering a different set of questions to give an overview of the discussion.

1,127 children and young people answered the survey individually. A further 2,170 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. A broad range of ages took part, from children under the age of 6 up to 18-year-olds. We received responses from 18 local authority areas.

Questions were developed by the Commissioner's experienced staff team based on themes that had emerged from previous engagement exercises with children, young people, and professionals.

## **Questions for children and young people**

### **Primary aged answers**

**Do you have a smartphone? (By smartphone, we mean a phone that you can use to go on the internet and use apps)**

Yes (261) - 62%

No (159) - 38%

**Do you take your smartphone to school?**

No (198) - 77%

Yes (59) - 23%

**Why do you take your smartphone to school? You can pick as many answers as you want.**

To message my family (42) - 68%

To help me feel safe (38) - 61%

Another reason (18) - 29%

For learning (6) - 10%

Because my friends do (5) - 8%

**Why else do you take your smartphone to school?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- For safety when walking home
- Life 360 (parents to see where I am)

**Does your school have rules about smartphones?**

Yes (288) - 68%

I don't know (109) - 26%

No (24) - 6%

## **What are the rules?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Phone must be put it in a special drawer in class / kept by the teacher
- Do not bring the phone to school / not allowed phones in school
- Allowed to have them but not allowed to use them during school time/ on the school grounds

## **Do you think your school needs more rules on smartphones?**

No (205) - 49%

I don't know (122) - 29%

Yes (94) - 22%

## **What do you think the rules should be?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Shouldn't have phones in the school
- You should only be allowed to use your phone during break times / on the yard

## **Do you want there to be rules about phones when you go to secondary school?**

No (171) - 41%

I'm not sure (126) - 30%

Yes (124) - 30%

## **Does your school have rules about smartphones?**

Yes (288) - 68%

I don't know (109) - 26%

No (24) - 6%

## **Secondary aged answers**

**Do you have a smartphone? By smartphone, we mean a phone that you can use to go on the internet and use apps**

Yes (680) - 97%

No (21) - 3%

**Do you take your smartphone to school?**

Yes (633) - 94%

No (43) - 6%

**How often do you use your smartphone when you're in school?**

Sometimes (365) - 57%

Often (141) - 22%

Never (75) - 12%

All the time (56) - 9%

**What do you mainly use your smartphone for at school?**

Messaging/calling family (382) - 68%

Messaging friends (260) - 46%

Schoolwork/learning (254) - 45%

Social media (217) - 39%

Playing games (215) - 38%

Other (61) - 11%

**What else do you use it for?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Check the school timetable and other school apps
- Check the time
- Listen to music

## **Are you allowed to use smartphones in class?**

No (636) - 91%

Yes (62) - 9%

## **What can you use it for? Choose all that apply**

Interactive learning (e.g quizzes, research, QR codes etc) (56) - 90%

To support my learning (apps, translation) (33) - 53%

Family needs (12) - 19%

Other (8) - 13%

Health needs (5) - 8%

## **Do you ever use your smartphone in class? Choose all that apply**

Yes - for learning (299) - 48%

No (235) - 38%

Yes - for other things (188) - 30%

## **Do you think smartphones should be allowed in classrooms?**

Yes (433) - 62%

No (265) - 38%

## **Young people were then asked an additional question:**

### **Please tell us why**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Distracts us from our work
- Helps us with our work/learning
- In case of an emergency

## **Do you find smartphones distracting during class?**

No (433) - 62%

Yes - a little bit (214) - 31%

Yes - very (50) - 7%

## **Why do you find them distracting?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Noise / loud
- Notifications / Messages
- People using them during class/ distracting others / not listening during the lesson

## **Would you prefer more rules about smartphone use in school?**

No (347) - 51%

I'm not sure (249) - 36%

Yes (90) - 15%

## **What's the one thing you'd change about smartphones in your school?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Use phone during break and lunchtime
- Unrestricted access
- Use them for learning

## **Questions for Teachers**

Where teachers responded on behalf of a group, their answers reflected the answers given by children directly. Teachers were also able to give their own perspective and experiences in the following questions:

**Please summarise your group's discussion - how did they feel about smartphones in school? Did they want more rules? Are there rules in place already? How do they feel about them?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Phones are good for safety / communicate with parents / emergencies / walking to and from school
- Current rules in school are fair / enough rules already
- Should be banned – less distracted, more focused
- Should be used for education purposes
- Good idea to have them in school – show we trust young people

**Are there rules already in your school on phone use?**

Yes (52) - 96%

No (2) - 4%

**What are the rules?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- No phones in school
- Allowed on site but must be switched off / kept in bags
- Any phones that are brought in are kept by a teacher / kept in the office until the end of day



**To what extent does smartphone use affect you being able to teach/ work with a group?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- Not a problem / not relevant – don't allow phones in class
- Phones are a distraction to teaching
- Constant source of confrontation / pupils constantly looking at their phones / ignoring the rules

**Would you like the rules to change in your school/setting? What would you change?**

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- No – current rules work well
- Better enforcement of current rules / tougher punishments
- Ban phones from school

## **Conclusion**

- 94% of secondary school children said they take their phone to school
- 68% of secondary school children said they used their phone in school to message or call family. Other practical uses included checking the school timetable and checking the time
- 91% of secondary school children said they aren't allowed to use a phone in class
- But 30% of secondary school children said they have used their phone in class for things other than learning
- Most children and young people are happy with their current school rules
- 96% of teachers said there are already rules in school about phones – these rules included no phones in school, phones being allowed on site but kept in bags, and confiscating devices
- Whilst some teachers said that phones don't cause significant issues, some said phones were a constant source of frustration, and a distraction to teaching

## **What are we doing with it?**

We've shared these views with the Welsh Government and the Petitions Committee who are holding an inquiry into the petition on banning smartphones in schools.