

Should mobile phones be banned in schools?

What they said...

'I am seeing the most violent, vulgar, horrible comments you can imagine... I have kids being photographed in change rooms during sport... Lots of kids are being told to kill themselves and sent links to suicide websites'

Susan McLean, adviser to the Federal Government's Cyber Safety Working Group

'If school students want to investigate, collect data, receive personalised and immediate feedback, record media, create, compose, or communicate with peers, in and beyond the classroom, then using mobile apps is ideal'

Matthew Kearney, associate professor, Teacher Education Program, University of Technology Sydney

The issue at a glance

On December 13, 2018, the New South Wales government announced that mobile phones will be banned from public primary schools across the state from the start of the 2019 school year. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/dec/13/mobile-phones-to-be-banned-in-nsw-public-primary-schools>

The New South Wales Department of Education will provide guidelines to schools about exactly how the ban will work; however, it is believed students will not be able to have access to mobile phones during the day.

On December 10, 2018, the federal Education Minister, Dan Tehan, delivered a speech at the Australian National University's conference on preparing young people for education beyond Year 12, in which he flagged the possibility of mobile phones being banned from Australian classrooms in the name of improving student performance.

<https://www.news.com.au/national/western-australia/schools-urged-to-ban-phones-by-federal-education-minister-dan-tehan/news-story/f996079ac6b126634650dd71474834bc>

In September, 2018, a new law came into effect in France outlawing mobile phone use by students up to the age of 15. The legislation also bans tablets and smart watches.

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/france-school-mobile-phone-ban-takes-effect-20180906-p5023k.html>

The New South Wales' decision has sparked extensive debate within that state, with academics, school principals, teachers and parents all taking up positions on both sides of the question. The issue is a vigorously contested one across Australia and overseas.

Background

The use of mobile phones in schools

The use of mobile phones in school settings or environments is contentious. Supporting parents believe that cell phones address their safety concerns by enabling them to communicate with their children. Teachers and administrators opposed to mobile phone usage in schools believe that they cause disruption, and may be used for malicious purposes such as cheating on tests or cyber bullying, including taking inappropriate photographs. Students may become addicted to playing games and messaging others on their mobile devices, causing them to pay less attention in class and miss important lessons.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_phone_use_in_schools

Countries where mobile phones are banned in schools

Britain

In the United Kingdom, no schools banned mobile phones in 2001. However, by 2007, 50 percent of the schools had banned these devices, and by 2012, this number had increased to 98 percent. According to CNN Money, students' academic skills improved when policies were implemented to ban cell phone use in schools. Schools banning students from carrying phones helped students score higher on exams and reduced the students' temptations to use cell phones for recreational or anti-social purposes.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_phone_use_in_schools

Canada

In February, 2017, a Toronto middle school announced the banning of mobile phone use by its students. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/toronto-school-bans-cellphones-from-classrooms-1.3295140>

In May 2017, it was announced that mobile phones would be banned in Central Middle School, on Vancouver Island. <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/cellphone-ban-at-victoria-middle-school-riles-parents>

In August, 2018, the premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, announced that his government intends to ban the use of mobile phones in schools across the province.

<https://bccatholic.ca/content/classroom-cellphone-ban-gets-mixed-reaction>

France

In September, 2018, a new law came into effect outlawing mobile phone use by students up to the age of 15. The legislation, which follows a campaign promise by French President Emmanuel Macron, also banishes tablets and smart watches.

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/france-school-mobile-phone-ban-takes-effect-20180906-p5023k.html>

Israel

In September, 2016, the Israeli Ministry of Education banned the use of smart phones in classrooms for schoolwork and limited the use of technology in schools.

The Israeli Ministry of Education has issued guidelines limiting WiFi radiation in schools. Wireless networks are banned in preschool and kindergartens.

First and second grade use of the Internet is limited to a maximum of three hour per week.

The third grade maximum is eight hours a week. <http://weeksmd.com/2017/01/israel-banning-smartphones-schools/>

Internet information

On December 13, 2018, the New South Wales government issued a media release titled 'NSW takes action on mobile devices in schools'

The release details the government's decision to ban mobile phones from public primary schools in New South Wales from the start of the 2019 school year.

The full text of the release can be accessed at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/media-releases/nsw-takes-action-on-mobile-devices-in-schools#>

On December 13, 2018, news.com.au published a news report titled 'Mobiles banned from NSW primary schools from next year'

The report includes the view of psychologist, Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, who led the review, the findings of which resulted in the ban.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/mobiles-banned-from-nsw-primary-schools-from-next-year/news-story/3e9f7ae1e6f70eaaa2496852c03611b5>

In December, 2018, the New South Wales government released 'Review into the non-educational use of mobile devices in NSW schools'. The independent review was led by Dr Carr-Gregg is a child and adolescent psychologist specialising in adolescent mental health and parenting adolescents. The review made five recommendations, one of which was that mobile phones be banned in public primary schools in New South Wales beginning from 2019.

The full text of this review, which includes a full discussing of views contrary to those which determined its recommendations, can be accessed at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/media/documents/mobile-phone-review.pdf>

On September 17, 2018, The Sydney Morning Herald published an analysis titled 'Educators push back against school smartphone ban' which presents the view of a number of education experts opposed to the banning of mobile phones in schools.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/education/educators-push-back-against-school-smartphone-ban-20180917-p50481.html>

On September 10, 2018, news.com.au published a report titled 'Education experts call for mobile phone ban for primary schools following French move'

The report details the concerns of an number of education experts in Australia regarding the impact of mobile phones on schoolchildren.

The full report can be accessed at <https://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/mobile-phones/education-experts-call-for-mobile-phone-ban-for-primary-schools-following-french-move/news-story/c017703246d38948eb7f4da87f94b795>

On September 7, 2018, The Australian Financial Review published a report titled 'Sexting and cyber bullying behind review of mobile phone use in school'

The report presents a range of responses to the decision of the New South Wales government to conduct a review into the impact of mobile phone use among schoolchildren with a view to developing a policy on the issue.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/sexting-and-cyber-bullying-behind-review-of-mobile-phone-use-in-school-20180907-h152pk>

On August 14, 2018, the Australian Education Union (AEU) published an article titled 'Phones in class: attraction and distraction' which presented arguments for and against the use of mobile phones in classrooms.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/news/phones-class-attraction-and-distraction>

On July 3, 2018, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment titled 'School phone ban vital for students, argue education experts'

The report gives the views of Dr Helen Wright, an international education adviser and former head of Ascham School and Dr Danielle Einstein, a clinical psychologist specialising in the treatment and prevention of anxiety, depression and OCD. Both authors favour a ban on mobile phones in schools.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/education/school-phone-ban-is-vital-say-education-experts-20180703-h1268h.html>

On July 1, 2018, The Illawarra Mercury published a news report titled 'Illawarra teacher says banning phones will not stop school bullying' which features the views of Wheel founder Michael de Main, who claims that the banning of mobile phones will not of itself address the problem of bullying within schools.

The full text can be accessed at

<https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/5498214/illawarra-teacher-says-banning-phones-will-not-stop-school-bullying/>

On June 28, 2018, The Conversation published a compendium of views titled 'We asked five experts: should mobile phones be banned in schools?'

The article gives the opinions of five educational experts with differing positions on whether mobile phones should be banned in schools.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/we-asked-five-experts-should-mobile-phones-be-banned-in-schools-98708>

On June 21, 2018, Ten Daily published a comment titled 'The NSW government's announcement of a review into smartphone use in schools has sparked debate' featuring the views of psychologist Jocelyn Brewer, from the University of Sydney's Cyber Psychology Research Group, who opposes banning mobile phones in schools as a means of tackling bullying.

The full text can be accessed at <https://tendaily.com.au/news/tech/a180621orp/banning-smartphones-not-the-answer-to-tackling-cyber-bullying-in-schools-20180621>

On April 17, 2018, Teacher published an analysis by Dominique Russell titled 'Mobile phones in the classroom – what does the research say?' which examined a number of research findings on the educational effects of mobile phone use, finding largely in its favour.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/mobile-phones-in-the-classroom-what-does-the-research-say>

On March 11, 2018, news.com.au published a comment by Dr Tom Nehmy, a clinical psychologist and founder of the Healthy Minds Program, titled 'Smart phones have robbed kids of their childhood'

The comment outlines a number of Nehmy's concerns regarding the negative effects of mobile phones on children. The full text can be accessed at

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/teens/smart-phones-have-robbed-kids-of-their-childhood/news-story/7cbb23fd70568afadeebdbc500d83aa2>

On February 6, 2018, The Herald Sun's Kids' News published a report titled 'Call to ban smartphones in schools to prevent cyber bullying and improve students' focus on learning' The report details the call by then federal Education Minister, Senator Simon Birmingham, to ban the use of mobile phones in schools. The report gives the views of a number of academics who support the proposal.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/kids-news/call-to-ban-smartphones-in-schools-to-prevent-cyberbullying-and-improve-students-focus-on-learning/news-story/1d546bae382ada599be0cd2186497ed>

On February 4, 2018, The Courier Mail published an article titled 'Premier rejects school smartphone ban despite online evils' which details the decision of the Queensland

government not to ban mobile phone in schools; however, to call on other state and territory governments to develop a national policy against bullying in schools.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/premier-rejects-school-smartphone-ban-despite-online-evils/news-story/843a861a9782eb511bee32eca06a685e>

On April 13, 2017 Huffington Post published a comment by Dr Richard Freed, a psychologist, author, and speaker on parenting in the age of digital technology, titled 'Why Phones Don't Belong in School'

The comment argues the case against mobile phones in schools drawing on a wide range of other articles and research findings to support its position.

The full text can be accessed at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-freed/why-phones-dont-belong-in-school_b_9666730.html

On May 28, 2015, The Conversation published a comment by Joanna Rodriguez, Senior tutor, University of Surrey and Nadine Page, Teaching Fellow (Integrated Care), University of Surrey, titled 'Your smartphone could be good for your mental health'

The comment details ways in which mobile phones can assist in the maintenance of mental health.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/your-smartphone-could-be-good-for-your-mental-health-41804>

On April 28, 2015, Psychiatry Adviser published a report titled 'Bullied Students More Likely to Be Depressed, Bring Weapons' which detailed the results of a number of recent studies exploring the effects of bullying, including cyber bullying, on schoolchildren.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/childadolescent-psychiatry/bullied-students-more-likely-to-be-depressed-bring-weapons/article/411362/>

Arguments in favour of mobile phones being banned from primary schools

1. Mobile phones are a distraction in the classroom

Opponents of students being able to access their mobile phones while at school argue that these devices have repeatedly been shown to be a major distraction in the classroom.

Incoming University of New South Wales education professor, Pasi Sahlberg, stated in January, 2018, 'I have heard hundreds of stories from teachers here and abroad how having your smartphone in your pocket and sensing the incoming messages vibrating (distracts) students' attention from learning.' <https://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/mobile-phones/education-experts-call-for-mobile-phone-ban-for-primary-schools-following-french-move/news-story/c017703246d38948eb7f4da87f94b795>

A study from youth advisory group Year13 found 89 per cent of Australian students had used their mobile phones in the classroom regardless of their school's policy.

<https://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/mobile-phones/education-experts-call-for-mobile-phone-ban-for-primary-schools-following-french-move/news-story/c017703246d38948eb7f4da87f94b795>

United States studies have similarly indicated that mobile phones are a major distraction for students. A 2012 study found that 53 percent of undergraduate students reported text messaging during class. A 2014 study examined 99 college students during a 20-minute lecture, which was part of the experiment, and the average number of texts sent and received

among each student was 26.79 (14.10 sent, 12.69 received).

<https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2921&context=theses>

A 2013 Ohio University study found college students in a simulated classroom who did not use their phones 'wrote down 62 percent more information in their notes, took more detailed notes, were able to recall more detailed information from the lecture, and scored a full letter grade and a half higher on a multiple choice test than those students who were actively using their mobile phones'. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-freed/why-phones-dont-belong-in-school_b_9666730.html

A 2015 London School of Economics study similarly found that schools which ban the use of phones experienced a substantial improvement in student test scores, with the researchers concluding that phones 'can have a negative impact on productivity through distraction.' Researchers found that phones hurt vulnerable students the most. Study co-author Dr. Richard Murphy, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Texas, reports: 'Allowing phones into schools would be the most damaging to low-achieving and low-income students, exacerbating any existing learning inequalities.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-freed/why-phones-dont-belong-in-school_b_9666730.html

Kevin Donnelly, a senior research fellow at the Australian Catholic University, has argued, 'Successful classrooms are those where teachers are in control and where there no distractions as students don't have the luxury of surfing the net, figuring out what to do on the weekend or updating their social networking sites.'

Research investigating how students best learn, especially those in primary school, proves that the most effective way to learn is to hardwire the computer sitting on your shoulders — otherwise known as the brain.

Instead of relying on calculators and computers, students need to memorise times tables, do mental arithmetic, recite poems and rhymes, and learn facts and figures until they can be recalled automatically.' <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/kids-news/call-to-ban-smartphones-in-schools-to-prevent-cyberbullying-and-improve-students-focus-on-learning/news-story/1d546bae382ada599be0cd2186497ed>

2. Mobile phones promote cyber bullying

Opponents of the use of mobile phones by students at school argue that they lead to vastly increased instances of cyber bullying which has consequences for young people's mental health, including increasing the likelihood of their developing depression and contemplating suicide.

The recent suicide of a 14-year-old schoolgirl in Queensland after cyber-bullying has led to extensive discussion of how best to address the problem of cyber bullying within that state. Commenting on the situation in Queensland, Susan McLean, an Australian expert in the area of cyber safety and young people, who advises the Federal Government as a member of its Cyber Safety Working Group, has stated, 'I am seeing the most violent, vulgar, horrible comments you can imagine... I have kids being photographed in change rooms during sport...Lots of kids are being told to kill themselves and sent links to suicide websites.'

McLean has urged, 'There should be no personal devices used during the school day – it has to be against school rules.'<https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/premier-rejects-school-smartphone-ban-despite-online-evils/news-story/843a861a9782eb511bee32eca06a685e>

The decision to ban mobile phones in New South Wales public primary schools was taken after a review, led by child psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg, of the effects of mobile phone use upon children. The review, which considered about 14,000 survey responses and 80

written submissions, concluded that mobile phones posed a risk to children psychological wellbeing.

Dr Carr-Gregg stated, 'I'm really worried about the stress a lot of these kids are already under. It's very clear that the vast majority of young people who end their life have a mental health problem, particularly depression. So anything we can do to reduce depression, to reduce stress and anxiety in young people we should do and all schools have a duty of care to provide students with a safe environment in which to learn.'

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/mobiles-banned-from-nsw-primary-schools-from-next-year/news-story/3e9f7ae1e6f70eaaa2496852c03611b5>

Similar findings have been made in research conducted in the United States. It has been found that high school students subjected to bullying and other forms of harassment are more likely to report being seriously depressed, consider suicide and carry weapons to school, according to findings from three studies reported at the Paediatric Academic Societies meeting in San Diego in April 2015. <https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/childadolescent-psychiatry/bullied-students-more-likely-to-be-depressed-bring-weapons/article/411362/> One of the studies, headed by Dr. Andrew Adesman, of Northwell Health's Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center in New Hyde Park, New York, reports that depression and suicide are much more common in teens who have been the victim of bullying in school and/or electronically. Moreover, these risks were additive among teens who were the victim of both forms of bullying.

Their study, 'Relative Risks of Depression and Suicidal Tendency among Victims of School- and Electronic-Bullying with Co-Risk Factors,' presents results from the first national analysis comparing risks associated with the different forms of bullying. Researchers analysed data from a 2013 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey of teens in grades 9-12, and found that depression and suicidal thoughts are much more common among teens who have been bullied electronically or at school.

<https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/childadolescent-psychiatry/bullied-students-more-likely-to-be-depressed-bring-weapons/article/411362/>

Dr. Adesman stated, 'Although cyber bullying may not pose the same physical threat that face-to-face bullying does, it can be far more hurtful since it can spread like wildfire throughout a student body and take on a life of its own.'

<https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/childadolescent-psychiatry/bullied-students-more-likely-to-be-depressed-bring-weapons/article/411362/>

3. Mobile phones use can be addictive and reduces schoolchildren's resilience and sense of wellbeing

It has been claimed that the tendency to seek parental reassurance and to connect ongoingly with peers can be addictive and reduces young people's resilience, promoting anxiety and a reduced capacity to cope with uncertainty.

On July 3, 2018, the Sydney Morning Herald published an article by Dr Danielle Einstein and Dr Helen Wright in which they noted, 'Dependence on immediate communication is responsible for our diminished patience, capacity to calm our own emotions and withstand uncertainty. When this fundamental human ability is in deficit, we see associations with anxiety, depression and reports of physical tension and distraction during NAPLAN testing.' The doctors continued, 'In Australian research we have seen that the number of co-occurring psychological disorders a person will develop rises with a person's own rating that they have difficulty embracing uncertainty. This should be absolutely fundamental to our approach to educating and bringing up children.' <https://www.smh.com.au/education/school-phone-ban-is-vital-say-education-experts-20180703-h1268h.html>

Dr Danielle Einstein, clinical psychologist, honorary associate, University of Sydney, and psychology department, Macquarie University has further stated, 'The introduction of smartphones has led to a decline in people's ability to cope with uncertainty. Research shows being uncomfortable with uncertainty is associated with students feeling distracted and tense during...tests. The more uncomfortable young people are with uncertainty, the higher the number of co-occurring psychological problems they report experiencing. Smartphone use is associated with the current epidemic of anxiety and depression.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

Dr Einstein has further explained, 'It's about the excessive reliance on the phone to calm worries. Using the phone gives a little bit of info and quiets anxiety momentarily. But children need to learn to tolerate uncertainty. There are times when you can't get reassurance.'

<https://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/sexting-and-cyber-bullying-behind-review-of-mobile-phone-use-in-school-20180907-h152pk>

These anxiety reactions have been linked to addiction to or dependence on the device. A 2012 review of research literature regarding the propensity for addictive behaviour among mobile phone users in the United States found the tendency ranged from 0 to 38 percent. Even more concerning was that addictive behaviour was most common among vulnerable groups. The review states, 'The personality trait most consistently associated with addiction is low self-esteem, though extraversion is associated with more intense use. Women with low self-esteem are the most vulnerable group, and the most commonly associated psychopathological symptom was depression.'

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22648317>
Anecdotal accounts from schools where mobile phones have been banned support claims of reduced anxiety and dependence. A mother whose daughter attends a school at Perthshire, in Scotland, at which mobile phones have been banned, contacted the school to say, 'The change in [our daughter] is amazing. It's like having our own girl back. No sign of panic or anxiety. She was previously using her mobile phone to "hide behind" and cope in pressured situations, like break and lunchtime. Now she is not at all worried about putting her phone away during school, and that speaks volumes.'

4. Neither schools nor teachers can adequately monitor students' in-class mobile phone use
Those who oppose students being able to access mobile phones at school argue that it is very difficult for schools or individual classroom teachers to control how students use their mobile phones when they are allowed to bring them into the classroom.

An Australian study has demonstrated that, irrespective of schools' policies intended to restrict or regulate mobile phone use by students, it is very difficult to control student behaviour in this area. A study from youth advisory group Year13 found 89 per cent of Australian students had used their mobile phones in the classroom regardless of their school's policy. <https://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/mobile-phones/education-experts-call-for-mobile-phone-ban-for-primary-schools-following-french-move/news->

Incoming University of New South Wales education professor, Pasi Sahlberg, has stated, 'Many teachers are upset that they have to serve as police officers, hunting down misusers and those who violate in-school or classroom-based rules.'

<https://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/mobile-phones/education-experts-call-for-mobile-phone-ban-for-primary-schools-following-french-move/news-story/c017703246d38948eb7f4da87f94b795>

Senior research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, Dr Jennifer Buckingham, has similarly stated, 'The likelihood is if you use phones in classrooms, the risks will outweigh the benefits. It's very difficult for a teacher to control what happens every time they turn their

back.' <https://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/sexting-and-cyber-bullying-behind-review-of-mobile-phone-use-in-school-20180907-h152pk>

Anecdotal evidence from the United States indicates that American teachers are also having difficulty regulating the manner in which students use their mobile phones. Matt Miles, a high school teacher from Fairfax County, Virginia, was quoted in the Huffington Post claiming that the problem is getting worse. Mr Miles stated, 'Whereas five years ago, I could quietly ask the one rebellious student to put his or her phone away with no real interruption to class, doing that today would require multiple conversations with a majority of my class.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-freed/why-phones-dont-belong-in-school_b_9666730.html

There have also been reported instances of students actually using their mobile phones to harass teachers. The Queensland Teachers' Union has indicated that it has provided legal support to staff secretly recorded on smartphones by students.

Steve Ryan, the Queensland Teachers Union president, has stated, 'We've had examples where children have deliberately provoked teachers, set them up and when they reacted filmed it on the phone which is then used later for distribution around on Facebook.'

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/smartphone-use-out-of-control-among-queensland-schoolchildren/news-story/3982f135c3c70a826e9b6d6d66f96f7c>

5. Mobile phones reduce students' real world social skills

Dr Tom Nehmy, an Australian clinical psychologist and the founder of the Healthy Minds Program, has stated, 'Smartphones, gaming over Wi-Fi and social media platforms have combined to alter the way young people spend their time. These technology-based pursuits have taken them away from non-screen activities that are associated with greater wellbeing. [United States research has] found that adolescents who spent more time on non-screen activities such as face-to-face social interactions and exercise were likely to be happier.'

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/teens/smart-phones-have-robbed-kids-of-their-childhood/news-story/7cbb23fd70568afadeebdbc500d83aa2>

Melissa Ortega, a child psychologist at New York's Child Mind Institute, has suggested that increasing use of mobile phones has reduced young people's capacity to communicate verbally in one-on-one situations. Ortega has stated, 'They don't know how to handle conflict face to face because so many things happen through some sort of technology.'

Clinically, I'm seeing it in the office. The high school kids whom I do see will be checking their phones constantly. They'll use it as an avoidance strategy. They'll see if they got a text message in the two minutes they were talking to me.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/children-texting-technology-social-skills_us_1137570

Ortega added, 'Another thing I'm noticing is they may have trouble initiating interactions, those small talk situations. They don't have as much experience doing it because they're not engaging in it ever. They always have something else going on.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/children-texting-technology-social-skills_us_1137570

Gary Small, a neuroscientist and author of 'iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind' has warned about the consequences of an over-reliance on technology, including mobile phones, in order to communicate. Small has stated, 'Humans send many nonverbal cues, from fidgeting to foot tapping, long pauses to eye contact. Reading those signs is a skill that young people are not learning when they're using these devices.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/children-texting-technology-social-skills_us_1137570

Some academics have even expressed concern that excessive use of electronic devices may be impeding communication between children and their parents. Cris Rowan, a paediatric occupational therapist, has noted, 'As children and parents are attaching more and more to technology, they're detaching from each other, and we know as a species we need to connect. We're really pack animals. We need to be connected to other human beings. That's just a fact for any living organism; it doesn't do well when it's on its own.'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/children-texting-technology-social-skills_us_1137570

Arguments against mobile phones being banned from schools

1. Mobile phones are an important means of communication

Supporters of student access to mobile phones at school claim they are an important communication device enabling students to contact other students and adults, especially their parents.

Some researchers claim that mobile phones have now reached such a widespread level of use and acceptance that they have become an inevitable part of modern communication. In January, 2017, Carol Cooper of Rochester College had published a paper titled 'The Influence of the Mobile Phone on Young Adult Communication'. Cooper states, 'Consider some of the communication possibilities the mobile phone affords. First, the portability of the mobile phone makes communication possible anywhere at any time. Second, the ubiquitous use of the mobile phone...is a vehicle for self-expression and collective identity, often through the use of text messaging and social media. Third, [users] are now so used to multi-tasking, the co-presence of synchronous and asynchronous communication while simultaneously performing other activities has become routine.'

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322055127_THE_INFLUENCE_OF_THE_MOBILE_PHONE_ON_YOUNG_ADULT_COMMUNICATION

Regarding the communication value of mobile phones for parents and children, Damian Maher, Senior lecturer in education, use of ICT and social media, University of Technology Sydney, has stated, 'The phones provide a link between students and their parents, which has an important role to play in ensuring their safety. Evidence indicates parents want this type of access.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-28/smartphone-ban-in-schools-good-or-bad-idea/9918934>

In addition, British research conducted in 2012 indicated that some students communicate on their mobile phones not only for social purposes but in order to share knowledge and understanding. One student was quoted stating, 'A few days ago, my friend didn't understand one of the questions on the Science homework, so he Facetimed me, and I showed him my answer and I explained how I got that answer to him.'

<https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/mobile-phones-in-the-classroom-what-does-the-research-say>

2. Mobile phones are a useful educational tool

Many educators argue that mobile phones, as miniature computers, can be used by students to research and communicate for educational purposes. They claim that this is particularly important because mobile phones are so portable and because they give access to computer functions which schools with limited technology would not be able to make available otherwise.

This point has been made by Matthew Kearney, associate professor, Teacher Education Program, University of Technology Sydney. Professor Kearney has stated, 'If school students

want to investigate, collect data, receive personalised and immediate feedback, record media, create, compose, or communicate with peers, in and beyond the classroom, then using mobile apps is ideal.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-28/smartphone-ban-in-schools-good-or-bad-idea/9918934>

Principal Chris Presland, of St Clair High School, in Sydney, is another staunch defender of the use of mobile phones for educational purposes. He has stated, 'Since [then prime minister] Tony Abbott cut the laptop program across the country, we lost the guarantee that every student can have a laptop. For a lot of students, a mobile phone is the main tool they have to access applications that other students take for granted.' <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/news/phones-class-attraction-and-distraction>

Students at St Clair use their phones for class research and filming for class projects, and to access educational YouTube videos. One class assignment had students researching the periodic elements and designing a QR code [a matrix barcode like those on grocery items] with information about each element embedded in the code. They pasted the codes around the school so other students could access the information through an app on their phone.

<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/news/phones-class-attraction-and-distraction>

Research undertaken in Britain in 2012 shows that students rely mostly on their devices to keep them organised. The calendar, alarms and camera (usually to take photos of a teacher's notes) are features constantly used by students, the report notes. One pupil said his device was essential for 'remembering things' and without he would 'forget to take homework in a lot'. The research concluded, 'There is clear evidence that many pupils feel that they are deriving educational benefit from the use of their devices. They are using many of the features of their devices and often finding creative ways to employ these features in their schoolwork, both at home and at school.'

<https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/mobile-phones-in-the-classroom-what-does-the-research-say>

A Concordia University Portland discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones in the classroom (updated in July, 2018) noted, 'Access to the internet provides instant answers for the curious. This is the search-and-learn environment kids are involved in today. Now, when they want to know "Why do leaves change color," they are only a search away from an answer. This also gives students the ability to get an answer to a question they may feel uncomfortable asking in class. If a teacher uses a term they don't understand, they can find the answer discretely, and without interrupting the class.' <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/pros-and-cons-of-allowing-digital-devices-in-the-classroom/>

The discussion also noted, 'With internet access, children can be exposed to a world of creative ideas outside of their bubble. They can learn other languages, teach themselves how to draw, knit, or play chess. They have access to an endless array of options available to help them learn, and gain skills they might not otherwise be exposed to. All of this can be accomplished through a smartphone, which can be a valuable learning tool, if used correctly.' <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/pros-and-cons-of-allowing-digital-devices-in-the-classroom/>

3. Schools should be teaching students how to use digital technology, not banning it
Supporters of primary school students being able to access mobile phones while at school argue that digital literacy is a major area within which schools should be educating children and that mobile phones are an important medium for and aspect of this education. Digital literacy is a critical aspect of young people's schooling and research shows mobile phones can play a role in supporting such learning. It's important students learn with these devices so they can effectively participate in the workforce.

Regarding schools' obligation to educate children in the effective use of mobile phones, Damian Maher, Senior lecturer in education, use of ICT and social media, University of Technology Sydney, has stated, 'Digital literacy is a critical aspect of young people's schooling and research shows mobile phones can play a role in supporting such learning. It's important students learn with these devices so they can effectively participate in the workforce.' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

A similar point was made by Susan Sawyer, Professor of adolescent health, University of Melbourne, and director, Royal Children's hospital centre for adolescent health, University of Melbourne, who has stated, 'Beyond the 3Rs, an important aspect of [students'] learning is about safely negotiating online environments. This means all schools need to develop policies around the use of mobile phones during school hours. Given the dynamic nature of the mobile world, regularly engaging students and parents in reviewing and revising these policies is an important part of everyone's learning.' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

Joanne Orlando researcher, technology and learning, Western Sydney University, has also argued, 'We should not ban mobile phones in schools because it's important to educate children to live well in the era in which they are growing up. A good education for students today is knowing how to use technology to learn, communicate and work with ideas. There is significant research...that shows selective, quality and empowering uses of technology provides new learning opportunities and the ability for students to develop skills they will need for their careers.' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

Elizabeth McDougall, Principal of Sacred Heart College, New Town, Tasmania, has similarly stated, 'Beyond the school gates and as students grow older, they're going to have to know when to use a device effectively, in a workplace, for example, so if they haven't got that structure in place already they're at a disadvantage.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-10/new-town-high-school-bans-mobile-phones-in-classroom/10222268>

This view has also been expressed by some British educators. Paul Howard-Jones, a professor of neuroscience and education at the University of Bristol, claims that schools have an important role in helping pupils learn when to use their phones. Professor Howard-Jones has stated, 'If school and education is about preparing us for the world, then learning how to use your mobile phone - when it's appropriate, when it's not appropriate, is a very important part of that.'

Children need to learn to self-regulate. They're not being given the opportunity to do that if their phones are taken away at the start of the day.' <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-44546360>

4. Banning mobile phones in schools will not resolve the cyber bullying issue

Opponents of mobile phones being banned in schools argue that this measure may be counterproductive. Banning the use of mobile phones is likely to drive their use underground where bullying and other anti-social behaviour will be more difficult to monitor.

The Head of the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council, Chris Presland, has claimed that banning mobile phones to stop bullying and reduce distractions is similar to banning cars to stop people from speeding. Mr Presland has stated, 'It's not going to stop cyber bullying, firstly, most of it doesn't occur during school hours and phones are just one device that kids have access to, it's a complete red herring.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/educators-push-back-against-school-smartphone-ban-20180917-p50481.html>

Joanne Orlando researcher, technology and learning, Western Sydney University, has argued, 'Mobile phone use is a complex social activity and taking phones away will likely lead to

underground and hidden use by teens. This will exacerbate issues (such as cyber bullying) this call to ban phones is trying to address.' [://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools)

The same point has been made by the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, a national Australian charity which works to reduce and mitigate the effects of violence against children. The Foundation states, 'Phones are used for many reasons and banning them creates amongst students an environment of secrecy and deception. It is far better to openly educate and encourage the responsible and safe use of technology. The important thing we need to impart is that if our children encounter a problem online they can openly seek our help, guidance and support.'

Banning technology means that children who "illegally" use their phones (and they will) are also more likely to engage in riskier behaviours and are less likely to come to a trusted adult if they are harassed or at risk.' <https://www.kinderling.com.au/news/will-banning-mobile-phones-at-school-stop-cyberbullying>

Jocelyn Brewer, from the University of Sydney's Cyber Psychology Research Group, has similarly stated, 'We have a lot of work to do in the bullying space, but banning phones in schools will not solve the problem, it will only shift the problem to other areas.'

Brewer explains, 'There's a lot of literature that shows banning doesn't change bullying behaviour. We need to instead be teaching [students] skills about what it means to be a human online, what our responsibilities are and how we act when we don't have face-to-face communication'

<https://tendaily.com.au/news/tech/a180621orp/banning-smartphones-not-the-answer-to-tackling-cyber-bullying-in-schools-20180621>

Brewer argues, 'It would be far more useful (albeit more expensive) for schools, to work in partnership with families and school communities, to improve the way social-emotional skills relevant to upstanding digital citizenry are taught. Digital citizenship involves understanding the rights and responsibilities that come with being online and how to use technology in a positive way.' <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=3066>

Michael de Main, the founder of The Wheel, an international educational marketplace for teachers, tutors and students argues, "Instead of banning phones to reduce the number of time students can be exposed to online taunts, wouldn't teaching them what to do in the face of cyber bullying be better?"

Teaching appropriate usage rather than banning will be more successful and beneficial to the next generation. There was bullying and distractions before mobile phones, so banning them will not stop the problem.' <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/5498214/illawarra-teacher-says-banning-phones-will-not-stop-school-bullying/>

5. Mobile phones can assist the physical and mental health of young people

Supporters of primary school students being able to access their mobile phones during school hours note that the devices can actually benefit children in the maintenance of their physical and psychological health.

Regarding children's physical health, Damian Maher, Senior lecturer in education, use of ICT and social media, University of Technology Sydney, has noted, 'In relation to health, research shows medical apps are important to support the health of young people, such as managing diabetes, and apps need to be accessed during schools hours.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>

Self-management is critical to achieving diabetes treatment goals. Mobile phones and In September, 2012, Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology, published an article which demonstrated, 'Bluetooth can support self-management and lifestyle changes for chronic

diseases such as

diabetes.'<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/193229681200600525>

In regard to children's psychological health, Susan Sawyer, Professor of adolescent health, University of Melbourne, and director, Royal Children's hospital centre for adolescent health, University of Melbourne, has stated, 'A particular benefit of mobile phones is they can provide access to therapeutic interventions for distressed young people while they are at school. Telephone support lines have long provided crisis support but are more commonly used outside school hours. The emergence of crisis text lines means adolescents can access text messaging support in real time, an approach that many find more accessible than telephone support, let alone face-to-face support, even with trained professionals at schools.'
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/what-do-five-experts-think-about-mobile-phones-in-schools>.

On May 28, 2015, The Conversation published an article by Joanna Rodriguez, Senior tutor, University of Surrey and Nadine Page, Teaching Fellow (Integrated Care), University of Surrey, titled 'Your smartphone could be good for your mental health'. It noted, 'There are programmes for depression and phobias, designed to help lift people's moods, get them active and help them to overcome their difficulties. The programmes use guided self help-based cognitive behavioural principles and have proven to be very effective.

Computer games have been used to provide therapy for adolescents. Because computer games are fun and can be used anonymously, they offer an alternative to traditional therapy.'
<https://theconversation.com/your-smartphone-could-be-good-for-your-mental-health-41804>

Further implications

Whatever the potential educational advantages of mobile phone use in Australian schools, it seems likely that other states may well follow New South Wales and prohibit the devices being brought to school or brought into the classroom.

All schools have a legal responsibility to provide students with a safe environment within which to learn and there is growing concern that the misuse of mobile phones by students is making it increasingly difficult for schools to fulfil their duty of care. This situation may obviously have severe personal repercussions for psychologically abused students and may also have major legal implications for schools.

In September, 2017, a writ was lodged before the Victorian Supreme Court by a 16-year-old boy who claimed he was subjected to constant bullying, harassment, taunting and homophobic insults as a student at a Victorian secondary college between 2013 and 2015, before he left in Year 9. The boy is suing Victoria's education department, and alleges the emotional trauma he suffered impaired his learning capacity. The boy's lawyer has stated, 'Schools owe their students a duty of care and where this is breached, they may be held liable for the damage and may be compelled to compensate those who've been harmed.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/duty-of-care-teen-sues-victorias-education-department-over-homophobic-bullying-20170912-gyg1jx.html>

In 2013, researchers Amy Dwyer and Patricia Easteal published a paper titled 'Cyber Bullying in Australian Schools: The question of negligence and liability'. Ms Dwyer and Ms Easteal found a school could be responsible if the cyber bullying occurred on school grounds, during school hours or using school owned technology.

The researchers explained, 'It is...possible that schools may be responsible if they have knowledge of the cyber bullying, or if they regulate student conduct, including through student conduct or anti-bullying policies, in such a way that they are subjecting students to its control but are inadequately implementing or monitoring anti-bullying policy regulations.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/technology/schools-could-be-sued-for-cyber-bullying-experts-20130814-2rx8u.html>

Their report concluded, 'We strongly recommend that schools therefore should be proactive and take on increasing responsibilities to protect students from cyber bullying.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/technology/schools-could-be-sued-for-cyber-bullying-experts-20130814-2rx8u.html>

The parents of a 14-year-old Queensland schoolgirl, who committed suicide after suffering physical and cyber bullying at a private Queensland secondary school, stated on A Current Affair, in May, 2018, that they believe their daughter's school did not do enough to protect her. <https://honey.nine.com.au/2018/05/02/10/28/amy-dolly-everett-cyberbullying-suicide> Following this death, the Queensland government has rejected demands that mobile phones be banned in schools across the state. A spokesperson for the Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, has stated, 'Decisions about the use of mobile phones during school hours are for the principal, in consultation with the school community...[However,] the Government is willing to listen to ideas put forward.'

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/premier-rejects-school-smartphone-ban-despite-online-evils/news-story/843a861a9782eb511bee32eca06a685e>

Responding to the death of the 14-year-old Queensland schoolgirl, Susan McLean, an Australian expert in the area of cyber safety and young people, who advises the Federal Government as a member of its Cyber Safety Working Group, criticised the response of the Queensland government, arguing that the Queensland Education Department should mandate a blanket ban, rather than allowing principals to formulate their own rules.

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/premier-rejects-school-smartphone-ban-despite-online-evils/news-story/843a861a9782eb511bee32eca06a685e>

Ms McLean concluded, 'Schools risk being sued by parents over their failure to provide a safe place for students – both online and offline. Duty of care is a legal tenet applicable to every school in Australia.' <https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/premier-rejects-school-smartphone-ban-despite-online-evils/news-story/843a861a9782eb511bee32eca06a685e>

Further instances of serious cyber bullying, related suicides and possible legal action against schools may well see other Australian states and territories follow New South Wales' lead and prohibit the use of mobile phones within their schools.