



# **Review into the non-educational use of mobile devices in NSW schools**

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the thousands of people who invested their time and energy in completing surveys, making submissions and providing commentary that has informed the work of the review. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the input from the many thousands of young people who took the time and effort to make submissions. We are also grateful to the many external experts consulted during this process. We are most appreciative for the help and support from the NSW Department of Education staff who have rendered invaluable help to the review team.

## Message from the review team

In reviewing the risks and benefits associated with the use of mobile digital devices, primarily smartphones, in NSW schools, we were particularly keen to identify approaches and practices that can be adopted to support children and young people to use such devices in safe, responsible and informed ways. Specifically, we have attempted to:

- Assess the extent to which having smartphones in NSW schools has contributed to or exacerbated risks to children and young people including from online (or cyber) bullying, image-based abuse and access to other online harm.
- Assess the extent to which having smartphones in NSW schools has contributed to the wellbeing and educational experiences of young people.
- Identify how children and young people can be best prepared to manage these risks and generally supported to use smartphones in safe, responsible and informed ways in school and by extension, other environments.
- Identify practices and approaches that can help schools and parents support children and young people to use smartphones in safe, responsible and informed ways in school and by extension, other environments.
- Consider whether a restriction or other limits should be placed on smartphone use for children in primary school or children in certain age brackets.

## Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

1. Conduct a review of evidence related to the benefits and risks of mobile digital devices\*, primarily smartphones, in schools for children and young people and approaches and practices to support students' use of such devices in safe, responsible, and informed ways. This will include:
  - a. An international literature review on the use and impact of mobile digital devices in all school settings – primary, secondary, Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) and Central Schools. This will include peer-reviewed scholarship from across disciplines and 'grey' literature (such as program evaluations and reports on evidence-based interventions).
  - b. Stakeholder consultation and feedback via focus groups and other mechanisms.
2. The consultation with children and young people will include when, how, and why they use mobile digital devices in order that the review's recommendations align with and can effectively and meaningfully impact their practices.
3. The review will assess the extent to which having mobile digital devices in schools may contribute to or exacerbate identified risks, including cyberbullying, image-based abuse, and access to online harm in schools.
4. The review will identify how children and young people can best be prepared to mitigate identified risks.
5. The review will identify best-practice approaches and practices for schools and parents to support students' use of mobile digital devices in safe, responsible, and informed ways to promote learning and respectful relationships.
6. The review will consider whether a restriction or other limits should be placed on smartphone use for children in primary schools or children in certain age brackets. The practices of other jurisdictions will be informative in this regard.

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\*Mobile digital device: a hand-held electronic device that can receive, store, process and send digital information.

## Background

On 21 June 2018, the NSW Government called for a review into the use of mobile digital devices, specifically smartphones, in NSW schools. The review was initiated because of:

- A recognition that schools across NSW employ diverse practices to facilitate, to regulate or to restrict the use of mobile digital devices and that these practices have not been examined in a structured way.
- A recognition that the guidance that exists around smartphone use in schools may not have been assessed for efficacy in the NSW schools context nor consolidated for use by schools.
- An acknowledgement that educators may need better support and guidance in navigating the use and regulation of ever-evolving technology.
- A need to provide better guidance to schools on the practices and approaches that can be employed to help students best use mobile digital devices in safe, responsible and informed ways.
- The ongoing prevalence of harm to students, including instances of student suicide and self-harm, allegedly resulting from cyberbullying and other harms linked to smartphones.
- Other indicators about a general decline in student wellbeing including: a 10 year high in youth suicide; reported increase in self harm, depression and anxiety over the last two decades; as well as a decline in performance in maths, reading and science, with a disproportionate fall among the lowest performing students.
- Divided expert opinion on the impacts of smartphone use on students' psychological, physical and mental health and overall wellbeing.
- A body of anecdotal evidence on harms (such as distraction in class and detrimental impacts on students' psychological, physical and mental health) that is not captured in formal research but should be considered in policy and practice.
- An apparent increase in instances of smartphone use being banned in schools or for children in certain age brackets, at the individual school level and in some cases nationwide.
- An acknowledgement that use of and familiarisation with technology, including smartphones, is essential to the future livelihood and productivity of students and that there are benefits to the use of smartphones in schools.
- A recognition that the safe, responsible and informed use of mobile devices, particularly smartphones, in schools may have flow-on effects into other environments (such as homes), later life and overall wellbeing.
- A need to assist schools meet their duty of care obligations to students in light of the varied harms that smartphones may be correlated to.
- A recognition that in NSW public schools smartphone use is governed by diverse departmental policies, including technology, network access, social media, curriculum and bring your own device policies, and that the prevalence of smartphone use in schools warrants review in its own right.
- An understanding that technology is ever-evolving and requires flexible, iterative and technology-neutral responses.
- A belief that the diverse and emerging views of all members of the school community and other stakeholders should inform the policies and practices employed in schools.
- The department's ongoing commitment and obligation to address emerging issues in regards to student wellbeing, health and safety and promote the digital capacities of students.

A reviewer, Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, was appointed to conduct the review. Dr Carr-Gregg appointed two other independent experts, Associate Professor Amanda Third and cybersafety expert Susan McLean, to assist him in the review.

## Terminology

Definitions of terms used frequently in the report are included below.

**Image-based abuse:** occurs when an intimate, nude or sexually explicit image is distributed without the consent of those pictured. This includes real, altered (e.g. photoshopped) and drawn pictures and videos. It can also include cartoon adaptations of an image. While most image-based abuse is about the sharing of images without consent, it can also include the threat of an image being shared. Whilst historically the term used to describe this behaviour was 'revenge porn', it is now recognised that the images shared do not always fit the description of pornography and that the sharing or threatening to share is not always motivated by revenge



**Bullying:** is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening. Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records). Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

**Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying can be described as any repeated harassment, insults and humiliation that occurs through electronic mediums such as email, smartphones, social networking sites, instant messaging programs, chat rooms, websites and through the playing of online games. Cyberbullying is not one isolated nasty comment or post but a repeated action.

**Sexting...or sending Nudes, Naked Selfies, DicPics or TitPics:** Is the act of sending sexually explicit or naked messages, photos or videos electronically, primarily between smartphones, but can include internet applications such as SnapChat, email, or social networking sites.

**Cybersafety:** The safe, responsible and informed use of digital media and technology. It is about keeping information safe and secure but also about being responsible with that information and being respectful of other people online.

**Office of eSafety Commissioner digital citizenship definition:** digital citizenship is about confident and positive engagement with digital technology. A digital citizen is a person with the skills and knowledge to effectively use digital technologies to participate in society, communicate with others, and create and consume digital content.

**Non-educational use:** use in school time that falls outside the NSW curriculum and teacher-directed learning. In this review, the term applied to the use of personal devices and data in a manner that has not been authorised by the school.

**Mobile digital device:** a hand-held electronic device that can generate, receive, store, process and send digital information, including photos

and videos. For the purposes of this review, mobile digital devices include smartphones, smartwatches and mobile tablets but not laptops. The review team make a distinction between personal use devices that often have independent internet connectivity which bypasses the school internet filter and devices that are provided by the school and or authorised by the school as part of teacher-directed educational activities.

## Research Methodology

The review consulted widely with students, educators, parents/carers and other interested members of the community through:

- An anonymous online survey offered to students, educators and parents/carers, which gathered almost 14,000 responses
- Confidential focus groups with a sample of students, teachers and parents/carers from across NSW
- Confidential interviews with a sample of government and non-government school principals from a variety of school types from across NSW
- Interviews with people, including school administrators, peak bodies and police, with specialised expertise and knowledge from NSW and other jurisdictions
- Confidential written submissions made online and via email
- A review of public policy, key research and other documentation, including existing school policies and procedures, from NSW and other jurisdictions
- A formal literature review on the use and impact of smartphones in school settings.

Public submissions and survey responses were received between 17 September and 19 October 2018. Focus groups, interviews and other consultations occurred during and outside of this time period. An external market research firm, Ipsos Public Affairs Pty Ltd, was engaged to conduct the focus groups and the majority of the principal interviews. The Western Sydney University was engaged to assist in the assessment of the qualitative data received in the survey responses. The literature review was completed by the NSW Department of Education. More details on the research approach can be found in Appendix 1.

A range of views and opinions were expressed on this issue and at times contradictory evidence was provided to the review team. While the team has attempted to articulate all sides of an issue, at times they have needed to make findings one way or another.

Unless permission has been expressly provided by the author/s, all submissions and survey responses are being kept strictly confidential. No person or organisation participating in the research has been identified in this report without their express permission.

All records from the research are stored and destroyed according to NSW Government policy.

## Stakeholder consultation at a glance

The review has been informed by public consultation and the voices and views of students, parents, teachers, principals and child development, cyberbullying, mental health and technology experts.

The voices and views of children and young people were central to the review and ultimately to the success of any practices and policies that may be adopted because of it. The review has specifically received and assessed evidence from children and young people on how and why they use smartphones to ensure that any advice provided by the review aligns with, and can effectively and meaningfully impact their practices.

A total of 13761 survey responses were received, and of these:

- 64.24% (8840) were from students
- 21.42% (2948) were from educators (teachers or principals)
- 14.34% (1973) were from parents/carers<sup>1</sup>

Of those students who responded to the survey:

- 15.17% (994) were from students in primary school
- 64.53% (4229) were from students in years 7-10
- 20.31% (1331) were from students in years 11-12

Thirty-five focus groups were conducted with students, parents and teachers, with each cohort interviewed separately. Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted with principals.

Written submissions were received from a variety

of external organisations including but not limited to: the Office of the eSafety Commissioner; the Alannah & Madeline Foundation; yourtown; Catholic Schools NSW; the Federation of Parents & Citizens Association of NSW; NSW Teachers Federation; Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT; University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre; FIC Technology Pty, Ltd; the Black Dog Institute; the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association Ltd; Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne; Media, Film and Journalism, Monash University; National Centre Against Bullying; The Behavioural Insights Team (UK), Australian Council on Children and the Media; Macquarie University; and the Australian Computing Academy at the University of Sydney.

The review team have also met or consulted independently with numerous stakeholders including: the NSW Primary Principals' Association; the NSW Secondary Principals' Council; the Association of Independent Schools of NSW; Catholic Schools NSW; the Independent Primary School Heads of Australia; the New Zealand Ministry of Education; the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People; and a sample of schools. The review team have met with relevant parties in other jurisdictions including Queensland, Victoria, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

The review has examined the policies, practices and views of both government and non-government schools in NSW, including schools for specific purposes and central schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey respondents were asked to self-identify as a student, an educator or a parent/carer. Responses were not verified by the review team.

## Review team

### Dr Michael Carr-Gregg

The NSW Minister for Education appointed Dr Michael Carr-Gregg to conduct the review. Dr Carr-Gregg is a child and adolescent psychologist specialising in adolescent mental health and parenting adolescents. His special interest is in the use of technology in the form of smartphones, web-based programs and biometric devices in the promotion of wellbeing and treatment of high prevalence disorders. He is the founder of CanTeen, the acclaimed cancer patients' support group for teenagers in Australia and New Zealand. In 1995, he was appointed an Associate Professor in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Melbourne. In 2003, he was one of the founding members of the National Centre Against Bullying and became one of their national spokespersons. He is the author of 14 books, the Parenting Expert in Channel 7's top-rating Sunrise program, has a regular spot on Fairfax radio 3AW and SkyNews. He is married with two sons and is a much sought after speaker on issues affecting adolescents and their parents.<sup>2</sup>

### Other experts

In conducting the review, Dr Carr-Gregg has been supported by two independent experts, Susan McLean and Associate Professor Amanda Third from Western Sydney University.

### Susan McLean

Susan is Australia's leading expert in the area of cybersafety and was a member of Victoria Police for 27 years. She was the first Victorian police officer appointed to a position involving cybersafety and young people, where she established and managed the Victoria Police Cybersafety Project. She has completed advanced training in the USA in 2007, 2012 & 2015 including the Protecting Children Online Certificate from Fox Valley Technical College and has successfully completed the 'University Certificate in Child Safety on the Internet' from the University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom. She also has qualifications from Netsmartz/NCMEC (USA) and NSPCC/CEOP (UK). She collaborates with a variety of international bodies and is a member of both the Australian Government's Online Safety Consultative Working Group and the National Centre Against Bullying. Susan provides regular advice and assistance to Australian families and schools in relation to online issues and presents to over 75,000 students per year as well as 1000s

of parents and educators. She is often a conduit between a victim of online abuse (and their families) and law enforcement to ensure criminal activity is reported and investigated. Susan is married with 3 children and is a passionate advocate for young people to ensure that they have safe and positive online experiences.<sup>3</sup>

### Associate Professor Amanda Third

Amanda is Principal Research Fellow in the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University, Australia. Her research explores the socio-cultural dimensions of young people's technology use, with particular emphases on children's and young people's rights in the digital age, the intergenerational dynamics shaping technology practice, and vulnerable young people's technological engagements. Amanda has led a series of large-scale, cross-sector and collaborative research projects, having worked with major corporates (e.g. Google; Telstra), startups (e.g. Catalyser, Project Rockit) global policy making organisations (e.g. UNICEF, Global Partnership to End Violence), not-for-profit organisations (e.g. Starlight Children's Foundation, Foundation for Young Australians) and government and statutory bodies (e.g. Office of the eSafety Commissioner). From 2011-2016, Amanda led a research program in the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, which united young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 75 partner organisations across the not-for-profit, academic, government and corporate sectors to explore how young people's technology use can be leveraged to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Amanda currently co-leads the Intergener8 Living Lab in Western Sydney, which is co-developing technology-based strategies to support intergenerational resilience with over 100 stakeholders. She is lead author of *Young and Online: Children's Perspectives on Life in the Digital Age* (UNICEF, 2017) and *Young People in Digital Society: Control/Shift* (Palgrave, 2019). She is a member of the Australian Government's Online Safety Consultative Working Group, and Expert Advisor to Global Kids Online and UNICEF's C4D Adolescent Digital Engagement Strategy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> More details about Dr Carr-Gregg can be found here: <http://michaelcarrgregg.com/about/>

<sup>3</sup> More details about Susan McLean can be found here: <http://www.cybersafetysolutions.com.au/about/>

<sup>4</sup> More details about Associate Professor Third can be found here: [https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/amanda\\_third](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/amanda_third)

## Enquiries about the Review

For any enquiries about the review, including requests for information in accessible formats, please email [review-mobiledevices@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:review-mobiledevices@det.nsw.edu.au)

Details about and documentation pertaining to the review can be found at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reports-and-reviews/mobile-devices-in-schools>

If you need to speak to a counsellor or support person, the support services listed below can help you:

- **Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800**, or at <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- **Lifeline on 13 11 14** or at <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

## Key findings and recommendations

As mobile digital devices are adopted by ever larger numbers of children and young people in New South Wales, the review team is mindful that our approaches to the use of such devices in schools must heed international expert advice that the mitigation of the potential risks of harm must be matched by a commitment to nurturing the positive potential of digital media use for children and young people. This is critical if we are to adequately prepare children and young people for the digital future. In this spirit, the review team makes the following recommendations.

### Recommendation – Implement a mandatory ‘digital licence’ for all students in NSW

The review team recommends that, before they are allowed to use any digital devices at school, all NSW school students be required to sit and pass a ‘digital licence’ competency test.

Students should sit for their first digital licence no later than year 3. A second, more advanced version of the digital licence should be completed by each student upon commencement of high school.

The licencing process will require that students first complete a series of interactive, online educational modules, ideally with their parent or carer. This training should address the use of all digital devices, including mobile digital devices. The review team recommends that,

in conjunction with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and other expert organisations, the NSW Government undertake an independent evaluation of any existing licence-like resources and invest in the collaborative development of a bespoke digital licence if existing resources are found lacking.

The review team recommends that any licence should be made available to students in government and non-government schools in NSW at no cost.

Engaging parents, schools and children in the digital licence process reflects the shared responsibility for cybersafety education. From a parenting perspective, the licence represents an effort to reduce the burden of responsibility for cybersafety education on schools, and to incentivise Australian parents to an authoritative style of engagement around their children’s use of mobile digital devices in a responsible manner. Where it is not possible for the child to complete this training at home or with a parent/carer, schools should provide this service. Consideration should also be given to the provision of this service by local public libraries.

The digital licence education modules should be based on the Office of the eSafety Commissioner’s digital citizenship principles, which outline a holistic and life-long approach to digital citizenship and comprise technical literacies and capabilities, social and emotional competencies, as well as personal rights and responsibilities to others. Upon completion of these modules, each child will be issued with a digital licence that acknowledges they have completed training to enable their safer use of mobile and other digital devices.

The review team recognises that some students start using digital devices for educational purposes from as early as kindergarten and an elementary version of the licence might be appropriate for this population.

To ensure the effective allocation of resources, and to reduce duplication, national consistency around such education resources should be prioritised.



The review team acknowledges that an existing digital licence (Google Digital Licence [www.digitalllicence.com.au](http://www.digitalllicence.com.au)) is already in use in some NSW schools and in other jurisdictions, including Queensland. The licence covers eight key topics, combines learning resources and interactive quizzes to evaluate comprehension and knowledge around cybersafety, and is targeted at children eight years and above. A version of the licence is available for both primary and secondary school students and it aligns to the Australian curriculum. The review team urges the NSW Government to assess the outcomes of an independent evaluation of this resource that has recently been completed in order to determine whether it is a useful resource on which to base the NSW digital licence.

### **Recommendation – Provide mandatory cyber safety education for students**

**In addition to the training modules put in place for the digital licence, the review team recommends that mandatory cyber safety and digital literacy education be in place in all schools in NSW. This is to ensure that all students in NSW receive consistent, quality and ongoing training in cyber safety and digital competencies across their education. The cyber safety education should cover all areas of cyber safety and not simply focus on one element (e.g. cyberbullying) and should include a students' legal obligations when using digital technology. The review team recommends that training in cyber safety and digital literacy should:**

- be embedded in the curriculum;
- be taught by appropriately trained and resourced classroom teachers;
- cover the full range of potential safety issues students may encounter online;
- offer clear strategies to enable children and young people to take steps to mitigate the potential risks of harm;
- create spaces for children and young people to understand and explore the opportunities and benefits of engaging online; and
- foster students' development of the technical, creative and higher order evaluative skills necessary to positive online experiences.

**Where external providers are utilised to support cyber safety in schools, the review**

**team recommends that the NSW Government and non-government school sector commit to utilising only those providers who are accredited by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.**

**The review team recommends that any cyber safety education resources used in schools be rigorously evaluated.**

This recommendation reflects:

- the need to skill children and young people to actively deal with the potential risks of harm they encounter when using mobile digital devices;
- the integral role of technology now and in their future lives;
- the current use of mobile digital devices as educational tools; and
- opportunities to better leverage mobile technology for educational purposes.

Schools are best positioned to deliver this training to the greatest number of children and young people in NSW.

The review team noted that all of the schools consulted were able to demonstrate some level of commitment to cyber safety education for students. However, variation in the quality and comprehensiveness of the education programs in place was apparent. Evaluation will help ensure that mobile devices are used in the safest, most responsible and best informed ways possible.

The review team considers the strength of any certification/accreditation demonstrated by providers who develop and deliver this training on behalf of schools to be central to the efficacy of cyber safety education.

## **Recommendation – Review the adequacy of existing cyber safety education in the curriculum and ICT general capability**

The review team found that a comprehensive central assessment of all existing cyber safety education in NSW might be warranted, including an assessment of the content of the current curriculum as it relates to cyber safety, as this was not part of this review's Terms of Reference.

The review recommends that a review of schools' approaches to the ICT general capability also be undertaken, as this was not part of the review's Terms of Reference.

Such an assessment should aim to identify and suggest strategies for addressing any existing gaps in the curriculum relating to cyber safety.

Consideration of these issues was not part of the review's Terms of Reference but the review team heard evidence that an assessment of this nature may be warranted. Any such assessment should aim to identify and suggest strategies for addressing any existing gaps in the curriculum relating to cyber safety.

## **Recommendation – Provide better quality and more cyber safety education for teachers, including NESA-registered professional learning**

The review team recommends that the NSW Government consider an examination of pre-service and teacher professional learning and consider additional investment in professional learning, particularly NESA-registered professional learning (if required).

The review team also recommends that the NSW government conduct an audit of teacher training in cyber safety to identify how to better equip teachers to embed the teaching of cyber safety skills and competencies, as well as to nurture students' capacities to leverage the benefits of technology, in the curriculum.

To mitigate the risks and maximise the opportunities of mobile devices in classrooms, it is critical that all teachers in NSW schools are well equipped to:

- manage the use of mobile devices;
- guide young people's development of necessary digital literacies; and
- exploit the teaching and learning opportunities these devices present.

The review team heard that teachers currently in service, and those currently training to become educators, would welcome additional teacher training in all aspects of mobile device management and use. This could include a consideration of how robust current certification standards are for providers of mobile digital device-related training.

## **Recommendation – Restrict the use of smartphones for students in primary school**

Reflecting the current practice of the vast majority of primary schools in NSW, the review team recommends that a state-wide restriction be placed on the use of smartphones for students in primary school in NSW.

Given that many children require a mobile phone to travel to and from school, the review team recommends that the NSW Government resource facilities to ensure the safe storage of children's mobile devices in government primary schools during school hours.

The review team recommends that, where a parent wishes their child to take a smartphone to and from a primary school, they should opt either to purchase a 'dumb' phone or other device without internet access or a camera, or alternatively use parental controls to deactivate the camera and internet functionality on an existing 'smart' device.

The review team recommends that the NSW Government provide accessible information to schools about how to deactivate such functionality on devices (e.g. existing smartphones that may already have been handed down to children by adult carers). This information could then be communicated by schools to parents and carers.

The review team noted that, even where schools are deploying tablets, laptops and desktop computers in the teaching of the curriculum (all using school filtering systems), it appears that the majority of primary schools in NSW have already restricted the use of smartphones in both classrooms and in the playground. Schools have a wide variety of policies and processes in place to support the implementation of this restriction. The review team considers there are strong ethical and legal reasons to justify such a restriction. In particular, we note schools' duty of care to provide a safe learning environment and reported increases in cases of stalking, inappropriate peer-to-peer contact, access to pornography and image-based abuse among primary school students.

The review team heard about some possible inconsistencies between departmental and school policies and legal considerations regarding the safe storage of children's digital devices at school. If a state-wide restriction were to be implemented, these inconsistencies would need to be resolved and communicated to schools.

The review team notes the report from the eSafety Commissioner, that one in four students under the age of 12 are being stalked, harassed and abused online. A total of 24 per cent of those aged 8 to 12 received unwanted contact from strangers online last year and this rose to nearly half of all 13 to 17-year-olds (42 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

Based on feedback received by the review team, it is anticipated that the recommendation for a state-wide ban on smartphones in primary school during the school day, will be supported by both government and non-government primary school principal organisations. There are strong indications that this restriction will also be supported by teachers and parents.

The review team notes that many parents regard their child having a smartphone as an essential communication tool, especially going to and from school. In light of this, the review team recommends that schools make provision for the safe storage of mobile digital devices during the school day. Consideration should be given to involving the whole school community in determining the most practical way to store these devices during the school day that is equitable, secure and manageable. This should ideally involve a consultation process with teachers, students and parents. Principals should make the final decision.

## **Recommendation 5 - Provide better guidance for secondary schools, including policies that could be adopted depending on a school's circumstances**

Acknowledging concerns about the potential negative impacts of mobile digital devices on student wellbeing, but also taking into account the important role mobile digital devices can play in young people's education, social life and sense of identity, the review team recommends that all NSW secondary schools develop and implement a specific policy/approach to guide the use of mobile digital devices in schools.

The review team recommends that secondary schools consider undertaking a consultation process with their communities to determine the most appropriate model for their circumstances.

Where a policy/approach is already in place in a school, it is recommended that schools be encouraged to evaluate the efficacy of and, where necessary, refine such policies/approaches in light of the evidence presented by this review.

The review team recommends that the implementation of any mobile digital device policy/approach be supported by clear communication between students, parents, teachers and school management.

Drawing on a comprehensive analysis of current policies/approaches in place in NSW schools to govern the use of mobile digital devices, and smartphones in particular, the review team has identified five possible models to guide schools in developing their own policy/approach, which are outlined in the table below.

The review team recommends that the NSW Government fund research to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these models in light of the paucity of peer-reviewed literature both nationally and internationally.

Despite anecdotal evidence received by the review team from students and staff to the contrary, the review recognises that there is, at the time of publication, no peer-reviewed evidence to suggest that the use of mobile devices in secondary schools during recess or lunchtime exposes students to additional risks of harm, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

The review team has received evidence that, when

it comes to the use of mobile digital devices - and smartphones in particular - in secondary schools, there are a number of different models already in place for managing mobile digital device use in NSW and other Australian jurisdictions. The review team has distilled these approaches into five basic models that might be considered by schools for implementation.

## Models of mobile digital device policy for schools' consideration

Model	Description
1	<p><b>Complete restriction</b> on unauthorised use of mobile devices in school hours, including recess and lunchtime. In some instances, schools may choose to apply these restrictions to students while they are in school uniform travelling to and from school, during school excursions and extra-curricular activities on school grounds. Students must hand their mobile digital devices in at the beginning of the school day and collect them after school or store them in an approved location. Schools need to provide secure storage facilities to ensure the viability of this model. Schools also must recognise that implementing complete restriction potentially has an opportunity cost for students' long-term development of digital skills and literacies (though this model permits teacher-endorsed use). Examples include The Shore School (NSW)<sup>6</sup>, John Edmondson High School (NSW)<sup>7</sup> or MacKinnon High (VIC)<sup>8</sup>. Mount St Benedict College in Pennant Hills, St Andrew's Cathedral School in Sydney, Kamaroi Rudolf Steiner School<sup>9</sup> in Belrose.</p>
2	<p><b>Developmentally-defined restriction</b> on unauthorised use of mobile devices in school hours for students in years 7-10. This model recognises older students' increased capacity to self-regulate in relation to their mobile digital device use. Schools need to provide secure storage facilities for the storage of mobile digital devices when not in use by students. Eg: Cranbrook School in Bellevue Hill where Junior School students and students in Years 7 to 9 are not permitted to have this phone turned on during school hours and must keep it secured in their bag or locker and students in Years 10 to 12 may use phones during recess and lunch breaks for communication purposes only.<sup>10</sup></p> <p><b>Model 2A)</b> Complete restriction of the use of mobile phones in secondary schools, with the exception of Years 11-12, who are permitted to use their mobile digital devices at any time during school hours. The French model is an example of this.</p> <p><b>Model 2B)</b> Complete restriction of the use of mobile phones in secondary schools, with the exception of Years 11-12, who are permitted to use their mobile digital devices in specific physical locations and/or at certain times. An example includes Camberwell Girls Grammar School (VIC)</p>

<sup>6</sup> Mobile phones are not permitted to be used on campus by students from the time a student arrives at school until departing from school at the end of the normal school day. They may be used on campus after 3.00pm as permitted by supervising staff. This includes making and receiving calls, texting or using phones for purposes of accessing the internet or taking photographs or videos'. Shore School Mobile Phone Policy.

<sup>7</sup> Students may not use mobile phones or similar devices while on school grounds. If parents choose to allow their child to bring a mobile phone or similar device to school, school staff are not to see or hear the device at any time and students are not to use the device at any time while at school. This applies to all times students are at school and on school grounds including before and after school, during and between classes and at all break times such as recess and lunch. Please note 'school grounds' extends to school excursions, sports carnivals and other events off the school site where an approved school activity takes place'. John Edmondson High School Mobile Phone Policy.

<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of 2018, McKinnon Secondary College instituted a phone ban for all students. The expectation was that students would deposit their phones in their lockers at the beginning of the school day and retrieve them at the end. The ban also extended to use of Chromebooks in the school yard during recess and lunchtime.

<sup>9</sup> <https://kamaroi.nsw.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Mobile-Phones-and-Electronic-Devices-Policy-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/distracting-and-addictive-school-rules-for-mobile-phones-20180922-p505dc.html>



Model	Description
3	<p><b>Partial restriction</b> on unauthorised use of mobile devices in school hours. The aim of the partial restriction model is to enable students to develop the habit of routinely disconnecting, thereby encouraging them to learn the value of self-regulation of their technology use. Schools need to provide secure storage facilities during designated technology-free days or times to ensure the viability of this model. Schools should complement partial restriction with clear policy about how technology is to be used outside technology-free periods or spaces (e.g. Models 4 and 5 below). For example, Queenwood School for Girls in Mosman<sup>11</sup> ask parents of K-6 students to only provide students with 'dumb phones'.</p> <p><b>Model 3A)</b> School-designated technology-free days (e.g. Technology-free Tuesdays). On a regular day (e.g. weekly or fortnightly) students are required to leave their mobile digital devices at home or hand them in at the beginning of the school day and collect them after school. An example includes St Paul's Catholic College (NSW).</p> <p><b>Model 3B)</b> School-designated technology-free times and spaces. Use is permitted in specific physical locations and/or at certain times only. Examples include Wodonga Senior Secondary (VIC)<sup>12</sup> and Newington (NSW)<sup>13</sup>.</p>
4	<p><b>No restriction</b> on unauthorised use of mobile devices in school hours (including during school excursions and extra-curricular activities on school grounds). To be effective, this model requires that the school actively work with students and their families - both formally and informally - to ensure they understand their responsibilities to themselves and others regarding appropriate mobile digital device use. This model allows individual teachers to make their own rules for their own classroom. The school needs to have a well-developed policy around the encouragement and enforcement of students' safe, responsible and informed use of mobile digital devices, and to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to support such use. An example includes Wantirna College (VIC)<sup>14</sup>.</p>
5	<p>The <b>active promotion</b> of the use of mobile devices for educational and other purposes, during school hours. To be effective, this model requires that the school actively work with students and their families - both formally and informally - to ensure they understand their responsibilities to themselves and others regarding appropriate mobile digital device use. The school needs to have a well-developed policy around the encouragement and enforcement of students' safe, responsible and informed use of mobile digital devices, and to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to support such use. Schools need to understand and ensure their legal responsibilities to ensure students' duty of care. Teachers need to be supported to develop the skills and resources to maximise the potential of devices in classroom teaching.</p>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/distracting-and-addictive-school-rules-for-mobile-phones-20180922-p505dc.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wssc.vic.edu.au/?p=28066>

<sup>13</sup> 'Students may access their mobile phone at recess and lunchtime to briefly check for important messages. Students are not permitted to use their mobile phones for phone calls'. Newington Mobile Phone Policy.

<sup>14</sup> [http://wantirnacollege.vic.edu.au/images/pdf-files/Parent\\_Information\\_Handbook\\_2016.pdf](http://wantirnacollege.vic.edu.au/images/pdf-files/Parent_Information_Handbook_2016.pdf)

The review team acknowledge that there are variations on all of these models, and encourages schools to work closely with their student and parent communities to adapt the above models in ways that suit their particular circumstances. Indeed, the review team heard evidence to suggest that the best possible uptake of mobile digital device policy requires the support of both parents and students and that schools are most likely to achieve such support when there is a meaningful parent and student consultation process to guide the development of the school's policy/approach on mobile digital devices. The review team also heard evidence that, regardless of what kind of policy a school chooses to adopt, such policies are most successful when they are introduced with enough lead time to ensure that the rationale for the policy is adequately explained to everyone concerned.<sup>15</sup> Further, the review team notes that appropriate communication and training of teachers regarding the enforcement of the school's policy on mobile digital devices is vital to the success of any such policy.

The review team notes that the lack of available evidence about the negative effects of students' use of mobile phones at school has not been an impediment to the implementation of prohibitions on the use of smartphones and/or other mobile devices on countries such as the UK, (where 98% of schools<sup>16</sup> have some form of prohibition on mobile phones) France<sup>17</sup>, Albania<sup>18</sup>, Greece<sup>19</sup> and states in the United States of America (for example, Wisconsin<sup>20</sup>). However, the review team finds that, in the absence of such evidence, secondary schools are best positioned to determine the best policy for their school community.

### **Recommendation – Commission world-first, independent, qualitative and quantitative research**

**In addition to research previously mentioned, the review team recommends that the NSW Government commission world-first, independent, qualitative and quantitative research into a range of related issues, specifically:**

- How and why primary and secondary school students use mobile devices in the classroom.
- The harms and benefits of smartphones in the school playground or yard.
- Children's experience of the interface between

home and school vis-à-vis consistency of rules and approaches, and support for their safe, responsible and informed use of mobile devices, including how teachers and parents may role model effective practice.

- How school staff (teachers and administrative staff) use mobile devices in their personal and professional lives and what scope there is to leverage these practices to enhance teaching practices, classroom management and pastoral care.
- To what extent schools might harness the potential of mobile devices and apps to enhance the building blocks of young people's wellbeing, particularly sleep, diet, exercise and mindfulness.
- The specific needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in relation to supporting their safe, responsible and informed use of mobile devices.
- What parents currently know about cyber safety, how they learned it and how they might be skilled to support their children's safe, responsible and informed use of mobile devices and, conversely, how children might be supported to upskill their parents.
- The efficacy of current cyber safety educational interventions being deployed in NSW schools for both students and parents, including products promoted by external cyber safety education providers as well as those from the NSW Department of Education and other schooling authorities.
- The needs of both pre-service and existing teachers vis-à-vis the management and use of mobile devices in the classroom to inform the development of any necessary training resources or programs.
- How existing policies compare with best-practice internationally, and how effectively they are being implemented by NSW schools.
- The risks and benefits of the use of smartwatches in schools and schools' current policies.
- How families and schools are using various technical solutions in tandem with policies to protect students from risks of harm stemming from mobile device use while at school.

<sup>15</sup> New schools, such as John Edmondson High School, have developed their mobile digital device policy prior to opening, without student and parent consultation, and have achieved the support of student and parent communities.

<sup>16</sup> Jamie Doward (16 May 2015). "Schools that ban mobile phones see better academic results". The Guardian.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/france-school-mobile-phone-ban-takes-effect-20180906-p5023k.html>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/03/c\\_137366699.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/03/c_137366699.htm)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/greek/en/article/2018/06/26/greece-bans-mobile-phones-schools>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/wisconsin/articles/2018-09-15/wisconsin-school-districts-ban-cellphones-in-classroom>

All such research should consider any differences between metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations; single-sex and co-educational environments; and Catholic, independent and government schools. The review team recommends that, where possible, such research should draw on both quantitative and qualitative methods; deploy an interdisciplinary approach; and engage school management, teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders in the generation of evidence and findings.

### **Recommendation – Better utilise agencies with requisite expertise**

**The review team recommends that the Office of the eSafety Commissioner be consulted on any policy initiative or reform that pertains to the safe, responsible and informed use of mobile digital devices in NSW schools.**

As a government advisory agency and regulator, it possesses the required expertise to guide cyber safety initiatives in NSW schools.

## **Principles guiding all of the review team’s recommendations**

The relationship between the risks of harm and benefits associated with children’s and young people’s digital media use is complex. The international evidence base demonstrates that not all children and young people are equally at risk of harm in relation to their use of digital media. Although all children and young people can at times be vulnerable to online risk, research consistently shows that those who are most vulnerable offline are those who are more vulnerable online, and our efforts need to focus more closely on those students.<sup>21</sup> Research shows that navigating some degree of risk of harm can enable children and young people to develop the skills to foster their resilience.<sup>22</sup> We also know that encouraging children and young people to develop their digital skills and literacies and to

explore the creative and technical dimensions of digital media can help to mitigate the risks of harm they face online, because it prepares children to better deal with them. But the majority of children and young people do not regularly engage in these more advanced digital practices.<sup>23</sup>

As the global research, policy and practice environment grapples with the complex question of how to support children and young people to maximise the positive potential of their digital media use, while minimising the risks of harm, rights-based approaches have surfaced as a productive framing to guide decision-making and the design of effective policy, education and interventions. The Convention for the Rights of the Child – the most widely ratified human rights convention in history – stipulates that all children have three kinds of rights: rights to provision, protection and participation.<sup>24</sup> The review team notes that, by attending to all three of these categories, we can begin to balance most effectively children’s protection from harm online alongside their provision needs – for example, their access to technology and to online content in a language they can speak – and their participation in the digital age.

The review team recommends that principles of equity must drive our approaches to legislation, policy and programmatic responses to children’s and young people’s use of mobile digital devices. Given they are at a higher risk of potential harm, it is urgent that the government and schools prioritise the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Further, the review team notes that, because children and young people don’t always distinguish between the ‘online’ and the ‘offline’ in the same ways that many adults do<sup>25</sup>, our approaches must seek to leverage the relationship between online and offline spaces in promoting children’s and young people’s safe, responsible and informed use of mobile digital devices.

Other principles guiding the review team’s work include:

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Third, A., Livingstone, S. & Lansdown, G (2019) ‘Recognizing children’s rights in relation to digital technologies: Challenges of voice and evidence, principle and practice’, Handbook on Human Rights and the Digital, Chando; Third, A. (2016), Researching the benefits and opportunities for children online, London: UNICEF & Global Kids Online. Available at: [www.globalkidsonline/opportunities](http://www.globalkidsonline/opportunities)

<sup>22</sup> Third, A. (2016), Researching the benefits and opportunities for children online, London: UNICEF & Global Kids Online. Available at: [www.globalkidsonline/opportunities](http://www.globalkidsonline/opportunities)

<sup>23</sup> Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in digital inclusion: children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 9 (4), 671–696.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Livingstone, S, Lansdown, G. & Third, A. (2017) The case for a UNCRC General Comment on Children’s Rights and Digital Media: A report prepared for the Office of the Children’s Commissioner of England. London, LSE Consulting. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Case-for-general-comment-on-digital-media.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/the-faceless-bullies-ng-b88825439z>

- The shared responsibility of students, parents, teachers, schools and the government to work together to ensure students' safe, responsible and informed use of mobile digital devices and media.
- The need to provide universal access matched by tailorable solutions and strategies.
- The feasibility and viability of options.
- The need to develop dynamic, flexible and responsive strategies in the context of a rapidly changing technological environment which will soon feature, for example, artificial intelligence and virtual reality.
- A holistic approach to child and youth wellbeing.

## Findings – mobile digital device use and attitudes towards it

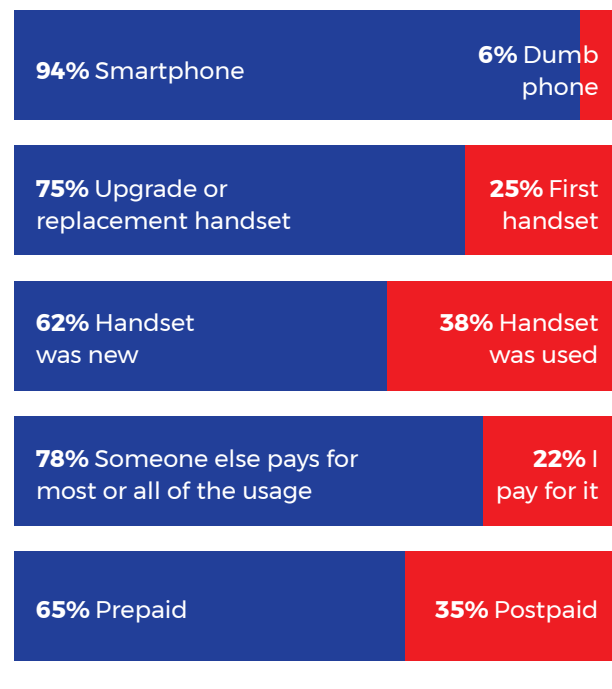
Smartphones and other digital devices are ubiquitous and their use by young people is a fact of everyday life. The review team notes that the Australian Child Health Poll has found that almost all Australian teenagers, two-thirds of primary school-aged children and one-third of pre-schoolers now have access to a tablet or smartphone.<sup>26</sup>

*The need to educate students on the responsible use of technology needs to be enacted at a very early stage.*

**NSW Teachers Federation**

The mobile environment is recognised as an essential and immersive aspect of our current day-to-day lives, and one in which students are often both knowledgeable and comfortable. The research conducted as part of this review found that parents recognise smartphones as essential features of day-to-day life, including for students. They see their child having a smartphone as an inevitability. They also realise that smartphones are continuing to become more useful and more prevalent in society.

### Australian Mobile Phone Owners aged 14-17 (Roy Morgan)<sup>27</sup>



<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ourphn.org.au/young-children-owning-smartphones-new-normal-australian-child-health-poll-finds/RCH> Health Poll, 2018,

<sup>27</sup> Roy Morgan Single Source Australia, July 2015 – June 2016, sample n = 512 Australian Mobile Owners aged 14-1



Australian teens are in step with their overseas counterparts in terms of use of internet via mobile phones and take-up of smartphones.

### Teens going online globally (Australian Communications and Media Authority)<sup>28</sup>

Internet-enabled devices	US teenagers (12-17 years) Sep-2014	UK teenagers (12-17 years) Apr-Jun 2015	Australian teenagers (14-17 years) Jun 2015
Use a mobile phone to access the internet	91%*	65%	65%
Use a computer to access the internet	88%	85%	74%
Own/have a smartphone	73%	69%	80%

\*Data reflects those using a 'mobile device', not just mobile phone. Data collected by internet survey methodology.

Base: Australia: people aged 14-17 years; US: people aged 12-17 years; UK: people aged 12-15 years.

Note: Teenage activities can be difficult to compare internationally, as research of this age group is limited, and international agencies use different methodologies and age bases.

Only 18.67% of the secondary students who responded to the survey developed by the review team indicated they did not use a mobile device at school.

Smartphones and other digital devices are utilised for a range of purposes in school settings. School-related activities, listening to music and sending text messages were the primary use of mobile devices by most students during a school day, with some also gaming and shopping online. In contrast to the survey results, the students in focus groups identified engagement in social media as the primary use of smartphones. Students reported that they also use smartphones to occupy themselves if they consider a class boring. Students and teachers reported mobile devices being used extensively by some students to communicate with each other during the school day, sometimes during lessons, pointing to the difficulties of classroom management due to the unauthorised use of mobile phones in school. The review team noted the US research<sup>29</sup> 'Hold the phone! High School Students' Perceptions of Mobile Phone Integration in the Classroom', published in 2016, which found that although

seven out of 10 students interviewed thought mobile phones support learning, serious concerns still exist among 30% of respondents, who feel the negative effects of smartphones justify a school-wide ban.

*With smartphone ownership so high, for many children, their first personal device is more likely to be a smartphone than a laptop. Research indicates that children and young people (as opposed to older adults) use smartphones as 'minicomputers', with the smartphone the primary tool used to access the internet, research, stream video and audio and create video and photographs.<sup>30</sup> For many tasks students undertake at school such as creating video and taking photographs smartphones may be more robust, easier to use, and create a better result than using a laptop or other device.*

**Australian Computing Academy at the University of Sydney**

<sup>28</sup> Sources: US data for mobile devices and own/have a smartphone: Amanda Lenhart, Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015, Pew Research Internet Project, 9 April 2015; US data for 'use a computer to access the internet': Amanda Lenhart, Teens and Technology—Understanding the Digital Landscape, Pew Research Internet Project, 25 February 2014; UK data: Ofcom, Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2015, November 2015; Australia data: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

Access to mobile devices can support students with specific mental health and medical conditions and learning difficulties to learn, communicate and interact effectively.<sup>31</sup> A range of submissions received from organisations have highlighted the benefits of students being able to access a range of information and continuous support via smartphones during the school day, noting that under the right circumstances devices can powerfully support young people's health and wellbeing. Some parents report their children need access to their mobile device throughout the school day. Some devices have apps that assist with diabetes management, for instance. Similarly, in addition to the music feature, some parents feel that access to mobile devices generally could be beneficial for students with an autism diagnosis or anxiety.

Many parents consider the move to high school as the appropriate time for their child to have a smartphone, with most children getting a phone around this time period. At this point, they are more likely to travel independently to and from school. Other triggers for children's uptake of smartphones included parents returning to work and wanting to have easy communication with the child; parents upgrading their own phone and consequently having a spare handset; concerns around the child's safety as they travel more independently to and from school; and peer pressure to have a mobile device.

Receipt of a first phone was generally met with a degree of excitement by students, and for many was seen as a recognition of their growing maturity and a measure of responsibility for owning and using a mobile device. Students also welcomed the opportunity the mobile devices presented to manage their social interactions. There is a clear opportunity at this juncture for parents and schools to work with young people to promote safe, responsible and informed use of smartphones.

*There is no single solution to managing the risks that mobile devices might present. However, educating young people to be socially responsible users of digital technology is one of the most effective and enduring strategies that can be adopted.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

The mobile environment was also recognised as simultaneously opening up a large range of distractions, online dangers and problematic behaviour.

Teachers raised concerns about some parental behaviours and expectations, including that some parents have an expectation that they can communicate with their children at any time during the day. Some parents are using phones to react immediately (and sometimes negatively) to their child being disciplined by a teacher. Some parents are also bypassing school administrative procedures and removing their child from school (for a variety of reasons) without the school's awareness.

It was apparent to the review team that students often experience stark differences in the regulatory approaches of parents and schools. This highlights the need for greater consistency of approaches between home and school contexts, as well as the importance of educating parents about school policies and procedures.

*Schools and school systems that provide a particular device to students, such as Chromebooks, or have a BYOD policy, generally provide information and training to students and teachers on their use. Most, if not all, schools will also require that parents attend a parent session on acceptable use agreements, with some schools also requiring that parents sign the agreement alongside their child.*

*Parents also indicated that responsible use of technology (whether that be personal mobile devices or school supplied laptops or tablets) should form part of the orientation/induction program for all families when they first enrol in a school so that teachers, parents and students understand not only the benefits and risks associated with technology but also the school's rules and consequences for breaching those rules. Parents also indicated that schools could provide more advice to parents about how to set expectations at home with regard to the appropriate use of smartphones and other devices.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

Whereas teachers and parents focused their concerns on mobile devices, some students saw mobile devices as no different from laptops. They reported instances of watching movies and undertaking other non-educational online activities in class-time with no intervention from teachers. The teachers' tacit approval (due to non-intervention) meant that some students could not see why certain policies singled out smartphone use as a special case for attention and regulation. In doing so, they intimated that a narrow and perhaps prejudicial approach to smartphones suggested schools' lack of understanding about digital technologies and platforms, digital life, practices and the learning and related opportunities that digital devices afford. Many students recognised the contradictory attitudes towards the regulation of different devices and platforms, and this mediated their view of the right to have smartphones available to them at all times.

Mobile devices are one of many technologies available to students in classrooms and these are differently valued and regulated, despite the fact that they enable similar (but not identical) practices. This suggests that there is scope for some schools and teachers to develop a more coherent understanding of, and approach to, the place of digital devices in the classroom and in the curriculum.

In the evidence generated by the review's consultation process, the review team noted that, in their responses, teachers, parents, and older students assumed that, as children and young people develop and mature, so too does their capacity to self-regulate in relation to their responsible digital use. This informed a common view that younger children were less able to regulate their own behaviour and more vulnerable to inappropriate use and exploitation. Despite this common view, it is important to note that such a developmentalist approach is theoretically and pedagogically contentious, with some researchers pointing out that young children have greater knowledge and capacity than adults often credit them with. That is, while many adults consider it is important to protect children and young people from what are thought to be difficult or inappropriate knowledge and practices, children's perceptions of the challenges of engaging online do not always match those of the adults in their lives.<sup>32</sup> This gap between adult perceptions and the worldviews of children can result in attempts to

support children that miss the mark.

Further, teachers identified the use of mobile devices in classrooms as an issue of equity for students who did not have access to laptops or PCs at their school. In these instances, mobile devices became the default tool for internet searches and other web-based learning activities. This underscores that fact that, as much as mobile devices are tools used by students for personal purposes, they are also tools that can facilitate learning about the appropriate usage of digital devices and social media platforms, including: digital etiquette; privacy; respect; cyber safety; critical appraisal of information; respectful communication; relevant laws; and so on. The review team notes that it is therefore incumbent upon the school provider (government or non-government) to ensure that all students have access to a suitable device where families are not in a position to provide one for their children.

*CSNSW also acknowledges that cyberbullying, image-based abuse and access to pornography are all potentially facilitated by mobile devices but these are also community problems and need to be addressed in a holistic, multi-modal, way.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

Although the terms of reference for the review focused on the non-educational use of mobile devices, it was often difficult to easily distinguish between educational and non-educational use. For example, some teachers were confident users of technology in their personal and professional lives and drew on their personal experience with technology when integrating it into their classroom teaching, highlighting that mobile digital devices are not always exclusively pedagogical or personal. Further, students' use of mobile digital devices for social purposes are frequently interconnected with their communication for educational purposes. Further, in the survey responses some teachers and students reported that some teachers allowed disruptive students to sit at the back of the room with unrestricted access to their mobile devices as a way of 'keeping them quiet' so that the rest of the class 'could get on with their learning'. In such instances, it appears that non-educational use is a practice or strategy encouraged by some teachers as a way of managing disruption to delivery of educational content.

The evidence considered also highlighted that mobile devices are not simply, or only, technological. Responses from teachers, students and parents highlighted the extent to which mobiles are not seen as simply, or only, technological devices. That is, discussion of them always points to the extent to which they are embedded in extensive networks of platforms, people, practices and relationships. This highlights the social and relational function of devices, and the ways in which different social relationships with peers, teachers, parents, online friendship groups and so on, define the purposes and frequency of use. Mobile devices are already present in the school context, and this presence is sometimes contentious and associated with perceptions of risk or benefit. However, both these risk and benefits are embedded in the relationships they enable among peers, families, teachers and social networks.

The review team acknowledge that the influence of smartphones in schools is deeply dependent on context and can result in both positive and negative effects often simultaneously and we discuss these in the following section.

## Findings – risks and harms and the extent to which these are exacerbated by mobile device use

The review team notes growth in not just the quantum of students bringing smartphones to school, but also that they are doing so at an earlier age than ever before, and that their use and misuse in classrooms and playgrounds have opened up new challenges for parents, teachers and schools in managing behaviours; managing distraction in class; reducing cyberbullying; and fulfilling adults' duty of care responsibilities to children and young people in the school environment.

*Firstly, the negative experiences that young people may encounter online are not limited to occurring while they are in the classroom. Our research tells us that cyberbullying is an extension of young people's increasing digital engagement and what is occurring in their everyday lives, especially the playground at school. In fact, much of the cyberbullying we manage is peer to peer and the nexus of the conflict often sits within the school community.*

*A solution focused only on the classroom setting therefore does not take account of the complex behavioural and social issues that are playing out online and, potentially, deals with only a fraction of the issue.*

*The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse affirmed the important role the Office has in educating parents, communities and students and helping schools to manage online risks in their contexts. In response to the Royal Commission recommendations, we are working closely with the Department of Education to develop an cyber safety plan, which will include a suite of resources and tools to support schools in cyber safety efforts.*

**Office of the eSafety Commissioner**



*The review team notes in particular: '... The use of smartphones in classrooms can be problematic, distracting and anxiety inducing. When not being used specifically for learning they can interrupt lessons. They can detract from social interaction with peers and engagement with the world when used inappropriately. The misuse of smartphones can have implications for cybersafety and cyberbullying/image-based abuse'.*

### **National Centre Against Bullying**

The review team noted that only 40.97% of students (primary and high school) who responded to the survey developed for the review considered there to be risks associated with using mobile devices at school. The review team noted that the older cohort of students in years 11 and 12 seems to have a greater understanding of the risks than their years 7 to 10 counterparts.

Below we outline the key risks of harm associated with the use of smartphones in schools that were identified by the review team.

### **Distraction**

The consensus across all audiences – educators, parents and students – was that mobile devices are often a distraction in the classroom. For teachers, they were perceived to be a source of frustration, with considerable teaching time lost to enforcing (or attempting to enforce) mobile device rules.

*The last decade has been one of disorienting technological change, and the effects are being felt in schools across the globe. On some estimates, half of students are now online 'almost constantly'.<sup>33</sup> Initial research suggests that the cognitive costs may be alarmingly high. Ward et al.'s 2017 study links the mere presence of a smartphone on the desk to declines of c.10% and c.5% in working memory and fluid intelligence respectively<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, mobile devices mean that social connections, entertainment and information have never been so easily accessible. In BIT's own research, young people have emphasised the need for a nuanced understanding of the issue. There are both major positives and negatives to young people's use of technology in general, and*

*mobile digital devices in particular.*

### **The Behavioural Insights Team (UK)**

Some illustrative quotes provided in survey responses and confidential submissions include:

*If you're on your phone in class you're not really listening.*

#### **Student (years 9-10)**

*It interferes with your education ... like in Business, I don't even know what I learnt this year because I was on my phone ... I just get so distracted.*

#### **Student (years 11-12)**

*I don't know how they study ... they are actually sitting there with their books and the phone going constantly, and I don't know how they do it ... I couldn't study like that.*

#### **Parent**

*kids will become more antisocial. they wont focus on their schoolwork. the teachers cant set boundaries for anything the kids are doing or watching on their phones.*

#### **Student (years K-6)**

*I think that if phones are to used at school, students like me, might be more focused on using their phones than learning. As well as that there is a chance that their phone can get broken, stolen or damaged.*

#### **Student (years K-6)**

*There's a time to use them, there's a time not to use them. You're there to learn.*

#### **Parent**

*It's not unusual to discipline 5-6 kids in a given class.*

#### **Teacher**

*From a teacher's point of view, I understand why they'd want to get rid of phones completely.*

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teens, social media & technology 2018. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

<sup>34</sup> Ward, A.F., Duke, K., Gneezy, A., & Bos, M.W. (2017). Brain drain: the mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces cognitive capacity. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2(2), 140-154.

### **Student (years 9-10)**

*Smartphones are now the greatest endemic problem within a school context in terms of their negative impact upon learning, bullying, teaching, administrative time, educational outcomes/results and social interactions.*

### **Teacher**

*The use of the phones in the classroom is a constant source of argument. You shouldn't have to start your lesson arguing with the kids to put their phones away.*

### **Principal**

*Australian classrooms should be environments in which children and young people can learn safely and without unnecessary distraction. Students should not be engaging on social media or using digital devices for personal purposes during classroom hours.*

### **Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

*There is little doubt that time on phone has an impact on learning opportunity. Concentration is necessary to work through complex and challenging problems, and phones can distract from the task at hand.*

### **Australian Council on Children and the Media**

For some students and teachers there was feeling that the negative impact of mobile devices on the classroom experience was out of control, with teachers accepting they had lost the 'battle' in managing students' use of devices during class time. Some illustrative quotes from survey responses and confidential submissions include:

*Some teachers just teach and they keep going ... even if everyone's on their phone.*

### **Student (years 9-10)**

*I've had groups of girls just all of a sudden get up and walk out because they've got a text from a friend saying they're having a meltdown in another class. They don't even have the courtesy to explain the situation. It's literally that brazen.*

### **Teacher**

*Sometimes, there is a class that everyone is on their phone. When the whole class is doing it, they (the teacher) just give up.*

### **Student (years 9-10)**

*When I was in my class, my classmates were using mobile phones all over the lesson and my teacher was yelling her voice but still they didn't listen.*

### **Student (year unknown)**

Some teachers also highlighted that significant time was wasted managing mobile devices in the classroom, which diminished the time spent delivering the syllabus. A number of organisations echoed this sentiment, and focused on the additional burden on teachers of having to enforce smartphone policies in addition to teaching. This highlights the need for teacher training and support in managing and maximising the benefits of mobile devices in class.

*Class time would increase significantly!*

### **Teacher**

*The sheer amount of time taken up dealing with non-school related phone use is a severe problem.*

### **Teacher**

*It is unclear how any prohibitions could be reliably enforced for personal mobile phones, and would place an undue burden on teachers who already sacrifice substantial education time to policing behaviour.*

**Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne; Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film, and Journalism, Monash University**

*As avoiding MDD\* use requires self-control, students' urge to check their MDD in class requires a high level of policing from teachers. In schools where students are permitted to have devices on their person disruptions to classes are almost impossible to avoid.*

*\*Mobile digital device*

**Dr Danielle Einstein, Insights Project,  
Department of Psychology, Macquarie  
University**

*Most teachers are acutely aware of the disruption one [unauthorised] mobile phone can cause to a working classroom...The ping of a single text message can cause everyone who was previously focused on the lesson to stop what they are doing, even involuntarily, for a moment and think about their own device...It will take a little while for the class teacher to get the pupils to focus again on their work...This interruption to learning might only last for a few minutes but all of these minutes add up.*

**National Centre Against Bullying**

Smartphones in class may detract from students' educational progression. Some respondents claimed that smartphones act as a major distraction. It is apparent that some students use their smartphones in class, even if their school's policy or teacher does not allow it. Some students also use them to distract others (including students in other classes). Rules are often applied inconsistently, and students admit to taking advantage of more lenient teachers. Smartphones at school generally can be a distraction for students whose parents are constantly in contact with them or vice versa. Teacher's perceptions were that some parents expect their children to be contactable at all times. Some educators and experts thought that this can take away from their child's ability to build independence and resilience.

*Students in years 8-10 were asked to rate how regularly they used social media, as well as the regularity with which their parents contacted them. In our sample of 1,975 students, at commencement, on average, students reported using social media 5-10 times a day. The initial post data set suggests that MDD\* use and anxiety are closely linked. Specifically, social media use is positively correlated with social anxiety such that the more regularly social media is used the more likely the students are to have higher levels of social anxiety. Additionally, the more parents message (or expect teens to message) to check that they arrive wherever they are going, the more separation anxiety the teens feel.*

*\*Mobile digital device*

**Dr Danielle Einstein, Insights Project,  
Department of Psychology, Macquarie  
University**

The review team though not considering educational outcomes, noted the recent study by the London School of Economics which revealed that, where mobile use in school was prohibited, test scores of 16-year-olds increased by over five per cent; which the researchers estimated corresponded to an extra working week to the school year. The researchers noted that there are both scholastic and monetary repercussions; in comparison with prolonging teaching time, the economic resources required to implement a phone ban would be considerably less<sup>35</sup>.

The review team also notes the recent research by Finnish researcher Dr Sahlberg who suggests that smartphone-related distraction is a key explanation for Australia's drop in the International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings<sup>36</sup>, although the team also recognizes considerable variation between States and remains circumspect about simple causal explanations. Dr Sahlberg maintains that smartphones are doing most damage at the primary level<sup>37</sup>. 'Smartphones don't belong in primary schools or young children under 12. For the sake of fairness and equity, [banning them in early years] would be the best thing to do'<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1350.pdf> p,17

<sup>36</sup> Other reasons cited include participation in early childhood education, (A recent OECD report found that only 15 per cent of Australian three-year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program, compared to the OECD average of 70 per cent, which could be directly impacting PISA results) teacher training (particularly in the area of mathematics) and support. Students in the lowest achievement bands are falling further behind and there are fewer students in the top achievement band.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.theeducatoronline.com/au/news/the-pros-and-cons-of-banning-phones-in-schools/251609>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.theeducatoronline.com/au/breaking-news/renowned-educator-calls-for-smartphone-ban/250479>

The review team support equity and accessibility and accept the evidence that the presence of mobile phones may be a distraction and in some cases can potentially reduce the quality of education on offer.

### **Bullying and cyberbullying**

The review team acknowledge that there is no credible, peer-reviewed literature about the extent to which the presence of mobile phones in recess and lunchtime increases the incidents of cyberbullying.

Even so, mobile devices – and, in particular, social media and messaging applications – were seen by some young people and teachers as amplifying existing bullying problems within a school community. The presence of mobile digital devices was seen as extending the bully’s reach both by potentially involving a larger number of students and providing opportunity for negative use of devices during recess and lunch times.

The review team recognises that mobile devices do not cause bullying, which is primarily an issue of attitude, relationships, respect and culture. As the recently released Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce Report put it: ‘Reducing cyberbullying among children and young people is fundamentally about respectful and positive relationships. There is no one specific strategy to reduce cyberbullying. Instead multiple, community wide actions are needed’<sup>39</sup>.

The review team acknowledges that there has been a paradigm shift in schools towards an emphasis on building social and emotional competencies and strengths-based solutions, which recognise the social and educational benefits of technology, including specific smartphone apps, web-based programs and biometric devices, while also reducing the likelihood of children putting themselves at risk. The team also notes that mobile devices can strengthen young people’s social ties and their sense of belonging, under the right circumstances.

### **Prevalence and cost of bullying and cyberbullying**

A recent report from PWC, *Economic Costs of Bullying*<sup>40</sup> demonstrated that for an estimated 910,000 children bullied during their school lives, (almost 25%) many experienced long lasting consequences. This and other research shows emphatically that all forms of bullying can have detrimental effects on young people in the short, medium and long term. The review team accepts that the costs associated with this bullying total \$2.4 billion, incurred while the children are at school and for 20 years after school completion, for each individual school year group. Costs are borne by individuals, families and communities and increase the likelihood of these young people engaging in risky behaviours such as alcohol and other drug abuse, chronic health issues and a greater likelihood of offending with impacts to productivity, and consequent family violence.

Regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying, it is difficult (according to Katz, et. al., 2014)<sup>41</sup> to precisely estimate prevalence as definitions of cyberbullying vary as does the timescale, frequency, sample selection, and mode of surveying the participants. Most contemporary research report lower rates for cyberbullying than for ‘traditional’ bullying in schools. However, there is a significant overlap between cyber and traditional face to face bullying<sup>42</sup>.

This review could not document the precise role of smartphones in cyberbullying given a lack of peer-reviewed evidence. While all bullying is abhorrent, cyberbullying is thought by some to be particularly virulent, due to the rapidity, widespread nature and permanency of the harmful content.

<sup>39</sup> Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce (2018): ADJUST our SETTINGS: A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland’

<sup>40</sup> The Economic Cost of Bullying in Australian Schools, (2018), The Alannah & Madeline Foundation and PricewaterhouseCoopers

<sup>41</sup> Katz, I., Keeley, M., Spears, B., Taddeo, C., Swirski, T., & Bates, S (2014). Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia: Synthesis report (SPRC Report 16/2014). Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia.

<sup>42</sup> Cyberbullying rarely occurs in isolation and is often a continuation of face-to-face bullying. Katz, I., Keeley, M., Spears, B., Taddeo, C., Swirski, T., & Bates, S (2014). Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia: Synthesis report (SPRC Report 16/2014). Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia.



Not all young people are equally affected by cyberbullying. The review team accept that some students are more at risk online. Those who are more at risk of harm can include, for example: members of the LGBTIQ community; those on the autism spectrum; individuals who have experienced trauma, or have a physical or intellectual disability; those who are from low SES backgrounds; have risk-taking tendencies; have family or interpersonal difficulties such as poor relations with parents, low self-esteem, or poor body image<sup>43</sup>; and those who identify as ethnically and/or culturally diverse, or as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI). It is vital that the government, schools, teachers and parents meet their duty of care to these children and young people and that efforts focus on maximising the benefits and minimising the risks of harm associated with their mobile digital media use.

The review team note that some evidence suggests that young people in ATSI communities are sometimes exposed to high levels of online violence including 'offensive content, racist, hate speech, which can create negative feelings and social fissures in remote communities where there is a relationship between online conflict and violent conflict offline'<sup>44</sup>.

*Certain groups are over-represented in levels of online bullying. These include LGBTIQ young people, those on the autism spectrum, young people who have experienced trauma, have a disability, are from low SES backgrounds, from other cultures, or from some remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, where the only access to online services is via mobile phone. In such communities, there is evidence that cyberbullying (as well as image-based abuse, and other offensive uses, such as filming and uploading fights)<sup>45</sup> is rife.*

**Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

In the evidence considered by the review team, many teachers noted that cyberbullying is occurring when devices are used at home or outside school but that the repercussions are being felt at school. The harms and risks associated with device use can only be mitigated through integrated solutions that recognise all the environments in which bullying is happening.

*The impact of these behaviours (cyberbullying and image-based abuse) inside and outside the classroom is significant and contributes to distress, shame, school refusal and absenteeism.*

**Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

While all audiences – parents, students, teachers and principals – recognised the role that mobile devices can play in relation to cyberbullying, students did not believe school policy relating to devices plays a significant part in regulating such behaviours. While students were often able to identify instances where information or images had been shared inappropriately, or used to bully a peer, they were clear that this would happen irrespective of whether or not mobile devices were available to them during the school day.

*If they're not doing it at school, they'll wait 'til they get home and destroy that kid at home.*

**Parent**

Indeed, the review team notes that policies of complete restriction of mobile digital device use in schools can potentially result in cyberbullying being relegated to after hours, limiting schools' capacity to detect incidents of cyberbullying and work with students to resolve issues. For those students who do not have the benefit of strong parental guidance at home, policies of complete restriction potentially place them at risk of not receiving the help and support they need to deal with cyberbullying.

*Restricting or prohibiting the use of mobile devices in school may cause behaviours such as cyberbullying to become less visible or detectable for teachers, parents and carers. It may also lead to children experiencing these often distressful behaviours avoiding seeking help for fear of reprimand or having their device confiscated.*

**Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

<sup>43</sup> Livingston, S. (2015). Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online: A review of existing knowledge regarding children and young people's developing sexuality in relation to new media environments NASCO.

<sup>44</sup> Rennie, E, Hogan, E & Holcombe-James, I 2016, Cyber safety in remote Aboriginal communities and towns: interim report, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Melbourne.

<sup>45</sup> Rennie, E., T. Yunkaporta & I. Holcombe-James (2018)



*It is...likely that, for some students, banning devices during school will displace bullying to times when they are unlikely to be surrounded by supportive peers or have adequate support from adults.*

**Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne, Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film and Journalism, Monash University**

Overall, the review team notes that the evidence from young people given to this review is that the presence of smartphones in schools at recess and lunchtime may increase the incidence of bullying and image-based abuse. There is a clear opportunity for schools to provide students with skills, knowledge and strategies to build their digital literacy and establish parameters for appropriate use.

### **Reduced opportunities for face-to-face social interaction**

Opinion was divided in terms of the impact mobile devices have on social interaction. For many students, parents and educators there was concern that it limits personal interaction, communication and physical activity. Others saw mobile devices as providing recreation, relaxation, and connection with peers. For students with a range of behavioural and mental health issues, it was recognised as a valuable coping mechanism.

The review team note the research of Rotondi et al., 2017<sup>46</sup> suggests that smartphones may interfere with social interaction and satisfaction and the work of Dwyer, et al, 2018 who have demonstrated that, during social interactions, young people felt more distracted and experienced lower enjoyment if they used their phones than if they did not.<sup>47</sup>

More than 73% of educators who responded to the survey developed for the review perceived that the presence of smartphones at recess and lunch reduced opportunity for social interaction during these break times.

Commentary received relating to social development afforded by constant mobile device usage includes:

*Over-reliance on mobile devices raises a risk of closing oneself off from interpersonal interaction and a concomitant loss of opportunities to play, build and ride. Communication through a device can mean that the nuances of voice, face and positioning are also lost.*

**Australian Council on Children and the Media**

*Allowing students to use smartphones during break times discourages authentic conversation between peers.*

**Teacher**

*You'll see 6 or 7 of them sitting in a stairwell, staring at a screen.*

**Teacher**

*Students hand in their phones to the office... This is part of the school's well established daily routines that the students are used to. Parents and caregivers support the policy. It means that students play, run around, read and interact all day. It works excellently.*

**Teacher**

*Often mobile phones are used at the expense of building face-to-face communication. Teenagers can hide by messaging someone, avoiding a more challenging conversation and leading to increased social anxiety.*

**Dr Danielle Einstein, Insights Project, Department of Psychology, Macquarie University**

<sup>46</sup> Valentina Rotondi, Luca Stanca, Miriam Tomasuolo, Connecting alone (2017): Smartphone use, quality of social interactions and well-being, Journal of Economic Psychology, Volume 63, Pages 17-26.

<sup>47</sup> Ryan J. Dwyer, Kostadin Kushlev, Elizabeth W. Dunn, Smartphone use undermines enjoyment of face-to-face social interactions, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 78, 2018, Pages 233-239.

## Excessive use of devices

Excessive use of devices was cited as a major concern for some teachers and parents. The evidence generated via the consultation demonstrates that there is a sometimes misguided faith in developmental logics that suggest that, while children are unable to self-regulate successfully in relation to their mobile digital media use, adults are capable of doing so.

As a counterpoint to this assumption, the review team notes research that finds adults, too, experience a range of challenges in regulating their use of mobile digital devices. This research relates to, for example, the use of social media and other non-work related digital platforms at work<sup>48</sup>; sleep deprivation due to disruption from checking social media throughout the night<sup>49</sup>; 'Fear of Missing Out' syndrome<sup>50</sup>; texting whilst driving and causing accidents<sup>51</sup>; access to the dark net<sup>52</sup>; purchase of online medications without prescription<sup>53</sup>; accessing and downloading pornography<sup>54</sup>; constantly tracking steps, heart-rate and calories burned.<sup>55</sup> This suggests that children are not the only ones to become overly attached to their devices and that there is scope to encourage adults to think more carefully about how they are role-modelling appropriate mobile digital device use for the younger generation.

The view that excessive use of devices as a societal issue, not solely an adolescent issue was shared by some parents in focus groups who commented:

*We're all in different rooms, on different devices, watching different things. It can break up a family in that way. You're all in the same house, but different rooms.*

### Parent

*I don't think we set a good example...it's too hard. (Parent talking about how they are aware of the need to be a good role model and that they frequently failed to demonstrate the self-regulation they were seeking from their children.)*

### Parent

Some teachers and students reported that teachers made use of their mobile devices during classes, which provided a poor example of self-regulation and undermined school policy. One teacher commented, for instance:

*'It starts with the teachers...If students witness their teacher casually ignoring the class just to text or go on social media, what message might that send to a year 7 student?'*

## Image-based abuse

The issue of image-based abuse is not confined just to students, but as the primary vulnerable population, young people must be protected from these harms as much as possible. The public sharing and/or posting of intimate images, often first shared in trust is a significant concern, and review team members, Susan McLean and Dr Michael Carr-Gregg note that while there is no Australian peer reviewed evidence, anecdotally young people often report to them that they are humiliated by the occurrence. They regularly observe that the sharing of these images within the school environment, and during the school day is becoming more common and is seen as an easy way to hurt or harm. Other issues reported to them include the unauthorised taking of pictures and videos in school change rooms and showers. Regardless of the policy option taken by a school, the review team believes that devices that can take photos or videos should be prohibited from being used in these environments where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy. This approach is consistent with that of most public change facilities.

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291018155\\_Social\\_Media\\_Use\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Dual\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291018155_Social_Media_Use_in_the_Workplace_A_Study_of_Dual_Effects)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/internet-is-causing-sleep-deprivation/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563213000800>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5030365/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.createdigital.org.au/dark-web-new-research-ai/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/pharmacies/dangers-of-buying-medicines-online/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/latest-porn-statistics-are-surprising-20180424-p4zbd8.html>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/24/fitness-trackers-out-of-step-when-measuring-calories-research-shows>

## Excessive time online

### Research from the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People

Children and young people themselves identify time spent on social media/the internet/technology/no face to face social interaction as the top issue facing children and young people today. The top issues facing children and young people today – according to children and young people themselves are:

Time spent on social media/internet/technology/no face to face socialisation – 19%  
Time spent on social media/internet/technology/no face to face socialisation – 19%  
Jobs/unemployment/opportunities – 14%  
Access to affordable education/good teachers/schools – 12%  
Mental health issues (anxiety, depression and eating disorders) – 11%  
Money/poverty/financial stress/cost of living 11%  
Bullying/cyber bullying – 11%  
Housing affordability – 10%  
Drugs/alcohol – 7%  
Stress (high expectations, pressure to succeed, school, work, family) – 6%  
Peer pressure/the need to fit in/being accepted – 6%  
Obesity/health and exercise issues – 6%  
Ageism/being taken seriously/stereotypes/negative opinions of younger people – 6%  
Discrimination/racism/equality – 5%  
Climate change/global warming/the environment – 3%  
Body image/appearance – 3%  
Domestic/child abuse/violence/neglect – 3%  
Other – 11%  
Don't know – 10%

Base total n=1,000

Q820: What do you think are the top issues facing all children and young people today?

The review team received evidence that parents are concerned about the amount of time their children are spending on devices, distraction, online danger and 'addictive' behaviour. Many parents consider spending time on a mobile device inherently less valuable than activities that are socially or physically interactive. They fear their children being vulnerable to pressures of social media interaction, grooming and accessing inappropriate content. House rules are often an

ongoing battle and a source of tension and some parents acknowledge there are challenges in enforcing rules at home. Teachers noted similar challenges in schools where restrictive policies are already in place.

While there is no evidence of a direct link, the research does suggest that for young people more than 2 hours on social media is associated with poorer mental health and can be problematic for at least 5% of students.<sup>56</sup> Further, 20% of young people reportedly wake during the night to check their social media feeds. This suggests that excessive social media can be detrimental to young people's wellbeing<sup>57</sup>. A 2017 review of the latest research on the topic showed that social media use for a minority of individuals is associated with a number of additional psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, loneliness and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time in an era of mobile connectivity, time online is no longer a very meaningful measure on its own. Rather, what is important is the kind and quality of interaction online. Parents' understandable concern about time online highlights a clear opportunity to educate parents, teachers and young people about what constitutes a positive online experience.

*Much smartphone use is so compulsive as to become automatic. In many cases, we have our phone out in our hand before we're fully conscious of wanting to check it. This is not an accident: many apps compete for attention by using a combination of powerful behavioural science tools, such as unpredictable rewards schedules.*

#### The Behavioural Insights Team (UK)

Some school environments – such as boarding schools, special education, alternative education, lower SES schools, schools with a higher proportion of ATSI students, distance education, and central schools – present unique challenges in regards to mobile digital device use.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/guest-blog-social-media-family-life-and-wellbeing.html>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/guest-blog-social-media-family-life-and-wellbeing.html>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/14/3/311>

### Findings – benefits of mobile device use

- Young people told the review team that digital media and mobile devices are essential to their everyday lives and mandatory 21st century tools that are critical to their sense of identity and generational belonging. Many spoke of losing access to digital media in highly emotive terms, describing the sense of loss when separated from their device as akin to the loss of a limb.

*We are seeing many students refuse to put phones away as directed by the teachers, they are unwilling to allow the phone to be confiscated and they see the phone as a right to have access to at all times. The devices are an issue in the playground and they are an obstruction to learning and application. Even poorer students have iPhone 8s and X phones - very expensive and delicate. For some it is the only good thing in their life they truly cherish and they would sooner lose a hand!*

#### **Educator (teacher or principal)**

Mobile devices are central to young people's social lives, their relationships with peers, family and broader networks, critical to their capacity to manage 'life admin', and their ability to undertake both formal and informal learning. They reported not being given adequate opportunity to learn about the benefits of technology and to imagine the possibilities it offers.

*We only get told about how negative social media is, I have never been taught throughout high school except for a single external talk that social media can be an amazing way of personal branding, and creating a profile of yourself that you can be proud of, and that a potential employer can view and see your achievements and hobbies. As I leave school this year, I wish I was taught this information before going into the workforce. Kinda disappointing to be honest.*

#### **Student (years 11-12)**

*Your able to communicate with all of your friends and your parents, technology will be a key part in our future and it will benefit us in the long run, it also allows trust between students and teachers. Having phones allows you to record memories at school and allows students to have a sense of independence and freedom.*

#### **Student (years 7-10)**

### **Educational use and value**

An assessment of the educational benefits of mobile devices in classrooms was outside the scope of this review. However, as the review progressed, it became clear that any consideration of the benefits associated with mobile digital media without attention to educational benefits would have been incomplete. Further, it became clear that any recommendations made by this review pertaining to the regulation of mobile device use in schools may have implications for students' capacity to realise educational benefits. Therefore, while our recommendations do not address the educational use or benefits of mobile devices, we canvass evidence presented by stakeholders below.

Mobile devices can be powerful education tools when used responsibly and increasingly children are learning and documenting their learning in formats other than traditional reading and writing. Indeed, the majority of educators who responded to the survey conducted by the review team indicated they used mobile devices as teaching tools or supports in class.

Many teachers and students use devices in ways that support educational outcomes. These include: checking timetables; using a timer or calculator; taking videos or photos of experiments, the whiteboard or for specific assignments; playing educational games; creating videos; watching video tutorials; collaborating with other children on a shared document or presentation; creating illustrations and animations; and using specialised apps. Some also value smartphones as research tools, being more portable and faster than tablets and computers with connectivity speeds that sometimes outpace the school's Wi-Fi. Parents also reported their children participate in these uses.



Even so, there is clear scope to better embed technology in the curriculum in order to nurture 21st century skills in students. Collaboration via online platforms is a requirement of the 21st century curriculum and workplace environment. Further, current initiatives demonstrate the NSW Government's own identification of smartphones as powerful learning tools. NSW's STEMShare program, for instance, includes iPhones in kits for students to explore virtual reality and augmented reality<sup>59</sup>. However, in the assumption that children will have access to mobile devices to complete tasks and collaborate with other students (for example preparing video entries to competitions), equity issues are at play.

The review team acknowledges that, as technology develops, it will provide further significant opportunity for learning, creating and connecting. Virtual and augmented reality and Artificial Intelligence will be an inevitable part of their education in the future<sup>60</sup>. As such, all young people from an early age need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and strategies to use these new technologies in a safe, responsible and informed way.

*Some tools used by students are frequently available as mobile apps. Indeed many coding and robotics tools rely on apps and Bluetooth connectivity to control them (for example sphero robots).*

*Another example where smartphones provide a superior experience is in the field of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). GIS allows for the use of location data to locate information around the school based on GPS triangulation. There are many educational applications for HSIE (Human Societies and the Environment) in this field.*

**Australian Computing Academy at the University of Sydney**

The review team acknowledges that mobile phones can and do, especially under teacher direction, provide students with opportunities for positive classroom learning experiences. Many smartphones contain apps which include a variety of useful learning tools. In terms of classroom management, the review team note the evidence that when teachers use students' smartphones in their classrooms for learning, they do not experience discipline problems related to mobile phone use<sup>61</sup>. There is clearly scope for the broader

integration of mobile devices into classroom learning. However, this is partly dependent on nurturing teachers' positive attitudes, values and beliefs around the use of these devices.

There was a recognition from some teachers, principals, parents and expert organisations that, while some educators are already working to embed technology – and mobile devices specifically – in their teaching practice, generally speaking, policy and practice need to be strengthened in order for the educational benefits of mobile devices to be realised.

*Some illustrative quotes provided to the review team include:*

*As to the education of children more generally, mobile devices have numerous benefits. They can effectively connect the school with home, thereby allowing the home to support the child's learning and the school to remain informed in real time about the child's progress at home. As a teaching tool mobile devices are effective, efficient and available. In addition, they allow for the student voice to be heard.*

*Mobile technology, similarly to other technology used by schools and teachers, such as, laptops, Virtual Reality/ Augmented Reality, and the resources of the internet and communications networks, can be a powerful and useful tool in the classroom for engaging children and encouraging critical thinking across all areas of the curriculum.*

*...we believe that there is space for the safe and responsible use of mobile technology for educational purposes in schools and that any benefits from safe and responsible use should not be overlooked if the risks can be appropriately managed by implementing a robust, practical and effective policy framework around mobile device use in schools.*

**Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association Ltd**

<sup>59</sup> <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/school-research-and-evaluation/research-and-evaluation-projects/past-evaluation-projects/stem-share>

<sup>60</sup> <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2018/8/2018-nmc-horizon-report>

<sup>61</sup> Walker, R., (2013) "I don't think I would be where I am right now". Pupil perspectives on using mobile devices for learning, Research in Learning Technology Vol. 21.



*All responses from schools, school authorities, parents and students, while acknowledging the challenges, spoke to the educational benefits that providing students access to mobile devices can provide. Mobile devices are seen as a valuable means to research, collect data, receive personalised and immediate feedback, record media, create, compose, and communicate with peers, in and beyond the classroom.*

### **Catholic Schools NSW**

*The use of applications in education is emerging and provides curriculum-based content in an engaging, user-friendly and interactive way. Examples of this type of learning have traditionally been seen through websites (such as Education Perfect, Mathspace, and Mathletics).*

### **ySafe**

*Our research findings on mobile learning in K-12 education indicate: mobile devices can and have been used by teachers, children and teens in Australia and overseas to enhance and transform teaching and learning; the use of mobile devices is associated with advances in contemporary learning and teaching approaches, such as the implementation of 21st Century learning, inquiry, problem-based learning, collaboration and differentiation...*

*Few teachers are designing m-learning tasks that require students to use mobile devices to participate in genuine, real-world community-based activities.*

**Associate Professor Matthew Kearney, Associate Professor Wan Ng, Professor Sandy Schuck and Professor Peter Aubusson, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre**

A minority of parents saw mobile devices as enhancing their children's skills and knowledge – either directly or via the information that they gain from the internet.

The review team also acknowledges, however, that the majority of parents, teachers and many students did not perceive a genuine educational

use for mobile devices. The review team notes that these sentiments suggest that public attitudes have either not kept pace with the use of technology in education or assume that students have access to other devices for the same purposes.

Both students and educators noted that, when there was reliable, good quality, regular access to iPad, tablet, laptop, or desktop technology, mobile device access was seen as having minimal additional educational value.

In contrast, in those schools with limited access to iPads, laptops and desktops, teachers and students were more likely to highlight the educational value of some of the functions available on a mobile device. In developing policy around mobile device access at school, educators were concerned that a more restrictive mobile device policy could introduce inequalities that could compromise students' educational progress. In schools where the quality of connectivity, or the availability of desktops and laptops, was not always optimal, mobile devices may represent the most viable option for connected learning.

*Many schools are moving towards bring your own device policies (BYOD), with a focus on tablets and laptops. This can place a significant financial burden on families. Research and evidence has shown that financially disadvantaged children and their families face barriers of social isolation, poor academic performance and unemployment as a result of a lack of understanding and limited, or no, access to information and communication technology.<sup>62</sup> The Academy believes that a more equitable approach is to encourage students to use technology that is affordable and accessible to them and their families. This may be a laptop, or it may be a smartphone. Being prescriptive and excluding smartphones from schools may deprive students of a technological tool that can enhance their learning opportunities.*

**Australian Computing Academy at the University of Sydney**

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/families-hit-with-rising-byod-school-technologycosts-20170126-gtz7sj.html> and <https://www.afr.com/technology/byo-technology-hikes-back-to-school-costs-20180124-hOnvk0#ixzz558u8G5Vj>, Sport, culture and the internet: Are Australian children participating? The Smith Family Research Report, June 2013

To ensure equitable access to the curriculum for students, smartphones may remain a necessary tool in delivering, among other things, the Science and Technologies syllabus in NSW schools.

*In Digital Technologies children investigate existing technologies and create digital solutions. In the words of NESA, 'students learn about the influence and relevance of science and technology in their lives now and in the future. The syllabus addresses important contemporary themes and general capabilities as students prepare to live and work successfully in the 21st century.'*

*Schools are free to deliver this syllabus in numerous ways. Even from kindergarten, children are required to identify the parts of digital systems and later, explore how instructions are used to control them. With smartphone penetration rates estimated at over 85%<sup>63</sup>, smartphones have become an indispensable part of modern life. To effectively introduce children to the Digital Technologies syllabus, it is important to acknowledge the existence of smartphones and to explore their features and functionality. We believe there are significant benefits to including smartphones in the toolset available to teachers to deliver the Digital Technologies syllabus.*

#### **Australian Computing Academy at the University of Sydney**

The NSW syllabus includes general capabilities, including the Information and Communication Technology capability. Though not considered in-depth by this review, the review team heard evidence that this capability is currently technically-focussed and that students may benefit from it being expanded to incorporate developmental skills such as self-regulation, as well as 21st century competencies, such as the capacity to work collaboratively online and in an agile and iterative fashion.

### **Mobile devices as aids to wellbeing**

Literature on the specific benefits of smartphones is scant. Research internationally shows that, under the right circumstances, digital media can powerfully support children's and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Digital media - and specifically, social media - can positively impact the key drivers of wellbeing, including: peer, family and intergenerational relationships;

developing a sense of identity; enhancing their sense of community and belonging; creating opportunities for self-expression, self-efficacy, civic and/or political participation; health monitoring and literacy; formal and informal learning, and so on<sup>63</sup>. Further, because of their ubiquity, relative anonymity and portability, mobile devices can assist with monitoring health and/or mental health conditions; promote connection to communities of support; and encourage help-seeking practices among groups who do not usually reach out for support.

While there is still not a comprehensive evidence base on the positive relationship between mobile devices and wellbeing, it is the review team's assessment that they can support students' wellbeing. For example, the review heard that many students used their mobile device to listen to music, either to aid their concentration during class, or to relax during recess and lunch. In general, there is a perception that using a mobile device to listen to music can be beneficial, both in and out of class. Many students also identify the value of meditation and mindfulness apps such as Smiling Mind, particularly at times of peak stress, such as exams.

Many students in NSW public schools rely on the use of a mobile phone or mobile device for a range of non-educational, daily functions including communication, health care and other reasons related to disability. Below are some examples where students with disability rely on the use of a mobile device at school for non-educational purposes:

#### **Students who are blind or have a vision impairment**

Students may need to magnify information to read it, so use their device or an inbuilt magnifier app for magnification; for example, to read their school timetable or the canteen menu or a sign.

- Students with low or no vision may require the use of a screen reader. Screen readers can be built in to a device or can be apps or software and provide access to digital information, not just educational content.
- Some students use apps or software to help them navigate the school and playground.
- Some students rely on the use of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) apps that assist in daily independence. These apps allow the student to take a photo of something and have the text read aloud, such as reading currency notes or labels on food etc.

<sup>63</sup> (Collin et al., 2011; Swist et al., 2015).

### Students who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Students may require the use of their mobile phone to control the volume and other settings in their hearing device.
- Some students require the live streaming of audio directly to hearing devices through a phone or device.
- Some students use mobile devices as portable audio recorders for taking notes, such as reminders for upcoming activities and tasks they need to follow up.

### Students on the autism spectrum

- Some students on the autism spectrum have difficulty with communication and may require the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) software or apps. This technology allows a student to replace or supplement their speech by selecting icons or images that produce speech for them. For example, a student could participate in discussions with their peers in the playground by selecting words or phrases to be spoken through their device.
- Some students have difficulty with sensory regulation and can become anxious. Students can use specific apps that help them monitor and regulate these emotions.
- Some students use apps and software that help them with their social skills. The apps may include video modelling of appropriate social skills in specific settings, such as the playground.

Parents of students recognise that mobile devices constitute a valuable playground coping mechanism for students with autism or other social and behavioural challenges. Other children and young people with a disability rely on tablets and other mobile devices to be able to communicate with others and to learn. Other benefits highlighted in the evidence received include for students with dyslexia, ADHD, and hearing and vision impairments.

*For many students with a disability, mobile devices can provide a means of social support and can enhance their ability to connect with others.*

#### Catholic Schools NSW

*Online support groups for my mental illness and meditation apps.*

#### Student (years 11-12)

*As a person who has a friend with ADHD, I see him in class listening to music and it helps him to focus on his work and not be distracted as much.*

#### Student (years 7-10)

*Benefits for electronic devices in school is for a student to learn/study while out in the playground or to relieve stress by listening to music. (If you have some mental illness eg. adhd)*

#### Student (years K-6)

Promoting a Universal Design approach to safe and respectable use of technology in schools will ensure the needs of all students are catered for.<sup>64</sup>

Some children and young people identified brain development as a benefit of online gaming, highlighting, for example, the strategic planning and problem solving skills required to compete successfully. Parents, on the whole, did not share in the perception of these benefits.

A surprising number of students considered mobile devices an aid to their wellbeing because they alleviate boredom in class. While the review team does not condone such uses, what this perhaps highlights is that there may be a mismatch between student and teacher expectations about what constitutes a positive and engaging learning environment. Given the centrality of digital media to contemporary young people's everyday experiences, there is much scope to bridge this divide by better integrating mobile devices into student learning.

### Connection to peer networks and communities of interest

Young people identified that they use the geolocation functionality of their mobile devices to locate peers in break time, and to map and plan a range of other interactions.

### Time management and balancing study with other life commitments

Secondary students in particular noted the organisational and time management benefits of having access to their mobile phones at school. Students report that mobile phones can assist in fulfilling their school-related commitments and managing their stress. Evidence generated by Mission Australia shows that time stress is a leading cause of concern for young people nationally<sup>65</sup>. The mobile phone is seen as a useful device for managing such stressors.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.washington.edu/doi/universal-design-education-principles-and-applications>

<sup>65</sup> Bullot A., Cave, L., Fildes, J., Hall, S. and Plummer, J. 2017, Mission Australia's 2017 Youth Survey Report, Mission Australia. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/706-five-year-mental-health-youth-report/file>

*I am able to access the internet to study using google docs (which I find more effective than books, allowing me access to the work I do at home as well) and study more effectively. By listening to music I am able to drown out any distracting background noise. As I have a part-time job, I occasionally get texts asking to work, or need to call my parents to organise my time immediately after school (e.g. picking my little sister up). Texting is useful so I can properly organise my time and not feel stressed about heading home when something needs to be done.*

**Student (years 11-12)**

### Personal safety

Many parents consider smartphones to be a safety device and an integral part of their parental duty of care. Students also shared this belief. Safety travelling to and from school is a commonly cited reason for having access to a device, particularly for students who travel significant distances and for students in primary school. Some parents consider having access to technology that enables real-time mobile tracking of their child's whereabouts as essential to their parental responsibilities.

*You can call your parents after school telling them who you will be walking home with and if there is an emergency.*

**Student (years K-6)**

*Many kids walk to and from school, and if they have a mobile device, they can text their parents to let them know they are at school/home safely. Also, if there is a sudden change of plans, for example, you have to pick your little sister up from the bus stop, your parent can just text you and let you know instead of them having to call the school and everyone has to run around.*

**Student (year 7-10)**

However, parents' faith in the mobile phone as a device that supports safety is often somewhat ambivalent. They recognise that, in some instances, mobile phones support safety, and sometimes they may compromise their children's safety. Catholic Schools NSW submission noted, for example, that while parents of secondary

students value devices as important for safety, communication and organisation, parents are simultaneously concerned about the social and mental health issues associated with excessive or inappropriate use of devices.

### Digital literacy benefits

Current trends in the development and uptake of new technologies suggests that mobile devices are already a key feature of many children's and young people's everyday lives and will become even more essential to their future lives. Research shows that, while greater access to technology potentially exposes children to a greater risk of harm, it also exposes them to greater opportunities, including that of increasing their digital literacy. Exposure to a range of digital devices, including mobile digital devices, at school enables children to develop the necessary skills and habits, in a supported environment, to successfully navigate complex digitally-mediated environments both now and into the future.

Notably, many students survey respondents noted the importance of technology, including mobile digital devices, for their future lives and careers.

*Technology advancements, for example we use laptops and computers a lot in most of my classes to make doing work a lot easier for the teachers and the students. When doing work, students share their work through google docs so teachers can keep track of where their students are up to whenever, wherever. Another reason would be the future, our future consists of technology and it's important we learn the skills and tools needed for when we are the generation in charge, because when it comes down to it all, we will be in government one day and we will be making the choices and listening to the student voice because they are who matter.*

**Student (years 11-12)**



*Students can learn skills that they will need in the future - technology constantly expands and improves and we need to learn so it will be useful for future jobs and careers.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*The benefits associated with the utilisation of mobile digital devices include: offering convenient access to an extensive range of learning resources and information which aren't available through non-digital methods; and preparing students for real-world scenarios and the future workforce in which most individuals will be required to be able to use digital devices.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

### Mobile devices as failsafe

Despite significant investment in school broadband infrastructure and hardware (e.g. the Australian federal government's Digital Education Revolution initiative, 2007-2013), technology and internet access in Australian schools remains variable. Many schools, particularly those in rural, remote, or lower socio-economic areas, still do not have fast and reliable connectivity and many struggle to maintain and upgrade hardware.

Students in particular noted that mobile devices provided a continuous point of connectivity in environments where school-provided technology is inadequate or out-of-date, or where school wifi access is slow or unreliable. Given that, in such circumstances the financial burden of connectivity lies with families, such reliance on mobile digital media potentially disadvantages some students. As such, consideration should be given to a review into the quality of school-based internet services to ensure that all students have access to an acceptable standard of connectivity that is fast, reliable and filtered. In the meantime, the review team urges schools to develop policies that take the speed and reliability of existing data infrastructure into account, and enable students to access the internet via personal data plans, where appropriate.

*School laptops are generally slow, there aren't always enough for every student and sometimes crash while phones are faster and students already bring them to class.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*The school wifi can be very slow at times and won't work on all devices. I can go to the school IT worker, but it takes out my valuable learning time, switching my data on and using my phone to research is both effective and less time consuming.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*School wifi is terrible, so using your phone can instantly bring up the thing you need to research or look at, in or out of class.*

**Student (years 11-12)**

### Access to information

Students identified that they use mobile digital devices to engage with a range of platforms, apps and software that they can use to access, manage and analyse information, including: Google classrooms, translation software, dictionaries, textbooks, document sharing and collaboration platforms, news outlets, presentation applications, among others. Many students noted that their mobile digital devices provide faster and more reliable access to information than is available via other devices. They also noted that mobile digital devices enable them ready communication with teachers. These factors need to be taken into account when schools are developing an appropriate policy.

*Japanese dictionary use for Japanese classes.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*When we use it for maths (textbook), Modern History (to access Onenote), also I use it to complete research activities/ assignments in class as well as use it to do work on Word, Powerpoint, etc.*

**Student (years 11-12)**



*We are able to contact parents easily and quickly. We can access news websites which are mostly blocked on our laptop.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*I check the news consistently throughout the school day.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*For a lot of our assignments we need to use google drive, google docs, or movie making software for filming and editing short videos. Phones in this case are much faster and more convenient for this, also checking google classroom and timetables to see what updates my teachers have left for me in the apps.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*Teachers can reach out to their students faster by using things like google classroom.*

**Student (years K-6)**

### **Communication benefits**

Parents value smartphones for allowing communication between themselves and their child. Use of mobile devices to coordinate travel to and from school, logistical arrangements with parents and carers, and communications with employers were all vital ways in which students used their devices, and reasons that they and their parents valued mobile devices.

Parents particularly valued mobile devices for providing a means for their child to communicate with them, specifically if they are worried or in danger. With the possession of a mobile device, parents felt able to allow their children greater physical independence travelling to and from school.

*Increased safety and availability of students. Parents can contact them more easily, messages do not get lost within communication systems.*

**Student (years 11-12)**

*Students can contact their family in the event of an emergency. It reduces the work of the office as they will not need to receive calls from parents and pass on messages. Plans can be made with family for after-school activities and students can contact their parents while public transport for safety reasons.*

**Student (years 7-10)**

*It is safer for children who travel home alone as they can keep in touch with parents and guardians.*

**Student (years K-6)**

Parents considered mobile devices particularly useful for emergencies and illness. Many educators, however, noted that the school office and administration staff could facilitate such communication without the need for a mobile device. Use of personal devices to contact directly a student by parent or vice versa can lead to a range of issues where a school is unaware of a situation or illness, or where a child leaves school without appropriate permission/process and is therefore unaccounted for. This highlights the importance of schools developing and clearly communicating a process for parents to contact their children during school hours.

*In the classroom students do not always follow directions to stay on task as they may be on Snapchat Facebook or playing games. They expect to listen to music despite mobile phone policy. Getting students to give up their phones due to misuse is impossible most times for the classroom teacher. Meetings and bullying are easily arranged via text or other methods. Students and parental contact can be negatively used as students get message from parent to leave school without going through admin office and can leave school without going through the proper channels.*

**Educator (teacher or principal)**

*Students believe they are entitled to use their phone for any reason at any time, this includes the idea that music is appropriate during any type of lesson where students are working independently. They also spend time during breaks on the phone rather than socialising. This means they do not have meaningful interactions with their peers or do any physical activity because they are always on their device. It can also be used to message other students inappropriately during school hours which can then be challenged by parents around issues such as cyber harassment happening while at school/ in class. Finally students often contact their parents directly when they are sick rather than report to the office for first aid and similarly try to avoid or pre-empt disciplinary action by contacting parents who sometimes turn up at school agitated or turn up without anyone being aware of an issue.*

**Educator (teacher or principal)**

*The only advantage to students having their own mobile device is in case of an emergency or situation where they need to contact their parents, but this could then reasonably be achieved through the school office.*

**Parent**

**Findings – current school mobile device policies and practices at home**

It is clear from the evidence presented to the review team that many schools in NSW recognise both the opportunities and challenges that attend the presence of mobile devices in schools. Many schools are actively engaged with the question of how to ensure students, teachers and parents can identify and mitigate the risks of harm associated with mobile devices, while fostering the benefits. Across the submissions and consultation process, NSW schools and other stakeholders called for principled and evidence-based guidance to support schools' policy- and decision-making, and their approaches to managing and leveraging the benefits of mobile device use by students.

Evidence heard by the review indicated that schools in NSW currently set their own guidelines for mobile phone usage and have a mandated responsibility to ensure the responsible use of mobile devices by students on school grounds (for example to ensure they are not being used to cyberbully and/or take photos of other students). There seems to be no consensus amongst schools (public or private) in NSW when it comes to regulating the use of devices, particularly smartphones, in classrooms, with variations in approach ranging from a complete prohibition to unrestricted use.

*Make any BYOD program open to all devices. Schools can still implement strong policies on the misuse of these devices. The misuse should be punished, not the device.*

**School**

A wide range of school mobile device policies are currently in place in NSW primary and secondary schools. Notably, the vast majority of NSW primary schools already prohibit the use of mobile phones during class hours.

More restrictive policies ranged from a 'no visibility' policy - whereby mobile devices are out of sight for the duration of the school day (kept in bags and pockets or dropped off at the school office) - through to policies that allowed limited access for checking timetables between classes. Other policies allowed access during recess and lunch, with a few schools allowing mobile devices on desks during class. Use during class time was generally only with express permission from the class teacher.

*However, there was near unanimous support for the school to have specific rules around their use including, for example, that they should only be used for school-related activity and only used with the permission of the teacher. Students also identified that there should be consequences if they do not adhere to the set rules.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

Penalties for policy infringements ranged from a verbal warning to temporary confiscation, detention, and longer periods of confiscation. In some schools, devices were only returned once a student's parents had come to school to meet with the Principal.

A range of policies support the appropriate use of mobile devices in schools including responsible use, privacy, anti-bullying, pastoral care and other wellbeing policies.

Teachers already manage the presence of mobile devices in classrooms. Teachers report deploying a variety of practices in their classrooms to manage the presence of smartphones. These various practices range from a total ban, confiscation, and regulated use. Some teachers refuse to allow digital devices in the classroom, some teachers are content to manage devices in the classroom, and some find the lack of consistency among their colleagues a source of frustration that undermines their own practice.

It was broadly recognised that options such as excluding phones from the classroom through practices such as central storage (front office, basket or box in classroom) or confiscation risked loss of devices, and this had legal implications. Many teachers noted that the lack of secure lockers or other safe storage for students to place their devices whilst in class also increased the risk of loss or theft. Decisions about the absence or presence of devices in the classroom were often shaped by the pragmatic issue of what to do with them when they are not in the possession of the student who owns them.

Some students also expressed concern about the safety of their phone if they were required to hand it in before school or before classes. For example, they anticipated staff potentially damaging their phone, or other students taking the wrong phone, intentionally or by mistake.

*I wouldn't trust the school with my phone ... like I don't know them. What if they drop it or something?*

**Student (years 9-10)**

In recognition of the range of existing practices, teachers also reported inconsistent policy positions, directions and take-up within and between schools, and note that the lack of standardised direction from the Department for public schools makes management of mobile devices onerous because of inconsistent attitudes and practices across the teaching staff/school.

Teachers raised concerns with some restrictive policies, including the conflict that can result with parents if students forgot to collect their devices from the school office or their locker. Policies that restricted device use but allowed students to keep their bags in class were ineffectual as students could remove the device from their bag and use it.

Teachers, parents and some students recognise the need for consistent whole of school practices. Teachers, parents and some students, complained about the inconsistent application of classroom rules for managing mobile devices among teachers within the same school. This was often expressed as tensions between: different teacher practices that seemed unfair to students; differences in parental responses that seemed unfair to teachers; and teacher practices that seemed unfair to parents.

Teachers also felt that there were significant differences between what parents allowed at home and what teachers allowed at school regarding the use of mobile devices. These differences often led to teachers feeling despondent about their own responsibility and capacity to effectively manage phones in the classroom. This suggests that issues of access, equity and the rights of teachers, students and parents needed to be more explicitly addressed and reflected in practice. Teachers felt that this would be best achieved through alignment with government policy that was consistently applied across the whole of school community; and this was seen as the responsibility of government, teachers, students and parents.

*To help reduce instances of cyberbullying, image-based abuse and online harm, we therefore advocate a whole school approach where schools work with parents, families and the wider community and develop many different local strategies to help educate all parties concerned about the healthy and appropriate use of mobile phones.*

**yourtown**

While students tended to have a clear understanding of school policy, they had an even firmer grasp of what was tolerated by school, and by specific teachers.

Parents frequently want more information about their school's mobile device policy. Often they have either limited or no understanding of this policy, and some claim they have never been provided with a copy. Parents had stronger understanding of the school policy where a 'contract' regarding the school mobile device policy was part of the school's enrolment process, indicating that a digital license may be an effective way of raising parents' awareness about school policy and expectations relating to the use of mobile digital devices.

Teachers were often critical that their school's policy was not sufficiently clear to teachers, students and parents, and that it was often inadequately articulated and enforced by the school leadership team. Some teachers do not feel sufficiently supported by existing policies and reported this allows students to take advantage of them.

Consistent implementation and enforcement of existing school mobile device policies was also a cause for concern among both students and teachers. Students were frustrated that the rules were not applied consistently, yet at the same time leveraged this to their advantage. Teachers found enforcement difficult when the policy was not being consistently applied by colleagues.

The review team were concerned to note that some 16% of students who responded to the review survey claim to have received no cyber safety education. Approximately 15% of primary school students claimed this, and this number increased to approximately 22% for students in years 11 and 12.

Many teachers want clearer policy guidance from the NSW Department of Education. They perceive this would underpin more effective, consistent policy enforcement in school. While schools should have the responsibility to manage their practices within policy and other frameworks that best reflect the values of their communities, given the diversity of existing approaches and differing outcomes, schools are seeking clear guidance and backup in the form of enforceable, manageable policies on the unauthorised use of mobile phones.

*Primary responsibility for protecting children from the risks of mobile devices lies with parents, while the primary role of the (NSW) Department (of Education) in these matters is threefold:*

- 1. to provide parents the resources to best protect their children from online risks;*
- 2. to provide students themselves with guidance on safe use of online technology; and*
- 3. where possible, craft or amend legislation and policies to further bolster the safety of children.*

#### **Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

*Parents as the first and primary educators of their children also have a particularly important role to play. The modelling that parents provide their children cannot be underestimated. As the mobile digital devices are provided, in the main, by parents, it is all the more important that parents partner with schools to educate children about being socially responsible users of digital devices, help monitor use and support schools to enforce policies.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

*A growing body of research shows that building effective partnerships between parents, families and schools to support children's learning leads to improved learning outcomes. Parents are the first and continuing educators of their children.*

#### **Craig Kettle**



Interestingly, the main point of difference between the focus group and interview data and the qualitative survey data, were teachers' descriptions of the practices they deployed to manage students' educational and non-educational mobile use in class. Importantly, what this suggests is that some teachers are already effectively managing mobile devices in their classrooms, and that knowledge of these practices can be of use to other teachers. It may therefore be beneficial to provide a list of 'things that work' alongside any policy that is developed. This would contribute to some consistency across schools between policy and the practices through which it is implemented. It would also assist in consolidating consistency of practices across teachers in any particular school setting, which the teachers' data suggested was simultaneously a key opportunity, challenge and source of frustration.

The majority of students and parents reported having some domestic rules or guidelines to regulate mobile device use. The most common were rules around devices at the dinner table, and no devices in bedrooms. Others included limited access, or switching off of Wi-Fi at a specific hour. In some families these rules appeared to be well grounded and followed; in others they were described as an ongoing battle and a source of tension. There is clear opportunity to find better ways to align schools' and families' rules around the use of mobile digital devices.

Diana Blumberg Baumrind<sup>68</sup>, a clinical and developmental psychologist who has undertaken significant work on parenting styles, distinguishes between 'parental responsiveness', which refers to the degree the parent responds to the child's needs, and 'parental demandingness', which is the extent to which the parent expects more mature and responsible behaviour from a child. Using these two dimensions, she recognises three different parenting styles:

- **Authoritarian:** the authoritarian parenting style is characterised by high demandingness with low responsiveness. The authoritarian parent is rigid, harsh, and demanding. Abusive parents usually fall into this category.
- **Permissive:** this parenting style is characterised by low demandingness with high responsiveness. The permissive parent is overly responsive to the child's demands, seldom enforcing consistent rules. The 'spoiled' child often has permissive parents.

- **Authoritative:** this parenting style is characterised by high demandingness and responsiveness. The authoritative parent is firm but not rigid, willing to make an exception when the situation warrants. The authoritative parent is responsive to the child's needs but not indulgent.

### Findings – attitudes towards more restrictive school mobile device policies and other limits

The review team considers that a key rationale for the prohibition of unauthorised use of mobile phones in school is the recognition in common law that all schools have a legal obligation to provide students with a safe environment in which to learn. We accept the peer reviewed literature as well as information from our own stakeholder consultations that the misuse of mobile phones in school can potentially enable and amplify online bullying, image-based abuse and aggression with significant short, medium and long-term impacts on the mental health of young people. This must be addressed if related harms are to be prevented through a collaboration between students, families, schools, broader community and ICT providers.

Enhancement of student wellbeing has emerged as an important approach to the development of students' social, emotional and academic competence. It provides a significant contribution to preventing youth depression, suicide, self-harm, antisocial behaviour (including violence and bullying) and substance abuse. Therefore, any policy restricting unauthorised mobile use in schools is only one piece in a complex jigsaw puzzle.

*As part of this public health approach, and noting the importance of schools in educating children and young people about online interactions as well as in effectively responding to harmful uses of smartphones, a whole school approach to addressing this issue is needed. Simply banning the use of or the non-educational use of mobile phones at school would not address cyberbullying, image-based abuse or the access to harmful content and their effects on young minds and, most importantly, would not equip children or young people with the skills they need to engage online throughout their childhood but also as an adult.*

**yourtown**

<sup>68</sup> Baumrind, D. (1967). Child care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behavior. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 75(1), 43-88.



There is widespread consensus that the use of mobile devices in both primary and secondary school should be regulated and overwhelming consensus that this decision is best made at the school level in consultation with the school community. A number of organisations recommended that schools continue to be able to determine their own policies, rather than having these dictated to them by government. They were advocative of the government providing additional support, evidence and best practice to allow schools to make better informed decisions.

Some illustrative quotes gathered during the review include:

*Many schools allow students to bring their devices to school. However, they generally restrict access and use in some way. Schools may require that devices remain in students' lockers or bags or that they are handed to teachers at the commencement of each class or at the beginning of the school day. While some schools do not allow the devices to be used at all, some (more often high schools) may permit personal use of phones at specific times. Other schools actively encourage the use of mobile devices in the classroom to support learning.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

*[We recommend that] that the use of smartphones in secondary schools is left to the discretion of the individual school with guidelines provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and informed by the Wellbeing Framework developed by the Department.*

#### **Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

*We believe that overall, schools should have the responsibility to manage their policies and practices within state-wide frameworks that best reflect the values of their communities...*

*We agree with Pasi Sahlberg: each school must work out the best way to teach its pupils how to exercise self-control around their phones; "we should teach all children safe, smart and responsible use of technology," he said. "Every school in their own way."*

*The National Centre Against Bullying agrees that every school make decisions about its students in its own way. To do so effectively, schools should be provided with explicit advice...*

#### **National Centre Against Bullying**

*While there is agreement that the use of mobile devices in both primary and secondary schools should be regulated, the overwhelming consensus is that this is a decision best made at the school level in consultation with the school community...*

*None of the students and teachers in the [omitted] survey supported government restrictions on mobile device use in school time. However, there was near unanimous support for the school to have specific rules around their use...*

*CSNSW supports an approach that empowers school communities to implement sound, evidenced-based policies, procedures and education programs to manage mobile digital device use at the local level.*

*Provide examples of best practice to guide schools and school systems in their policy development and implementation.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

According to the survey responses considered by the review team, while students generally supported and expected regulation in the form of specific rules around device use, this support did not generally extend to restriction. Parents and educators overwhelmingly supported restriction in both primary and high school settings.

*Another group of students suggested that if in-class mobile device use is restricted for students, the same should also apply to teachers. These students indicated that some teachers also get distracted by their devices in class: taking calls and accessing social media. [omitted] is aware that some schools have policies that do restrict teachers' use of mobile devices while on class.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

Use of mobile devices at recess and lunch divided educators, parents and students. Those in support of access during recess and lunch argued that a more restrictive policy would simply prompt students to find more inventive ways to get around the policy. Others felt that students would only learn appropriate use and management of their devices if they were exposed to the choice of using them during these periods of the school day. School communities varied considerably, and some parents had an expectation that they could communicate with students during the day and access at recess and lunch would facilitate this.

In contrast, others felt that students had sufficient access to mobile devices before and after school, and that they benefited from being away from their devices during the school day. They also tended to focus on the benefits of greater social interaction and physical activity during this time if mobile devices were not allowed.

On balance, parents and educators supported a policy that allowed restricted mobile device access during the school day; with either no access or only very limited access at either recess or lunch. They did so as they saw mobile devices detracting from students' educational progression, wasting valuable teaching time and effort, and felt that the available hours outside school were sufficient for students to make use of them and interact online.

*Most schools indicated that the presence of smartphones at recess and lunchtime can reduce opportunities for social interaction between students. While evidence is only anecdotal, observations made by some school personnel indicates that mobile device use at these times can have a negative effect on the development of social skills due to limited interaction. Where schools have restricted the use of mobile devices in the playground at these times they have seen greater levels of social interaction.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

Parents and students perceive that being able to take smartphones to and from school plays an important safety role. Parents value this because it allows them to contact their children when they are commuting. Banning mobile phones from school grounds altogether would therefore cause issues unless students are able to check them in and out from the office.

Older students were sanguine about the prospect of a policy of no access during the school day. They tended to recognise how distracting mobile devices could be, and that much of what they needed to do could be achieved on a laptop. In contrast, some students expressed anger and frustration that this would be an infringement on their 'right' to use their mobile device, and were particularly concerned about not being able to listen to music.

Opinion was divided on whether or not a more relaxed mobile device policy should be in place for more senior students. Students and parents tended to recognise that the maturity of year 11 and 12 students meant that they could be trusted with greater self-regulation. In contrast, educators tended to raise the point that enforcement would be more difficult if different rules applied to different year groups.

Some organisations also commented on the discrepancies between schools in terms of socio-economic status. They identified the mobile device as a potential leveller here, allowing those without access to a device such as a laptop to still engage with the educational benefits of mobile devices. As such, they argued that banning smartphones would have a disproportionately negative effect on lower socio-economic status schools.

*The poorer a child's family is, the more likely they are to rely on mobile devices to socialise. Accordingly, children from more well-equipped homes will be less affected by bans or restrictions on mobile devices, and may already have other digital technologies at home.*

**Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne, Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film, and Journalism, Monash University**

The review team notes that research from the London School of Economics argues that a prohibition on the unauthorised use of mobile phone bans can have different effects on different students, specifically that such restrictions on mobile phones improves academic performances for the low-achieving students (14.23% of a standard deviation) and has no significant impact on high achievers. They argue that low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones, than high achievers who appears to be able to concentrate irrespective of the presence of smartphones. '... banning mobile phones could be a low-cost way for schools to reduce educational inequality.'<sup>69</sup>

Students with specific medical conditions were recognised as needing access to their mobile devices throughout the school day, e.g. diabetes. Some parents and students also felt that access to mobile devices could be beneficial for students with an autism diagnosis and for those with anxiety.

A proportion of all audiences were concerned that a 'no mobile device during the school day' policy would be very challenging to introduce. Some students recognised that mobile devices currently occupied students who would otherwise be engaged in negative behaviour, and were concerned that without their devices, these students would make class discipline more challenging.

There is a risk that banning smartphones during recess and lunch will impact students' ability to learn appropriate use and management of their devices. Some parents are of the opinion that schools need to assist students in learning these skills for themselves. This is particularly relevant to year 11 and 12 students. Some teachers think it more important for these students to learn self-control than to be disciplined.

However, banning mobile devices during recess and lunch could increase personal interaction and physical activity. The review team heard reports from MacKinnon High School and Riverview to the effect that prohibitions on mobile phones was associated with an increase in noise levels and students' engagement in ball games during recess and lunchtime. Many parents and educators are concerned about students using their device during these times and therefore missing out on the benefits of interaction and activity.

The review team is not in favour of banning the use of technology in the form of desktops, laptops and tablets as long as they are connecting through department or school-provided filters that offer students some level of protection, as well as opportunities for positive classroom learning. However, the review team also notes that students in schools with limited access to tablets and laptops may be disadvantaged by banning smartphones in class. For these schools, smartphones are often used as a substitute for these devices.

*It is important to recognise that even if non-educational use of mobile devices is banned at schools; there is still an important role for schools to play in educating students, parents and caregivers about safe and responsible use of the technology outside of school and in preparing children for a life involving technology beyond school.*

**Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association Ltd**

The review team notes the work of Professor Garry Falloon, professor of digital learning at Macquarie University in Sydney, who opposes a 'blanket ban' of mobile phones in schools arguing that schools should instead manage their use.<sup>70</sup> The team agrees and believes that students in Year 11 and 12 demonstrate greater capacity for self-regulation than their younger peers and that schools should therefore provide these students with opportunities to develop self-control in the context of limiting smartphone use to specific times and specific places.

<sup>69</sup> <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1350.pdf>, p17

<sup>70</sup> The Educator 26 Jun 2018 The pros and cons of banning phones in schools

There were concerns from some respondents that simply banning smartphones in schools could be used as a scapegoat for a larger issue and that any policy should tackle the root causes of bullying in the community, regardless of whether the bullying occurs in person or via devices.

Some illustrative quotes gathered during the review include:

*The Foundation wishes to acknowledge the findings of Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce Report. Although terms or reference are different, the Foundation would like to highlight the following issues which we believe may be relevant to your considerations:*

*The acknowledgement that any approach to bullying / cyberbullying be treated primarily as a social and public health issue. A whole of community approach is required...*

**Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

*Implementing restrictions on mobile devices within schools also carries an inherent risk of signalling to teachers, as well as parents and carers, that the risks of online harms have been effectively neutralised by such a policy, potentially enabling a culture of complacency, or worse, pushing the issue underground.*

**Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

Extending from the point that banning mobile devices in schools could act as a scapegoat, a range of organisations and teachers commented that this would not stop bullying. Instead, it would simply move bullying to other times and scenes. Some went as far as to say that the level of bullying would be the same with and without smartphones present on school grounds.

Some illustrative quotes gathered during the review include:

*Curtailing these devices in schools would protect students from these risks only during school hours.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

*I am concerned about the impact of technology on student development and gravely worried about the impact of cyberbullying. However, banning mobile devices will not stop these abhorrent acts from occurring, merely it will move them to another device or another time.*

**Teacher**

*Schools acknowledge that these types of harmful behaviours and activities can and do happen at school, and though effects are often felt in school, they are more likely to occur outside of school.*

*The respondent schools advised that they do not have any evidence that the presence of mobile devices in school significantly increases cyberbullying, image-based abuse and access to pornography...*

**Catholic Schools NSW**



*...Blaming technology alone for these various, complex issues is reductive and will do little to address them adequately.*

*We do not believe that a ban on non-educational technology use will reduce cyberbullying. Banning devices during school hours will merely displace bullying to other periods of time, rather than actively minimizing the risks that students face.*

**Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne; Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film, and Journalism, Monash University**

While accepting cyberbullying as a potential downside to smartphone usage, some argued that the potential educational and other benefits of the tool outweighed this. They also saw smartphones not as the cause of this problem, but simply a vehicle occasionally being used for a negative activity – bullying – that would occur regardless.

*We do not ban pens because they can be used to write cruel words, we do not deny speech because it can be used to hurt and offend. We do not eliminate paper from schools because it can be used for distracting doodles and to transmit hateful ideas.*

**Associate Professor Matthew Kearney, Associate Professor Wan Ng, Professor Sandy Schuck and Professor Peter Aubusson, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre**

*The focus should be on the misuse of the digital platforms. The behaviour is the issue not the device. cyberbullying does not just happen on a mobile device. A woodwork teacher doesn't ban the use of a circular saw because it is potentially dangerous, and it is.*

**Teacher**

Several organisations expressed the opinion that cyberbullying during school hours can be more manageable than outside of school grounds. They compared the two situations and assessed that teachers have a greater level of power to instruct and assist students. If smartphones were to be banned, they argued, the only point at which students would experience cyberbullying would be

potentially without the support of their peers and adults.

Some illustrative quotes gathered during the review include:

*Reducing access to smartphones will also reduce access to health information, services and support, which will have negative implications for the overall wellbeing and health of young people...*

*The use of mobile devices to deliver these programs means that more young Australians can have access and engage with prevention activities for their mental health...*

*Answering questions about mental health on smartphones increases privacy and confidentiality for students, allowing services and programs to use this method to proactively identify students in need of mental healthcare.*

*Reducing access to mobile devices during school time will create challenges for best-practice evaluation and will limit students' participation in programs that aim to increase access to care and support.*

*Mobile devices are essential tools in the contemporary world. Responsible education must underpin and inform the technological capability of citizens and any future workforce. Schools have a role to play in ensuring the productive and harm-free use of devices to serve educative purposes, and in the long term, economic, social, scientific and technological advancement.*

**Associate Professor Matthew Kearney, Associate Professor Wan Ng, Professor Sandy Schuck and Professor Peter Aubusson, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre**

*Restricting or prohibiting the use of mobile devices in school may cause behaviours such as cyberbullying to become less visible or detectable for teachers, parents and carers. It may also lead to children experiencing these often distressful behaviours avoiding seeking help for fear of reprimand or having their device confiscated.*

*For some groups, including those that have historically not found it easy to engage with traditional help-seeking models and supports, such as people with disability, those living in remote locations and LGBTIQ people, the impact of having access to a mobile device that offers real-time, easy-to-access support that they are comfortable using cannot be underestimated.*

#### **Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

*There are numerous ways that mobile digital devices can assist students with a disability or a health problem, and if restrictions on mobile devices in schools do not adequately consider this, they risk hindering the education of such students and even endanger their health.*

#### **Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

### **Findings – best-practice approaches and practices for schools and parents to help children and young people mitigate risks and use devices in safe, informed and responsible ways.**

School policies or approaches that have been developed in consultation with school staff, students and parents appear to be the most robust.

If subsequent research finds evidence that ‘opt-in’ versions of mobile device restrictions may be more effective than blunt bans in secondary, then the government may wish to consider the evidence of ‘opt-in’ versions of mobile device restrictions in a sample of NSW schools.

*Implementing restrictions on mobile devices within schools also carries an inherent risk of signalling to teachers, as well as parents and carers, that the risks of online harms have been effectively neutralised by such a policy, potentially enabling a culture of complacency, or worse, pushing the issue underground.*

#### **Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

*Such approaches do not take away students’ agency and teach an important transferable lesson about self-control (that it is much more effective to commit yourself in advance rather than rely on willpower in the moment). While there is mixed evidence to support the contention, there is growing concern about young people’s ability to engage with others and entertain themselves offline as well as online. Our young people need, rather than an imposed ban, to be taught self-regulation in their use of smartphones.*

#### **The Behavioural Insights Team (UK)**

A variety of mechanisms could be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of mobile device policies including the use of citizens’ juries and rapid and robust evaluation through randomised control trials.

Teachers require better support to understand and productively engage with students’ ICT use. The review team recommends that consideration be given to targeted investment in initiatives that improve teacher learning and professional confidence, perhaps including NESA-registered courses.

*School leaders and teachers need to be supported with resources and have funded professional learning opportunities to ensure that they meet their duty of care responsibilities for all students and to engage in education about the productive and appropriate use of mobile devices.*

#### **Associate Professor Matthew Kearney, Associate Professor Wan Ng, Professor Sandy Schuck and Professor Peter Aubusson, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre**

Experience of schools such as Camberwell Girls Grammar shows that policies which restrict use are both manageable and enforceable. The review team recommends that restrictions on use be in place in both primary and secondary school.

Evidence received by the review team demonstrates that there is good practice already occurring in many schools, however there is scope for continuous improvement and for sharing effective practice across schools.

The review team believe it is important that all schools entrench digital literacy and cybersafety as part of their learning curriculum in a systematic way from kindergarten to the end of year 12.

Students tended to believe that they were

knowledgeable about how to make safe use of their mobile device. In contrast, parents were marginally less confident about their own knowledge. Students considered information about safe mobile device use as 'common knowledge' and were familiar with the messages about safe use. Parents were more likely to be concerned about the risks of the online environment, and their children's exposure to inappropriate material, or individuals who were intent on grooming.

Schools, peers and parents all provided students with their knowledge around safe use. School was the primary source, with regular information and lessons on this topic recalled as taking place from year 5 onwards. Students also recalled curriculum content from PDHPE lessons, in-school sessions with Police Liaison Officers and dedicated sessions provided by other third parties. Learning from peers tended to be a case of learning by others' mistakes. In contrast, many students were provided with regular information and guidance from their parents on safe mobile device use.

There was also discussion about the content of what is taught regarding safe behaviour, and criticism that the current range of topics covered is minimal and doesn't prepare students sufficiently for the breadth of ways in which the internet and online environment impact their world. There was debate that the school curriculum needs to be extended to better cover these aspects of students' safety.

Any cybersafety education must be holistic, comprehensive and cover all areas of both concern and benefit including the importance of digital reputation and how it may impact a student in the future. One dimensional or programs focussing on only one area should be avoided. So too, cyber safety education should be mindful of balancing students' protection with the need to nurture their digital skills and opportunities online.

*Making questions of online behaviour, the meaning and truthfulness of information, forms of online interaction, sociality and learning an integrated part of pedagogy and curriculum must be the only responsible way for schools to take up the future for young people in a digital society.*

**Teacher**

*Efforts should be made to avoid a*

*clash between the outcomes of NESAs Curriculum Review and any future action the Department takes in regards to mobile digital devices in schools.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

Students were quick to see themselves as having primary responsibility for the safe use of their mobile devices, although they acknowledged that both parents and school have a role to play.

Students' beliefs regarding their level of knowledge about cybersafety may need to be challenged. Many think staying safe is 'common knowledge'. Despite this, incidents of unsafe usage appear very common among students they know.

Students widely perceived safe mobile device use as being simply 'common sense'. That said, there was an appreciation that it is a constantly evolving area and given this, students' knowledge of safety needs to also be regularly updated.

*(Do you know enough?) Yes because you sort of know the basics. But no, because technology is always being updated and changing. So, you can never not know more.*

**Student (years 9-10)**

The review team considers that while the best and most effective policies and approaches of a school are developed in consultation with students, staff and parents, sometimes students don't have the developmental perspective that adults have.

*Recognise that individual schools may be capable of innovative solutions that serve their own communities needs. One school in Ireland, Blenneville National School, this year came to an agreement with parents that sixth class pupils would not access social media outside school hours due to incidents of cyberbullying. This consultative approach reportedly has widespread support in the community.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

There may be an opportunity to educate parents as well. Parents often lack confidence about their own cybersafety knowledge. This is mainly due to

their lack of familiarity with the apps their children use and how they use them. Apart from school and peers, parents are the most common source of cybersafety education.

*One core challenge is a simple lack of knowledge among parents of what the perceived risks are and/or how to best address them. For instance, in November 2017, P&C Federation representatives attended a Facebook Parent & Educator Roundtable where Facebook representatives stated that among the most frequent problems they encountered was parents being simply unaware of the resources available to help parents to protect and guide their children in their social media use.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

The review team notes the NSW Department of Education is currently reviewing its Digital Citizenship resources and it is recommended that the findings of this review inform the refinement or development of any resources.

*A first step might be in updating the Department's existing Digital Citizenship portal to encompass new and emerging technologies. However, prior to that occurring, there needs to be an evaluation of the uptake and effectiveness of the existing resources.*

*The Department should be asked to report on the longer term success or otherwise of their digital citizenship initiative post their trial, including the take up by schools, participation rates and evidence of changed or affected behaviours.*

**NSW Teachers Federation**

*We suggest the Department create comprehensive information and resources on cybersafety for parents and students, such as resources from the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, and require schools to include this information on their websites.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

The review team also recognise that families and specifically adult carers have a key role in educating young people in the responsible use of

and regulation of technology and particularly the use of mobile devices. The recommendations of this report should reflect the central role of families and acknowledge that the review team feels very strongly that its recommendations should not encourage the outsourcing of this responsibility to school but instead should incentivize intrafamilial conversations around responsible use of mobile devices in particular and cybersafety, generally. The provision of cybersafety education to parents should also be considered as very important. This education should include how to support a child at home and also ensure a good understanding of the individual school's policies and procedures around digital device use.

The review team understand that in order to address the issue of unauthorised use of mobile phones in schools, we need to see the issue through the lens of a whole of school approach to wellbeing, cyber safety, respect, and effective teaching and uninterrupted learning within a supportive school environment.

The review team also accepts that all schools should adopt a strengths-based approach with an emphasis on building social and emotional competencies (conflict resolution, anger management, problem solving, decision making and social/emotional learning) in order to improve school climate and reduce bullying and cyberbullying.

Many written submissions from organisations focused on a perceived need for schools and the department to focus not only on education around mobile device usage for students, but also for parents. Such education would include how to use devices appropriately, safely and in a socially acceptable way. These organisations, like parents themselves, saw the parent as a key role player in their child's digital behaviour, and thus just as requiring of relevant knowledge as the child themselves. The parent would need to reinforce what the child is learning about digital safety at school in the home, and to have the tools available to do so effectively.

Some illustrative quotes received by the review are below:

*Parents have reported to CCSP [Council of Catholic School Parents] that more guidance needs to be provided by primary schools to parents regarding rules around the appropriate use of smartphones and education about the socially acceptable use of smartphones, before even purchasing a device for their child.*



*It is important that to maximise the reach and impact of the program, a whole community approach is adopted to ensure parents, teachers and students are engaged and well-equipped to be socially responsible users of digital devices, at home and at school.*

**Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT**

*Parents need to partner with the school in managing their children's use of technology, not just within the school environment but within society at large.*

**NSW Teachers Federation**

*Feedback from parents suggests that more guidance could be provided by schools regarding appropriate access to, and use of, smartphones and other digital devices.*

*Promote parent and family resources that address the benefits and risks associated with mobile digital device use at different ages and stages of children's development and provide parents with strategies to support children and young peoples' safe and responsible use of devices.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

Some organisations pointed out that appropriate resources are already available. For example, several mentioned the Office of the eSafety Commissioner's website as a strong starting point for parents, and one that needed to have its profile raised. One suggestion included mandating schools to publish this information on their own websites. Other organisations noted that this type of information could be made available during an orientation program when a child starts at a new school.

*The Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the national Student Wellbeing Hub and the NSW Anti-bullying Strategy website clearly have an important role in the promotion and dissemination of high quality, evidence-based, practical resources for school communities – teachers, parents and students – to work together.*

**Catholic Schools NSW**

*AMTA supports the responsible and safe use of mobile devices by everyone and*

*recommends that parents, caregivers and teachers use the resources made available via the eSafety Commissioner's Office to understand how children and teenagers can be guided to use technology safely and responsibly.*

**Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association Ltd**

*We suggest the Department create comprehensive information and resources on cybersafety for parents and students, such as resources from the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, and require schools to include this information on their websites."*

*Parents are often unaware of these dangers and/or how to protect their children from them. The Department should provide on school websites a set of tips for parents to help their children navigate online platforms.*

**Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

All cohorts recognise the importance of cybersafety education and generally recommended that such education be mandatory throughout all schools and from an early age right through to the end of the school journey.

*[We recommend] that cybersafety education should be mandatory in all primary schools and integrated with social and emotional learning.*

**Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

*...We consider it important that schools embed digital literacy and cybersafety as part of their learning curriculum in a systematic way from Kindergarten to the end of Year 12. [We recommend] that cybersafety education directed at building skills and knowledge of users should be funded and made mandatory, commencing in primary school, integrated with social and emotional learning. This would teach the 'goods and bads' of technology, including smartphones and help children development judgement, self-regulation and safe use and control of their online practises.*

**National Centre Against Bullying**

*The need to educate students on the responsible use of technology needs to be enacted at a very early stage.*

*For many in the community, whilst such terms as cyberbullying, inappropriate websites, grooming and losing control of personal pictures have been heard, they are not necessarily well understood in a practical way. This is where Departmental resource development can assist.*

#### **NSW Teachers Federation**

*Organise seminars and workshops for students on responsible use of social media, covering areas such as what students can do to handle online bullying (e.g. blocking or reporting to social media platform for violations of its terms of use), and what the implications are of cyberbullying. Such seminars and workshops should take place on school grounds.*

#### **Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales**

*We can reduce negative behaviours by establishing clear policies and procedures within schools for dealing with instances of bullying and harassment. We can also do this by ensuring schools have frequent conversations with students about why cyberbullying, and bullying behaviours more generally, are not acceptable.*

#### **Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne; Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film, and Journalism, Monash University**

There were calls for education to go beyond simply the students. In order to be able to carry out this type of cybersafety training, some expressed that the teachers themselves would need to be more knowledgeable about the topic. This included having their knowledge constantly refreshed, given how frequently digital technology is being updated.

*[We recommend] that NSW teachers are supported by ongoing professional education to enable them to embed technology into the curriculum and to ensure that all teachers are up-to-date with new technologies, programs, apps, risks and opportunities.*

#### **Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

In addition to cybersafety education, organisations called for education on using mobile devices in a positive manner more generally. There were many comments about the educational value of mobile devices, both in the classroom as well as when children take it upon themselves to research and learn as part of their own personal interests. Organisations saw encouraging this educational usage as paramount to the long term benefit of mobile devices remaining a mainstay of the classroom, and of life in general. A solution to the distracting nature of smartphones in the classroom would be to have children learn from a young age to control their usage, in addition to being responsible digital citizens. This was also expanded to learning to research effectively, and to determine the credibility of respective online sources.

*In this technological era, it is important that the schools make provisions and policies that support the use of mobile devices in a way that encourages communication, positive school culture and promotes learning.*

#### **ySafe**

*The best protection for children's cyber safety is an investment in their learning, education and skills as part of a learning pathway. This should be directly linked to increased mastery of skills and appreciation of risk for the child in their use of technology.*

#### **Alannah & Madeline Foundation**

*Banning mobile digital devices of course also impedes the Department's important goal of teaching Internet and Communications Technology (ICT) skills and priming students to be effective and responsible digital citizens.*

#### **Dr Michael Cejnar, MBBS, FRACP CEO, FIC Technology Pty, Ltd**

*[Quoting Dr. Pasi Sahlberg] To help students avoid becoming distracted, schools should teach them self-control in the context of limiting smartphone use to a healthy level.*

#### **National Centre Against Bullying**

*We know one of the most effective protections for children in responding to and effectively managing negative online behaviours is through education –*

*specifically by teaching important social and emotional learning skills like respect, responsibility, digital resilience, critical reasoning ability, empathy and consent. It is much more difficult to teach these skills in a vacuum, where the mobile device is absent or demonised through prohibition...*

*We need to systematically build the capacity of young people to use digital technologies with respect, responsibility, resilience and critical reasoning so that they can respond to negative online experiences. An educative approach, as opposed to a prohibitive approach or ban, will empower young people to successfully navigate online challenges.*

*Consideration and examination needs to be made with regard to the holistic picture of a child's education, in order to ensure any proposed restrictions do not come at the opportunity cost of a teacher or school's ability or willingness to deliver comprehensive and consistent cyber safety education.*

#### **Office of the eSafety Commissioner**

*Educating young people to be socially responsible users of digital technology is one of the most effective and enduring strategies that can be adopted.*

*[Mobile devices] can also be used as a means of enhancing media literacy to underpin the development of the skills required to be critical consumers and ethical producers of online information. Pedagogically it is much more valuable to provide opportunities for student to learn these vital skills in a collective setting (such as the classroom) rather than in isolation, if at all. This is all the more important when considering how the world is changing and the increasing impact that technology has on people's lives.*

#### **Catholic Schools NSW**

*Research suggests that digital citizenship education will mitigate proposed issues more effectively than a technology ban.*

*Training in respectful online conduct could involve teaching students how to manage disagreements in online spaces, how to understand the perspectives of other people they engage with online, and how to engage in positive bystander actions. Training in civic engagement could involve teaching students how to participate in online activities that produce social benefits such as political participation or sharing skills and interests with a community.*

*Education in digital citizenship would contribute to the development of students' self-reflection of their own media use and enable them to employ these skills as adults.*

**Kate Mannell, Media and Communications Program, University of Melbourne; Robbie Fordyce, Media, Film, and Journalism, Monash University**

*Schools have a role to play in ensuring the productive and harm-free use of devices to serve educative purposes, and in the long term, economic, social, scientific and technological advancement.*

**Associate Professor Matthew Kearney, Associate Professor Wan Ng, Professor Sandy Schuck and Professor Peter Aubusson, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) STEM Education Futures Research Centre**

*If part of our role as educators is to prepare our students for the future, then we must equip them to properly use these tools. If we ignore these devices then, in my opinion, we, as educators, are negligent.*

**Teacher**

## Conclusion

Concerns about the presence of smartphones in classrooms prompted the NSW Government to launch a review into the risks and benefits of phones in the state's schools. The review has, as requested, examined "whether a restriction or other limits should be placed on smartphone use for children in primary schools or children in certain age brackets".

NSW Education Minister Rob Stokes asked the review to focus on best practice surrounding cyberbullying, sexting and internet safety and asked us to conduct a literature review. The review found a paucity of research around the risk and benefits of student use of smartphones in class, recess and lunchtime. It found that students, parents, educators, academics and cyber safety experts were divided on whether phones should be restricted in NSW secondary classrooms, with some arguing smartphones are addictive, distracting and raise privacy concerns, and others saying they were essential learning tools, vital to students' social lives, and that students need to learn the skills to engage positively and manage their mobile digital device use. The review found that different schools had adopted different policies on their use during school hours.

There was a significant degree of unanimity around the undesirability of the use of smartphones in primary school, with most primary principals asking parents of K-6 students to either not allow students to bring such phones to school, hand them in on arrival and pick them up on departing school or actively asking parents to give them basic mobile phones without internet access. A major driver of the review team's recommendations was the research released by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner in May this year of 3,000 young people which found that 24% of 8 to 12 year olds have received unwanted contact from strangers online and 15% had been subjected to cyberbullying. But it was not just the predatory behaviour online and cyberbullying that prompted the review team to recommend a restriction on smartphones in primary schools, it was also the inappropriate sharing of explicit images between students and the overwhelming number of teachers who argued that mobile phones in schools were an unnecessary distraction.

Prior to the review commencing, Finnish education expert Dr Pasi Sahlberg believed smartphone-related distraction was one of the main reasons why Australia and similar countries had fallen in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings, although the review team notes that more research is needed to make such a

connection. Sahlberg also stated that a complete prohibition at high school level would be difficult to enforce.

As far as secondary schools are concerned, the review team stopped short of recommending a restriction on smartphones but offered several approaches that schools could adopt based on their circumstances. These range from policies like John Edmondson High School in Horningsea Park who have instituted a complete prohibition on the use of smartphones. Their policy states: 'Students may not use mobile phones or similar devices while on school grounds. If parents choose to allow their child to bring a mobile phone or similar device to school, school staff are not to see or hear the device at any time and students are not to use the device at any time while at school. This applies to all times students are at school and on school grounds including before and after school, during and between classes and at all break times such as recess and lunch'.

Other schools have policies that reflect that older students, specifically in Year 11 and 12 have greater capacity for self regulation and need to be prepared for a work environment where they must learn to balance their mobile phone use with requirements of a job. As such some schools permit senior students to use their smartphones at designated times and in designated places. Still other schools allow students to carry their phones with them and can use them during recess and lunchtime, while some schools actively promote the use of mobile phones as teaching tools in class.

The most surprising finding from the review was the lack of evidence on the risks and benefits of the various models utilised by secondary schools and, in the absence of peer-reviewed evidence to support one model over the other, the review team called for more research.

The crucial conclusion the review reached was for the need for education around the safe, smart and responsible use of technology. The review team found that the inconsistent levels of cybersafety education across NSW might be addressed by the introduction of a digital licence requirement for all students in Grade 3 prior to bringing a device to school or being allowed to use an internet connected device at school and that all schools be required to have a minimum standard of cybersafety education. The review team also note that there is significant scope to enhance students' digital literacy across the curriculum and that strategies to enable this must be urgently sought.

The review team is indebted to the NSW Government for initiating the review.



# Appendix 1

The discussion guides that guided the focus groups with parents, students and teachers are reproduced here.

## Focus group discussion guide – Students

### Introduction & Warm-Up (5 mins)

- Welcome and thank for attendance
- Introduce self and client observers (if applicable)
- State aim of discussion – The Ipsos Social Research Institute is conducting this research on behalf of the NSW Government to better understand how kids and teenagers use mobile devices
- Housekeeping: toilets, fire alarm, turn off mobile phones
- Duration of meeting (1.5hrs)
- Open and frank feedback welcomed
- Own perspective is important, all opinions are valid. There are no right or wrong answers
- Everyone to participate, feel free to (politely) disagree, but do not talk over each other
- Moderator may need to move the conversation on to new topic occasionally to make sure key areas are covered in the time we have
- If it comes up, there is no need to share the reason any personal details if you're not comfortable doing so. If at any point you feel uncomfortable talking about a particular topic, feel free to excuse yourself from the room for a few minutes, or ask me to move on
- Confidentiality assured – reporting on themes, including anonymous quotes in support
- Permission for recording

### Participant Introduction - each member of the group to introduce themselves

#### Questions - General (10-15 mins)

- What age were you when you got your first phone? And why did you get one at that age? Was there a specific reason? PROBE
- And were you asking for a phone – or did your parents suggest that you needed one?
- How did you feel when you got your first phone?
- What was most exciting about having your first phone? What were you looking forward to doing with it? PROBE. And were there any frustrations or disappointments about that first phone?
- And thinking about the phone you have now, what kind of mobile device do you use?
- Do any of you have a smart watch? IF YES, PROBE FOR SMART WATCH USING THE ABOVE LIST AND KEEP THIS DEVICE IN MIND WHEN GOING THROUGH THE REST OF THE GUIDE.

#### Questions - School use (20-30 mins)

- From what you know, what's your school's policy about using your mobile device at school?
  - Can you use it if you're on school grounds?
    - Before school?
    - At recess or lunch?
    - In class?

- If you want to use your mobile device at school, what kind of things do you use it for? PROBE, WRITE FULL LIST ON FLIPCHART. And which of these are necessary uses – and which are just ‘nice to do’ uses?
- PROMPT FOR school-related activity, listening to music, sending text messages, making phone calls, using social media, playing games, shopping, watching online videos, reading books, communicating with parents, anything else?
- Which of these are you allowed to do at school? And which are you not allowed to do?
- Which of these do your parents allow you to do? And which do they not allow you to do?
- So in your typical day at school, how often are you using your device for school-related activities? And how often for non-school related activities?
- What do you see as the good things about having access to your mobile device during the school day? PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART.
  - Can you give some examples of positive things of being able to use your phone during the school day? PROBE. How about things that might be good for your education?
- And do you think there are any bad sides or issues with having access to your mobile device during the school day? PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART. USE PROJECTIVE WORKSHEETS
  - And can you give any examples of negative things of using your phone during the school day? PROBE. How about things that might be bad for your education?
  - Have you ever been distracted by using your device during the day? Were there any consequences? PROBE.
  - And what about more serious issues, like cyberbullying/ abuse/ pornography / social isolation? Does having access to your mobile device at school increase the chance of these types of problems? PROBE FOR YES/NO REASONS.
- How important do you think it is for students to have their mobile device during the school day? PROBE in classes? Outside of classes? PROBE Why is it important/not important?

#### **Questions - Cybersafety education (20-30 mins)**

- How much, if anything, would you say you know about using your mobile device safely?
- What, if any, information have your parents given you about using your mobile device safely? PROBE.
- And what, if any, information has your school given you about using your mobile device safely? PROBE AND LIST EXAMPLES.
- And how else have you learnt about how to use your mobile device safely? Have you learnt about cybersafety from anywhere else? PROBE.
- Have you ever tried to find information about cybersafety yourself?
- [IF HASN'T RECEIVED cybersafety EDUCATION] How useful do you think it would be to learn about safe mobile use? E.g. cybersafety education?
- So thinking about the range of cybersafety information or education that you've received, or learnt about, what are the most useful things you've learnt? PROBE.
- How has this knowledge helped you? PROBE. Do any situations come to mind where this might have helped out? Or where you might do something differently now with the information you've now learned?
- Were there things that you were taught about cybersafety that you don't think have been useful? Or were unrealistic? PROBE. What are the reasons these are unrealistic?
- Can you think of any examples of how you've changed how you use your mobile device, after receiving some cybersafety information or education?
- And whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure you use your mobile devices safely? Yours? Your parents? Your teachers and school? PROBE Why do you say that?
- Is there anything you would like to learn more about when it comes to cybersafety? Or anything that you think would be useful for you, or keep you out of bad situations?

### Questions - School policy (20-30 mins)

- Earlier we briefly discussed your school's policy about using your mobile devices at school. What do you think about the school's policy?
  - IF POSITIVE/NEGATIVE PROBE FULLY Why do you say that?
  - Why do you think the school has a policy around mobile device use at school?
  - Do you think the school's policy is helpful? IF YES/NO, why do you say that?
  - Does the policy help with some of the issues we talked about earlier? PROBE Why/why not? Are there particular issues the policy helps with, and other issues it doesn't help with?
  - Do students generally follow these rules, or not?
  - How seriously does your school enforce its mobile device policy? How well do you think the school is enforcing the policy?
  - What are the consequences when students break these rules?
  - What do you think your school's policy should be? What do you think would work best to deal with some of the issues we talked about earlier?
- In your opinion, what policy should your school have in place about how and when you can use your device? USE FLIPCHART TO FULLY EXPLORE STUDENT'S PREFERRED MOBILE DEVICE POLICY USE PROJECTIVE WORKSHEETS
  - When do you think you should be allowed to use your mobile device at school? PROBE Why?
  - Are there particular places/circumstances when mobile device use should be allowed, where it currently isn't?
- Some people suggest that there should be greater restrictions on the use of mobile devices during school hours.
  - What do you think about this suggestion? IF SUPPORT/OPPOSE, PROBE WHY.
  - What impact would it have on you if you weren't able to use your mobile device during school hours? PROBE.
  - How would you feel if you couldn't use your phone at all at school?
  - In what ways would it affect your life? PROBE FOR IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE, PROGRESS AT SCHOOL, COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS.
  - IF YEARS 7-12, Do you think access to mobile phones should vary according to which year you are in at school? IF SO, at what age should students get access – or more access to their mobile devices? PROBE.
  - If there were greater restrictions on use of mobile devices during school hours, what would be the advantages? PROBE.
  - And what would be the disadvantages? PROBE.
- Who do you think should be responsible for deciding on policies and rules for mobile device use at school? PROBE: Your school? The students themselves? Parents or parent bodies? The Government? Why this group?

### Thank and close (5 mins)

## Focus group discussion guide – parents

### Introduction & Warm-Up (5 mins)

- Welcome and thank for attendance
- Introduce self and client observers (if applicable)
- State aim of discussion – The Ipsos Social Research Institute is conducting this research on behalf of the NSW Government to better understand how kids and teenagers use mobile devices
- Housekeeping: toilets, fire alarm, turn off mobile phones
- Duration of meeting (1.5hrs)
- Open and frank feedback welcomed
- Own perspective is important, all opinions are valid. There are no right or wrong answers
- Everyone to participate, feel free to (politely) disagree, but do not talk over each other
- Moderator may need to move the conversation on to new topic occasionally to make sure key areas are covered in the time we have
- If it comes up, there is no need to share the reason any personal details if you're not comfortable doing so. If at any point you feel uncomfortable talking about a particular topic, feel free to excuse yourself from the room for a few minutes, or ask me to move on
- Confidentiality assured – reporting on themes, including anonymous quotes in support
- Permission for recording

### Participant Introduction - each member of the group to introduce themselves

#### Questions - General (10-15 mins)

- Do your children have a mobile device/phone?
  - IF SO, what age were your children when they got their first phone? And why did you get them one at that age? Was there a specific reason? PROBE
  - And were they asking you for a phone – or did you suggest that they needed one?
  - How did you feel when they got their first phone? PROBE
  - And thinking about the phone they have now, what kind of mobile device do they use?
  - IF NOT, when, if at all, do you think you'll get your child a mobile device?
  - What do you think will prompt you to get a phone for them?
  - And what are your considerations for and against getting them a phone? PROBE.
- What, if any, 'house rules' does your family have around mobile device use? PROBE AND LIST.
  - Why have you come up with those particular rules? PROBE.
    - How effectively/seriously do you enforce your 'house rules'?
    - How much of a problem, if at all, do you find it managing your child's mobile device use? PROBE
    - How do you about modelling good mobile device practice at home, if at all? How well do you find this works?

#### Questions - School use (20 mins)

- From what you know, what's your child's school's policy about using a mobile device at school?
  - Can they use it on school grounds?
    - Before school?
    - At recess or lunch?
    - In class?
- From what you know, if they want to use their mobile device at school, what kind of things do they use it for? PROBE, WRITE FULL LIST ON FLIPCHART. And which of these are necessary uses – and which are just 'nice to do' uses?
  - PROMPT FOR school-related activity, listening to music, sending text messages, making phone calls, using social media, playing games, shopping, watching online videos, reading books, communicating with you/family.



- So in a typical day at school, how much time do you think they normally spend on their device? And what proportion of that is for school-related activities? And how much for non-school related activities?
- From what you know, what do you see as the benefits of students having access to their mobile device during the school day? PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART.
  - Can you give some examples of positive consequences of students being able to use their phone during the school day? PROBE.
  - Are you in contact with your child/ren during and/or after school hours using mobile devices? When do you do this? How useful/necessary is this to you? PROBE. What impact would it have if you weren't able to be in contact with your child/ren throughout the school day?
- And do you think there are any drawbacks or issues with students having access to their mobile device during the school day? PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART.
  - And can you give any examples of negative consequences of students using their phone during the school day?
  - And what about more serious issues, like cyberbullying/ image-based abuse/ pornography? Does having access to their mobile device at school increase the chance of these types of problems? PROBE FOR YES/NO REASONS.
- How important do you think it is for students to have their mobile device during the school day? PROBE in classes? Outside of classes? PROBE Why is it important/not important?

### **Questions - Cybersafety education (20-30 mins)**

- How much, if anything, would you say you know about the safe use of mobile devices by your child/ren?
- And what sources have you used to get this information? PROBE.
- And what, if any, information has your school given your child/ren about using their mobile device safely? PROBE AND LIST EXAMPLES.
- And where else have your child/ren learnt about how to use their mobile devices safely? Have they learnt about cybersafety from anywhere else? PROBE.
- Have you ever tried to find information about cybersafety yourself? [IF CHILD/REN HASN'T RECEIVED cybersafety EDUCATION] How useful do you think it would be for your child/ren to learn about safe mobile use? E.g. cybersafety education?
- So thinking about the range of cybersafety information or education that they've received, or learnt about, what are the most useful things they've learnt? PROBE.
- How has this knowledge helped them? PROBE.
- Were there things that they've been taught about cybersafety that you don't think have been useful? Or were unrealistic? PROBE.
- Can you think of any examples of how they've changed their use of their mobile device, after receiving some cybersafety information or education?
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure they use their mobile devices safely? Yours? Your child/ren? The teachers and school? PROBE Why do you say that?
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure students use their mobile devices in an effective way? E.g. being digitally literate, forming strong relationships, etc. Students? Parents? Teachers and school? PROBE Why do you say that?

### **Questions - School policy (20-30 mins)**

- Earlier we briefly discussed your child's school's policy about students using their mobile devices at school. What do you think about the school's policy?
  - IF POSITIVE/NEGATIVE PROBE FULLY Why do you say that?
  - Why do you think the school has a policy around mobile device use at school?
  - Do you think the school's policy is helpful? IF YES/NO, why do you say that?
  - Do students generally follow these rules, or not?
  - How seriously does your school enforce its mobile device policy?
  - What are the consequences when students break these rules?

- In your opinion, what policy should your school have in place about how and when you can use your device? USE FLIPCHART TO FULLY EXPLORE STUDENT'S PREFERRED MOBILE DEVICE POLICY
  - When do you think students should be allowed to use their mobile device at school? PROBE Why?
  - Are there particular places/circumstances when mobile device use by students should be allowed?
  - Have you ever had to work with the school to ensure your child is using their mobile device appropriately? PROBE. How did you do this? How effective was this?
- Some people suggest that there should be greater restrictions on the use of mobile devices by students during school hours?
  - What do you think about this suggestion? IF SUPPORT/OPPOSE, PROBE WHY.
  - What impact would it have on your children if they weren't able to use their mobile device during school hours? PROBE.
  - How would they feel if they couldn't use their phone at all at school?
  - In what ways would it affect their life? PROBE FOR IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE, PROGRESS AT SCHOOL, COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS.
  - And how would it affect your life? PROBE COMMUNICATION WITH CHILD/REN, KNOWING WHERE THEY ARE ('FIND FRIENDS')
  - Do you think access to mobile phones should vary according to which year children are in at school? IF SO, at what age should students get access – or more access to their mobile devices? PROBE.
  - If there were greater restrictions on use of mobile devices during school hours, what would be the advantages? PROBE.
    - What if these restrictions were put in place by Government, rather than your child/ren's school?
  - And what would be the disadvantages? PROBE.
  - How do you think students would learn to regulate their mobile device usage if they were banned at school?
  - What do you think would be the long term implications of banning mobile devices at school? PROBE. Would there be any impacts on their development of digital skills? Or digital attitudes?
  - How would you feel about needing to be responsible for your children's development and digital skills and attitudes yourself, rather than them learning about this through school?

**Thank and close**

## Focus group/interview discussion guide – teachers and principals

### Introduction & Warm-Up (5 mins)

- Welcome and thank for attendance
- Introduce self and client observers (if applicable)
- State aim of discussion – The Ipsos Social Research Institute is conducting this research on behalf of the NSW Government to better understand how kids and teenagers use mobile devices
- Housekeeping: toilets, fire alarm, turn off mobile phones
- Duration of meeting (1.5hrs)
- Open and frank feedback welcomed
- Own perspective is important, all opinions are valid. There are no right or wrong answers
- Everyone to participate, feel free to (politely) disagree, but do not talk over each other
- Moderator may need to move the conversation on to new topic occasionally to make sure key areas are covered in the time we have
- If it comes up, there is no need to share the reason any personal details if you're not comfortable doing so. If at any point you feel uncomfortable talking about a particular topic, feel free to excuse yourself from the room for a few minutes, or ask me to move on
- Confidentiality assured – reporting on themes, including anonymous quotes in support
- Permission for recording

### Participant Introduction each member of the group to introduce themselves

#### Questions - School use (20 mins teachers /10-15 mins principals)

- What is your school's policy about using mobile devices at school?
  - Can students use phones if they're on school grounds?
    - Before school?
    - At recess or lunch?
    - In class?
  - How long has the current policy been in place?
- What are your thoughts on the current policy? PROBE GOOD/BAD, REASONS WHY.
- In what ways do students currently say they need to use their phones? PROBE, WRITE FULL LIST ON FLIPCHART. And which of these are necessary uses – and which are just 'nice to do' uses?
  - PROMPT FOR school-related activity, listening to music, sending text messages, making phone calls, using social media, playing games, shopping, watching online videos, reading books, communicating with parents.
- So in a typical day at school, how often do you think students normally use their device for school-related activities? And how often for non-school related activities?
- What do you see as the benefits of students having access to their mobile devices during the school day? PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART.
  - Can you give some examples of positive consequences of students being able to use their phones during the school day? PROBE.
  - Can you give any examples of how use of mobile devices can enhance a student's educational progress?
- And do you think there are any drawbacks or issues with students having access to their mobile devices during the school day. PROBE FULLY AND FLIPCHART.
  - And can you give any examples of negative consequences of students using their phones during the school day? How does it affect students? PROBE FOR ABILITY TO FOCUS, RETAIN INFORMATION ETC.
  - Have you ever seen students distracted by using their mobile devices during the day? Were there any consequences? PROBE.
  - Under what circumstances does device use become problematic in your school?
  - Have you had any bad situations or problems with students in your school that occurred because they were using mobile devices? Either on school grounds or outside of school.

- And what about more serious issues, like cyberbullying? Do students having access to their mobile devices at school increase the chance of cyberbullying? And what are the other risks? PROBE FOR YES/NO REASONS.
- Are there particular students who find it difficult to comply with the school's policy? Why is that? PROBE.
- How important do you think it is for students to have their mobile device during the school day? PROBE in classes? Outside of classes? PROBE Why is it important/not important?

### **Questions - Cybersafety education (20-30 mins teachers /10-15 mins principals)**

- How much would you say you know about the safe use of mobile devices?
- What training, if any, have you been given about the safe use of mobile devices and cybersafety? When/where did you receive that training?
- If you need guidance or advice on this issue, who do you turn to? PROBE.
- How much, if anything, would you say students know about the safe use of mobile devices?
- What, if any, information has your school given students about using their mobile device safely? PROBE AND LIST EXAMPLES. Have you ever personally given students information about mobile device safety? □ And how else do you think students have learnt about how to use their mobile devices safely? PROBE.
- Thinking about the range of cybersafety information or education that they receive, or learn about, what do you think are the most useful things they need to know? PROBE.
- How will this knowledge help them? PROBE.
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure students use their mobile devices safely? Students? Parents? Teachers and school? PROBE Why do you say that?
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure students use their mobile devices in an effective way? E.g. being digitally literate, forming strong relationships, etc. Students? Parents? Teachers and school? PROBE Why do you say that?
- What, if any, training have you had about regulating phone use in classrooms? IF HAD TRAINING: How did you find this? How well did this equip you? How could this be improved?
- What, if any, training have you had about using mobile devices for educational use in classrooms? IF HAD TRAINING: How did you find this? How well did this equip you? How could this be improved?

### **Questions - School policy (20-30 mins teachers /10-15 mins principals)**

- Earlier we briefly discussed your school's policy about students using mobile devices at school. What do you think about the school's policy?
  - IF POSITIVE/NEGATIVE PROBE FULLY Why do you say that?
  - Why do you think the school has a policy around mobile device use at school?
  - Do you think the school's policy is helpful? IF YES/NO, why do you say that?
  - Do you and your colleagues follow the school policy to manage mobile devices in schools? IF NOT, WHY NOT? How easy is it to manage/enforce the policy?
  - Do students generally follow these rules, or not?
  - How seriously does your school enforce its mobile device policy?
  - What are the consequences when students break these rules?
- How effective do you think the current policy is?
- Do you know of policies at other schools that may be more effective? Why do you think these are more effective?
- In your opinion, what policy should schools have in place about how and when students can use their devices? USE FLIPCHART TO FULLY EXPLORE TEACHERS' PREFERRED MOBILE DEVICE POLICY
  - When do you think students should be allowed to use their mobile device at school? PROBE Why?
  - Are there particular places/circumstances when mobile device use should be allowed, where it currently isn't?
  - Are there any technical solutions that you think could help to manage students' use of mobile devices at school? What might these be? How would they help?

- Do you use mobile devices as a teaching tool or support in your classroom? PROBE FOR EXAMPLES
  - In your opinion, how helpful is it to use mobile devices as a teaching tool in the classroom? How does it enhance your quality of teaching? PROBE.
  - Are there any downsides to trying to use mobile devices during lessons? PROBE.
- Who do you normally go to for advice about mobile device usage? PROBE: students using mobile devices inappropriately or too often in class or on school grounds / students facing issues as a result of mobile devices / using mobile devices as part of education in class
  - How have you found this? How much support have you received? What support would be useful here?
  - Do you ever work with colleagues to improve the way students use their mobile devices? E.g. share ideas or feedback? Some people suggest that there should be greater restrictions on the use of mobile devices during school hours.
  - What do you think about this suggestion? IF SUPPORT/OPPOSE, PROBE WHY.
  - What impact would it have on students if they weren't able to use their mobile devices during school hours? PROBE. IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE?
  - How would you feel if they couldn't use their phone at all at school?
  - In what ways would it affect your professional life? PROBE FOR IMPACT.
  - Do you think access to mobile phones should vary according to which year students are in at school? IF SO, at what age should students get access – or more access to their mobile devices? PROBE.
  - If there were greater restrictions on use of mobile devices during school hours, what would be the advantages? PROBE.
    - What if these restrictions were put in place by Government, rather than your school?
  - And what would be the disadvantages? PROBE.
  - How do you think students would learn to regulate their mobile device usage if they were banned at school?
  - What do you think would be the long term implications of banning mobile devices at school? PROBE. Would there be any impacts on their development of digital skills? Or digital attitudes?
- Who do you think should be responsible for deciding on policies and rules for mobile device use at school? PROBE: Your school? The students themselves? Parents or parent bodies? The Government? Why this group?

**Thank and close (5 mins)**

## Survey Questions

### Student

- Q1. I am responding as...
- Q2. Which year group are you in?
- Q3. Do you use a mobile digital device at school?
- Q4. What do you use your mobile device for while at school?
- Q5. During the school day, approximately how much time do you spend on your device on non-school related activities?
- Q6. Do you think there are risks associated with using these devices at school?
- Q7. Do you think there are benefits associated with using these devices at school?
- Q8. Have you received any education in cybersafety?
- Q9. How would your life change if you weren't able to access your device during school hours?
- Q10. What rules should your school have in place about how and when you can use your device?
- Q11. Should the government restrict you from using your device in school time?
- Q12. Additional comments for students



## Parents

- Q13. Are you worried about students having access to mobile phone devices at recess and lunch time in schools?
- Q14. Are there advantages to young people having access to mobile devices in school hours?
- Q15. Have you ever had to work with a school to ensure your child is using their device appropriately?
- Q16. What forms of cybersafety education have you found most useful?
- Q17. What strategies do you use at home to regulate your child's use of mobile devices?
- Q18. Whose responsibility is it to ensure children and young people use mobile device wisely?
- Q19. What rules are in place at your child's school to regulate the use of mobile devices and are these rules appropriate?
- Q20. Should the government restrict the use of mobile devices in primary schools?
- Q21. Should the government restrict the use of mobile devices in high schools?
- Q22. Additional comments from parents

## Educators

- Q23. Under what circumstances does mobile device use become problematic in your school?
- Q24. What rules are in place at your school to regulate mobile device use by students and how do you manage this? How easy is it to enforce school rule and why?
- Q25. Do you use mobile device as a teaching tool or support in your classroom?
- Q26. Whose responsibility is it to ensure children and young people use mobile devices safely?
- Q27. How do you currently work with other teachers to manage mobile devices in schools and who do you turn to for advice?
- Q28. Do you actively seek further training around the effective use of digital technology?
- Q29. Is the use of mobile devices more problematic for some students?
- Q30. Do you believe that the presence of smart phones at recess and lunch time reduces opportunities for social interaction between students?
- Q31. Do you have any evidence that the presence of mobile devices in schools increases cyberbullying, image based abuse and access to pornography?
- Q32. Should the government restrict the use of mobile devices in primary schools?
- Q33. Should the government restrict the use of mobile devices in high schools?
- Q34. Additional comments from educators

## Analysis of the survey responses

The open-response survey items were analysed by a team of Western Sydney University (WSU) researchers and a research-assistant experienced in qualitative and quantitative mixed, methods research and data analysis and the use of NVivo software. The team familiarised themselves with the questions and formed an overarching sense of patterns in the responses. This scoping stage was followed by three rounds of analysis: in the first round key themes were identified for each of the questions, and in the second round themes from related questions were combined and consolidated. The third stage of data analysis was a meta-analysis of all the open-response survey items.

## **Appendix 2 – Sample school policies as they pertain to mobile digital devices.**

## Appendix 3 – Resources provided to the review team in submissions

“Acknowledging that the Australian Curriculum is already crowded, and teachers are already under time pressures, the Office has developed a range of evidence-based frameworks, tools and programs, mapped to the Australian Curriculum and hosted on the Well Being Hub and at [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au), to support schools play this role.

Our programs include:

- Young and eSafe - a platform to empower young people to think critically and to take action as positive bystanders if they encounter online conduct such as cyberbullying.
- Rewrite Your Story - video based resources to initiate conversations around harmful online behaviours, particularly cyberbullying.
- Be Deadly Online – a platform aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, tackling cyberbullying, sexting and reputation management.
- The Lost Summer – a gamified educational tool that teaches young people the value of behaviours like respect, consent and empathy through game play and is supported by lesson plans and guidance for teachers.

To redress this knowledge gap, the Office publishes and regularly updates a wide range of resources on our iParent portal help parents understand cyber safety issues and how to mitigate the inherent risks. This includes the following guidance on the internet and smartphones:

- **eSafety guidance for parents of pre-schoolers:** practical tips to help manage your child’s first access to connected devices.
- **Your child’s first smartphone:** what to consider before giving your child their first smartphone.

Complementing this is the recently released Screen Smart Parent Tour, a self-reflective and interactive tool designed to help parents of 10-14 year olds get up to speed with cyber safety matters.” Office of the eSafety Commissioner

“By providing accessible and anonymous prevention and treatment, the Internet can play an important role in overcoming obstacles for seeking help. Black Dog Institute’s mental health prevention and early intervention school-based programs that utilise smartphone devices in their delivery and implementation include:

- **Bite Back** – The very first free online positive psychology program designed to improve the overall wellbeing of young Australians between 13 and 16 years old (15,000 users in Australia). This program is now available to all Australian schools.
- **Sleep Ninja** – This program is for young people with sleep difficulties, and delivers Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Insomnia, with effects on sleep and mood. Following successful piloting and feasibility testing in 6 schools, this program is now being taken to trial phase.
- **Smooth Sailing** - Delivered in the classroom, the Smooth Sailing service utilises a website (accessed on mobile and desktops), to screen students’ mental health and provide care via online therapy programs or face to face with the school counsellor. This service has been implemented in 26 NSW high schools, with over 1800 young people taking part. The service also provides a secure online portal, allowing school counsellors to initiate and action follow-up.

**SPARX** - An online, gamified Cognitive Behaviour Therapy program, which effectively prevents the onset of depressive symptoms, when delivered to adolescents prior to a significant, universal stressor like final secondary school exams. This program was delivered in 10 selective high schools in NSW. “ Black Dog Institute

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