



17th January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

Firstly, may I wish you a very Happy new year and I hope that you have had a restful Christmas.

I am writing to you regarding the use of mobile phones and the research and approach we have undertaken at St Laurence.

National Research

According to the Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019, 40% of 12-15s who use social media say they feel pressure to be popular on these sites. Importantly, research shows that children do not necessarily see a distinction between the online and offline worlds; similar proportions of children said they felt pressure to be popular in 'real life' as well as on social media. The Children's Commissioner report 'Life in Likes' detailing how children use their devices, worryingly found that children prioritise speaking to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support online, removing face to face interactions and personal connections.

Unsurprisingly, there is a correlation between the time spent on social media and the experience of being bullied. Children aged 12-15 who spend more than ten hours a week on social media are twice as likely to say they have been bullied through this platform than those who are on it for less than ten hours a week (26% vs. 12%). The Media Lives research reports that children are seeing more hateful online content than they used to, and half of children reported seeing violent and other disturbing content online in the last year.

The Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019 also explores national parental views and indicates that parents are increasingly concerned about their child seeing self-harm related content online. Almost half of parents are concerned about their child seeing content which might encourage them to harm themselves, up from 39% in 2018. According to the report, fewer parents feel that the overall benefits of their child being online outweigh the risks compared to five years ago; just over half of parents feel this (55%), compared to two-thirds (65%) in 2015.

With regards to gaming, research shows that two in five parents of children who play games, say they are concerned about how much time their child spends on them; while over a third are concerned about their content. A third of parents say they are concerned about whom their child is gaming with. These concerns are not unfounded; a quarter of 12-15s who play games online say they have played against people they don't know. Furthermore, the World Health Organisation has officially recognised gaming addiction as a modern disease demonstrating the growth in international concern and there are now help centres in the UK which deal with screen addiction for children, further evidence showing the seriousness of device addiction for our young people.

It would be impossible to ignore the benefits that technology can bring to the classroom but we are in the business of education, looking to develop our young people into well rounded individuals, and ensuring we are providing them with a safe environment within which to learn.



For these reasons we then carried out our surveys, the results of which are below:

Parent Survey

There was an excellent response from parents and the overwhelming majority of you were in favour of changing the current approach. Many of you were concerned about levels of online bullying that your child has experienced at some point; many of you were worried about the levels of peer pressure that were experienced to have the most 'up to date' device as well as gaming addiction which certainly aligned with the above research, but most of all, you felt that it was important for there to be boundaries for the use of mobile phones in school and that the current approach was not suitable.

Staff Survey

Almost all of the staff here at school took part in the survey and again, the overwhelming response was that the current approach should change. Many teachers had identified that mobile phones presented problems in lessons and the pastoral teams particularly spoke of the negative impact of mobile phones in school, either through reports of concerning content being seen or causing conflict between friendship groups.

Student Survey

There was again a very high response from students and they had a lot to say about this. The majority absolutely wanted to keep the approach as it is which conflicted with the other two groups who took part but interestingly, especially in light of the research above, they also spoke of having experienced online bullying at some point and the negative impact of social media.

Next Steps

Based on all the research, the survey responses and having read through the comments made by all those involved, we have decided that from Monday 6th June (the first day back after the May half term), we will have a new approach.

From Monday 6th June, students in years 7 to 11 are allowed to use mobile devices up until 8.30am at which point they should be turned off and in their bags until 3pm, after which they are welcome to use them. This means we are not stopping a student from having a mobile on them for an emergency before or after school. However, during the day we will not allow students to use mobile devices unless otherwise directed by a member of staff and this includes at break and lunch. Students in the Sixth Form will be allowed the use of a mobile device but this will be restricted to the sixth form centre.

The use of a mobile device in a lesson will not be banned but this will be only at the teacher's discretion. However, as it can disadvantage students without a device and also conflicts with some parents' choice on what their child has access to, staff will be fully briefed on this and asked to consider different strategies where possible.



There are of course some exceptions that we could not ignore. Some students have a significant medical condition (diabetes for example) where the phone is essential for monitoring health and these students, who are known to us, will be allowed their phone. These cases will be agreed and communicated with the parents to avoid any concerns.

The reason why we have chosen to introduce this after the May half term is so we can work together to prepare our students for this change. We will be providing information to students via the tutor period and in lessons, working with the student council on how to support our students and giving you the opportunity of asking questions about this change. I invite you to email me at the school with any questions you may have about this, after which I will prepare a Frequently Asked Questions sheet with our responses which will be shared with you before the February half term. Any questions need to be sent to headteacher@st-laurence.com by 31st January.

Best wishes.

Kind regards

Tim Farrer
Headteacher