

Dear Families,

As you will be aware through recent media, the Minister for Education, Mr Paul Givan, has made it a Departmental Policy to reduce and, where possible, ban, the use of smartphones across schools.

At St Bride's, it has always been a school policy not to permit pupils to carry or use Mobile Phones in school and not to wear digitally enabled technology such as smartwatches, particularly those that can also act as recording devices. The many potential safeguarding issues associated to this are clear.

We have made our views on childhood access to technology known to families each year through our Parent/Carer Information Handbook and our suite of eSafety policies, this is not a new approach.

We are also proud to support the *Smartphone Free Childhood* campaign, promoted by Minister Givan, and this year are offering all parents the opportunity to hear directly from **The Thrive Academy** experts on ways to protect, support and ensure appropriate use of technology and internet access in a parent workshop taking place on **Monday 16th February at 3.30pm in our Ashleigh Hall**. **All parents are warmly invited and encouraged to come along to this session** to make you aware of things to look out for – after all, our children often outsmart us when it comes to technology and its many workarounds.

Following the return from the Christmas break, staff at St Bride's have noted an increase in the number of pupils wearing digital watches and carrying mobile phones without parents having sought school permission. As staff do not want to remove this technology from pupils, we are seeking the cooperation of all families to ensure that all pupils (and parents) are adhering to our school policy and leaving this technology safely at home.

We acknowledge the many valid reasons why some parents may choose to purchase smart technology for their primary-school-aged children but would strongly discourage against this as we feel, and all of the research shows, that access to such technology in the primary years has a detrimental effect on pupil wellbeing.

Below is the advice and rebuttals provided by the **Smartphone Free Childhood Campaign**.

“My child needs a smartphone to stay safe on the journey to and from school.”

We all want our children to be safe and families often assume a smartphone is the best way to ensure that. But smartphones don't just offer connection, they also open the door to harmful content, group chats, and pressure to respond at all hours.

Even with good intentions, they can expose young people to things they're simply not ready for.

There's also a growing issue with phone theft. Around 500 children are mugged for their phones every day in the UK (ONS, 2019), and many secondary students admit to using their phones while walking, leading to accidents and near-misses.

A simple brick phone (**call and text only**) is more than enough for emergencies or last-minute changes to collection arrangements and in many ways, makes their journey safer, not riskier.

“I need to be able to contact my child during the day.”

This one comes up a lot. But the truth is, children can be reached at school just like they always could. Schools have reliable systems in place for passing on urgent messages to pupils. And one of the great things about the school environment is that it gives young people the space to learn problem-solving, confidence and independence, without checking in with home or their 'friends' every five minutes.



ST BRIDE'S PS & NU, BELFAST

PRINCIPAL: MS CATHY HUNTER

DERRYVOLGIE AVENUE, BELFAST. BT9 6FP

TEL: 028 90381700

E-MAIL: INFO@STBRIDES.BELFAST.NI.SCH.UK

WEBSITE: WWW.STBRIDESPS.ORG.UK

INSTAGRAM: [@StBridesPS](https://www.instagram.com/StBridesPS)

“I want to track where they are.” We understand that tracking can offer reassurance. Devices like Air Tags or GPS watches are a great alternative, they're affordable, discreet, and far less likely to be lost or stolen. But it's also worth thinking about the message we send when we track children constantly. Does it help them feel secure and trusted or anxious and watched? Research suggests that while some children do feel reassured by being tracked, many internalise the idea that the world is too dangerous to explore or that they can't manage alone. Over time, this can undermine the very confidence we're trying to build. A brick phone, or check-ins at agreed times, can be a more balanced way to build trust and independence.

“My child needs to be able to contact me during the school day.”

Again, they can. Schools are well set up to support this. But in most cases, constant contact isn't helping young people, it's holding them back. Managing minor issues, solving disagreements, or remembering PE kits without parental intervention builds resilience and confidence. And when something really is urgent, the school knows how to reach home.

“We need to prepare kids for the digital world.”

We agree completely. But here's the thing: learning to use a smartphone doesn't take years. It takes minutes. What takes time and maturity is learning to manage distraction, pressure, addictive features, and exposure to harmful content. A smartphone-free school day doesn't mean rejecting tech. It means giving kids the time and space to develop the foundations they'll need to navigate it well when they're older. For more on this read our article about why delaying smartphones is like giving your child a superpower.

“My child has diabetes and uses their phone for medical needs.”

Of course, if a smartphone is being used for genuine medical purposes, that's absolutely fine. Every school will make reasonable adjustments to support students with specific health needs. Smartphone-free school policies are never about restricting necessary medical access, they're about making sure devices are used with purpose, and with young people's wellbeing in mind.

“My child's smartphone has parental controls.”

Parental controls can help but they're far from fail-safe. According to a Parentkind poll (May 2024), 58% of teens say they've never had controls put on their phone by parents. And of those who do, nearly half, 47%, say they've found ways to bypass them. So, while controls might offer some short-term peace of mind, they're not a long-term safeguard. And they can't filter out the social pressures that come with smartphone use — like the constant group chats, comparison traps, or exposure to harmful content. Even with controls, smartphones still offer 24/7 access to a world that children just aren't ready for.

“My child has additional needs and really needs their phone.”

We know there are exceptions and complexities, and we're not here to pretend there's one solution that fits everyone. For students with specific needs, schools can and do make individual arrangements. A smartphone-free policy isn't about making life harder for families, it's about creating a learning environment that works better for most pupils, most of the time.

Further information can be found on the Department of Education's website or by visiting www.smartphonefreechildhood.org

Thank you for your support and cooperation as we strive to enable all of our children to **SHINE** at St Bride's. **S**afe **H**appy **I**ncluded **N**urtured **E**ngaged



ST BRIDE'S PS & NU, BELFAST

PRINCIPAL: MS CATHY HUNTER

DERRYVOLGIE AVENUE, BELFAST. BT9 6FP

TEL: 028 90381700

E-MAIL: INFO@STBRIDESPS.BELFAST.NI.SCH.UK

WEBSITE: WWW.STBRIDESPS.ORG.UK

INSTAGRAM: [@StBridesPS](https://www.instagram.com/StBridesPS)