



Surrey Secondary Phase Council

Co-Chairs Barbara Mayaire and Steve Smith

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Dear Families,

As your child approaches the transition from primary to secondary school, we know this is an important milestone, for them and for you. We want that transition to be safe, positive and enriching, supporting both wellbeing and learning.

That is why, as the Surrey Secondary Phase Council, writing on behalf of all 58 secondary state school Headteachers in Surrey, we are urging families to delay purchasing a smartphone for your child for as long as possible. The Smartphone Free Childhood movement recommends waiting until at least age 14.

Why we must intervene

There is now strong evidence that smartphones can negatively affect young people's wellbeing, learning and relationships. Key concerns include:

- **Less real-world social interaction** and more time spent online
- **Greater exposure to harmful content**, often unintentionally
- **Increased risk of anxiety and low mood**, particularly with earlier smartphone use
- **Addiction and distraction**, affecting sleep, concentration and behaviour

The Moral Argument

Children are not allowed to smoke or drink alcohol, two substances with potentially significant impact to their health. However currently we give children access to smartphones where they have access to harmful content including extreme pornography, cyberbullying, harmful chat messages, extremist ideology and toxic communications. We have a responsibility as adults to protect our young people from this.

What Surrey secondary schools are seeing

Across Surrey secondary schools, we are increasingly seeing the impact of smartphones through issues that begin outside school but quickly spill into school life, such as friendship conflicts escalating through group chats, distress linked to social media and messaging platforms, and pupils being drawn into online interactions late into the night. These issues can affect learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and create safeguarding concerns for families and schools. Schools see little evidence of smartphone ownership and use adding any true 'value' to a child's life. Schools do see a significant number of occasions where smartphone use has fractured a child or teenagers experience of growing up. Additionally, increasing numbers of parents of secondary age children are regretting allowing smartphone ownership and see it as having a high level of impact on their family life.



School policies and access to learning

Every Surrey secondary school enforces strict mobile phone policies, many operate a “no phones seen at all” rule, to protect learning and wellbeing. Importantly, no child will be disadvantaged by not having a smartphone. Homework and communication can be accessed via a home computer or tablet, and schools provide support where needed.

A practical alternative

We understand parents’ concerns about safety and communication, especially when children begin travelling independently. A basic “brick phone”—calls and texts only, with no internet or apps—offers peace of mind without the risks.

Our united appeal to Surrey families

We encourage families to:

- Delay smartphone ownership until at least age 14
- Consider a brick phone for essential contact
- Join other parents by signing the Smartphone Free Childhood Parent Pact www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

We recognise that peer pressure is challenging to manage and saying ‘no’ to your child can be difficult to sustain. However, together we can protect children’s wellbeing and preserve what matters most: friendships, outdoor play, healthy sleep and uninterrupted learning.

Thank you for your support and cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Smith and Barbara Mayaire
Co-Chairs Surrey Secondary Phase Council
(On behalf of Surrey Secondary State School Headteachers)