

Date: January 2026**Ref:** Dorset Council Smartphone & mobile phone recommendations**Department:** Education and Learning

Dear Parents, Carers and Guardians,

As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring the best educational outcomes and safeguarding the wellbeing of all children and young people, we are writing to share important guidance on the use of mobile phones in schools.

Smartphones are now a common part of everyday life, and while they offer many benefits for adults - such as staying connected and accessing information, there is growing concern about their impact on children and young people. This concern is shared by Dorset Council, school leaders, teachers, and support staff across the county.

What the Evidence Tells Us

A growing body of research highlights the negative effects of smartphones and social media on children and teenagers, including:

- Increased anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem
- Disrupted sleep, reduced attention and focus
- Exposure to harmful or inappropriate content
- Cyberbullying and online peer pressure
- Reduced time for play, social interaction, and skill development

Many children now receive their first smartphone while still in primary school. By age 12, most already own one. In response, Dorset Council has worked with schools, children and young people, and the Dorset Education Board to develop a shared approach aimed at:

- Supporting completely smartphone-free environments in first and primary schools
- Sharing best practice for smartphone-free middle and secondary schools, some of which already restrict smartphone and mobile use for Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils
- Encouraging all schools to prohibit phone use during the school day as part of their behaviour policies

Dorset Council

- encourages schools to develop and implement clear, consistent mobile phone policies that:

- prohibit phone use during the school day
- are clearly communicated to pupils, parents, and staff
- are supported by education on digital literacy and responsible use
- include appropriate consideration of provisions for pupils with specific needs (e.g. caring responsibilities, medical or safeguarding reasons)

A Cultural Shift

In light of research and new understanding of the associated negative impact we anticipate there may be a shift in coming years, with fewer children receiving smartphones when they start secondary school.

Numerous Dorset schools already have policies restricting phone use during the school day. However, to truly safeguard children, we need to work together beyond the school gates and adopt a proactive, evidence-informed approach that responds to emerging research and evolving challenges. Schools tell us they remain deeply concerned about children's online safety - especially outside school hours.

Working Together

Many Dorset parents have signed up to parent pacts, agreeing to delay smartphones for their children, and we expect these initiatives to grow. While exceptions may be made for children with specific medical needs or caring responsibilities, these should be reviewed individually by the school.

If you need to contact your child while they travel to and from school, we recommend using a basic mobile phone, often referred to as a brick phone. These phones are inexpensive and do not have smartphone capabilities including internet access.

Dorset Council and schools will encourage families to delay smartphone ownership until at least age 14, unless there is a specific need. This will help safeguard children, preserve childhood, and support the development of vital life skills.

Support for Families

If your child already has a smartphone, we encourage you to explore parental controls and safer SIM options. These can help limit access to inappropriate content and manage screen time.

For further support and resources, please visit Smartphone Free Childhood, a national initiative helping families to navigate this important issue: [Smartphone Free Childhood](#).

Additional information can also be found here:

[RESOURCES — Papaya Talks](#)

[Resources for parents - Health Professionals For Safer Screens](#)

[Smartphone Free Childhood | Resources for Parents](#)

Next Steps

Dorset Council are planning an event in the Spring Term (2026) for parents and carers, providing an opportunity to hear directly from Smartphone Free Childhood as well as other key stakeholders and professionals. Further details will be shared in due course. We also intend to collaborate with local councillors and MPs to advocate for broader reforms at a national level, addressing key challenges related to social media use and strengthening age verification measures.

Thank you for your continued support in helping us create safe, focused, and nurturing learning environments for all children.

Yours sincerely,

Dorset Council Education and Learning Team