Phones away: A mixed methods study exploring secondary school pupil and staff perspectives on tighter mobile phone restrictions

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when times have felt tough and been a welcome distraction from the intensity of doctorate training!

Abstract

There has been much debate in the last five years about the use of mobile phones in schools. Many secondary schools across the world have been introducing mobile phone bans. In the UK, numerous schools have considered further restrictions since the government published guidance in February 2024 which recommends against the use of mobile phones during the school day. However, at present approaches to mobile phone use in schools have been inconsistent and there is a lack of empirical evidence as to the impact of mobile phone restrictions have on a range of factors thought to be influenced by mobile phone use. This research investigated the impact of tighter restrictions on mobile phone use in a secondary school, looking at factors such as attention/concentration in class, behaviour, wellbeing, cyberbullying, physical activity, screen time and social interactions in school. A pre- and post- measure survey was completed by pupils in school, to look at their views before and after mobile phone policy changes. Focus groups with staff and pupils were then conducted to gather their views on the use of mobile phones in school and their perspectives on the findings from the survey. Descriptive statistics were produced for the survey data, and a thematic analysis was used to analyse data gathered from the focus group. Findings showed that most pupils do not feel that mobile phone restrictions have made a difference to factors investigated. School staff were predominately against the use of mobile phones in schools with concerns about safety and classroom distraction. Whereas pupils mostly felt that mobile phones should be used in school within reason. The difference in staff and pupil perspectives highlights the importance of involving the views of pupils in policy formation. Future research could look at longer follow-up periods to review impact and involve parent views.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) use declaration

Artificial intelligence tools (including Claude AI) were used in a limited and supportive capacity during the preparation of this thesis. Their use focused primarily on idea generation for theme/subtheme names during drafting, the final names and all written work are produced by me. AI tools were used as an assistive aid to support the literature review process (by helping to summarise key pieces of information) and did not generate substantive academic content. All writing, conceptualisation, analysis, interpretation, and scholarly argumentation and judgement presented in this thesis are my own work.

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Abbreviations

AI: Artificial intelligence

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CBT: Cognitive behavioural therapy

CYP: Children and Young People

DfE: Department for Education

DSIT: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

EBSA: Emotionally based school avoidance

EP(s): Educational Psychologist(s)

LRQ(s): Literature research question(s)

NHS: National Health Service

PSU: Problematic smartphone use

RQ(s): Research question(s)

SEN: Special educational needs

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

1. Introduction

1.1 Thesis overview

This research investigates pupil and teacher views on smartphone use. Specifically, it explores whether introducing tighter restrictions on smartphone use in a secondary school makes a difference to certain factors. These are attention/concentration in class, rule-breaking/behaviour in school, wellbeing, physical activity, cyberbullying, school belongingness and screen time. Schools in the United Kingdom (UK) are being advised by the government to prohibit the use of smartphones during the school day, which could soon become a legal requirement (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), 2026). Therefore, it is important that there is evidence on whether smartphone restrictions make a difference and to consider the views and concerns of pupils and teachers in relation to the availability of smartphones in schools. At present, there is limited evidence on effectiveness of smartphone restrictions and pupil and teacher views on smartphone use from a UK context. This is particularly important for the field of educational psychology to consider as Every Child Achieving and Thriving (Department for Education (DfE), 2026a) White Paper outlines reforms which state the English education system must create a more inclusive system by 2030. Therefore, any policies put forward will need to review whether they help promote inclusivity and a calm, safe school environment.

1.2 Chapter Overview

This chapter will outline the use of mobile phones amongst children and young people (CYP) and in schools, both globally and in the UK. This will consider the current and broader context of mobile phone use and how this has led to policy changes in the UK, some of these being in response to concerns raised about mobile phone use in schools. As most, if not all, mobile phones used today by CYP have internet access and software applications available (Baker, 2025), the terminology used to refer to mobile phones throughout this thesis will be a 'smartphone'. A smartphone is defined as a mobile phone that connects to the internet and can function like a small computer (Cambridge Dictionary). Furthermore, this chapter will discuss some of the psychological theories around smartphone use and the role of educational psychologists (EPs). It will conclude by discussing the researchers' personal and professional interest in this topic area and the purpose of the research.

1.3 Current and historical context of smartphone use amongst CYP and adults

The use of smartphones is a challenge for schools globally. Technology is advancing all the time and becoming increasingly prominent in everyday life. By the age of 11, nine in ten CYP in the UK own their own smartphone and this rises to 99% by age 16 (Ofcom, 2024). All CYP aged 12-17 are more likely to use a smartphone to go online than any other device (Ofcom, 2024).

The history of mobile phones/smartphones is not long and spans just over 40 years with the first mobile phone launched in 1984 (British Broadcasting Corporation

(BBC) news, 2014). The public generally did not own mobile phones until the 1990s when the reduction in their price brought them into the mainstream (BBC bitesize, 2024). Please see figure 1, 2 and 3 for a timeline overview of the history of mobile phones/smartphones from 1984 to 2026 which focuses on the UK context and current concerns. The timeline includes the most used applications often accessed on a smartphone by CYP which are YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp (Ofcom, 2024). It also includes some dictionaries ‘word of the year’ to represent popular cultural phenomenon’s driven by using smartphones. As the timelines demonstrate, smartphones have had many advances in a short space of time and their use amongst CYP has increased throughout the years (Rahali, Kidron & Livingstone, 2024). The ownership of mobile phones/smartphones has also rapidly increased amongst the UK adult population in the last 30 years with most of the population owning a smartphone in 2025 (Barber, 2025).

Figure 1.

A timeline of the development and use of smartphones from 1984 to 2010.

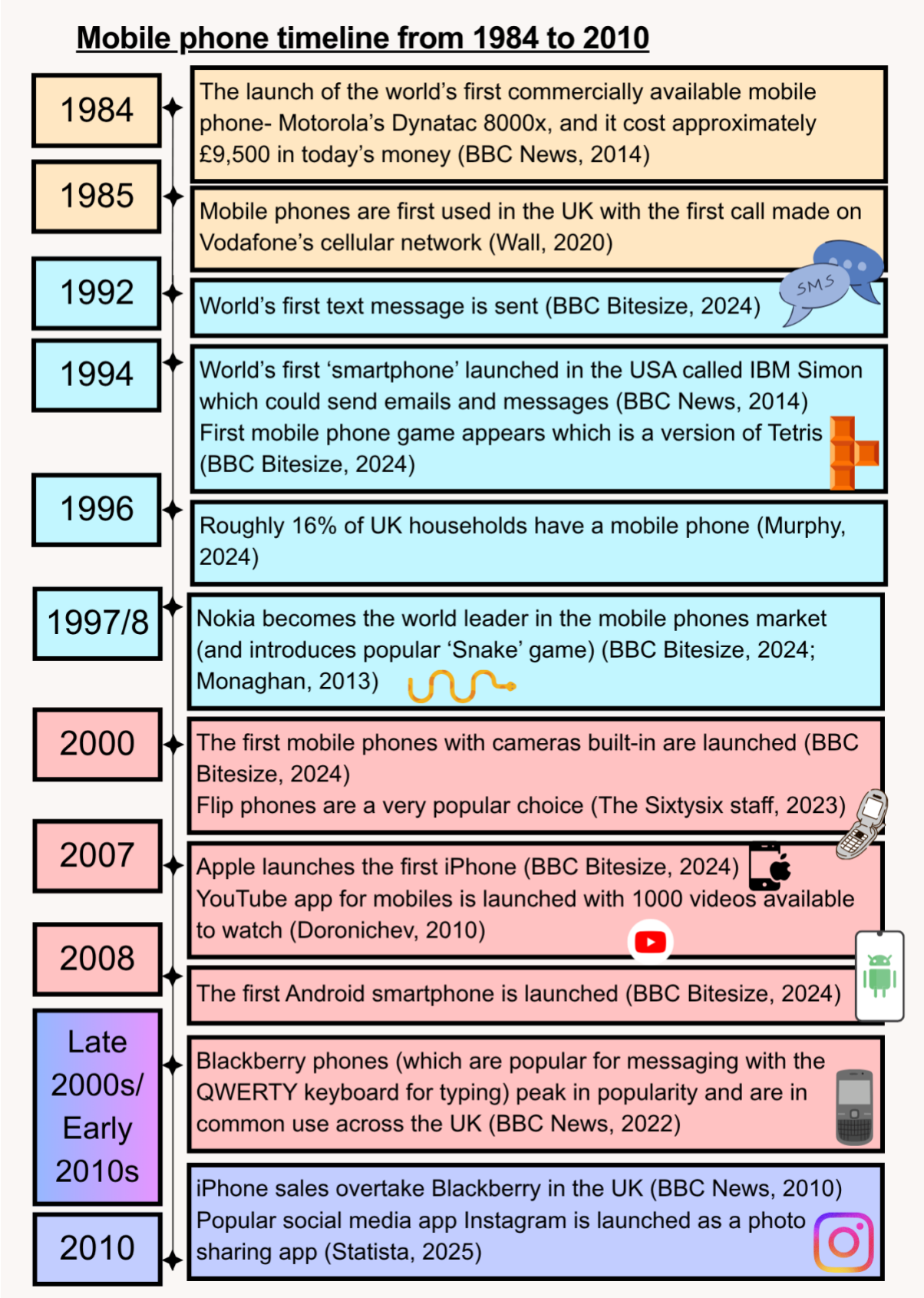


Figure 2.

The smartphone timeline continued from 2011-2023.

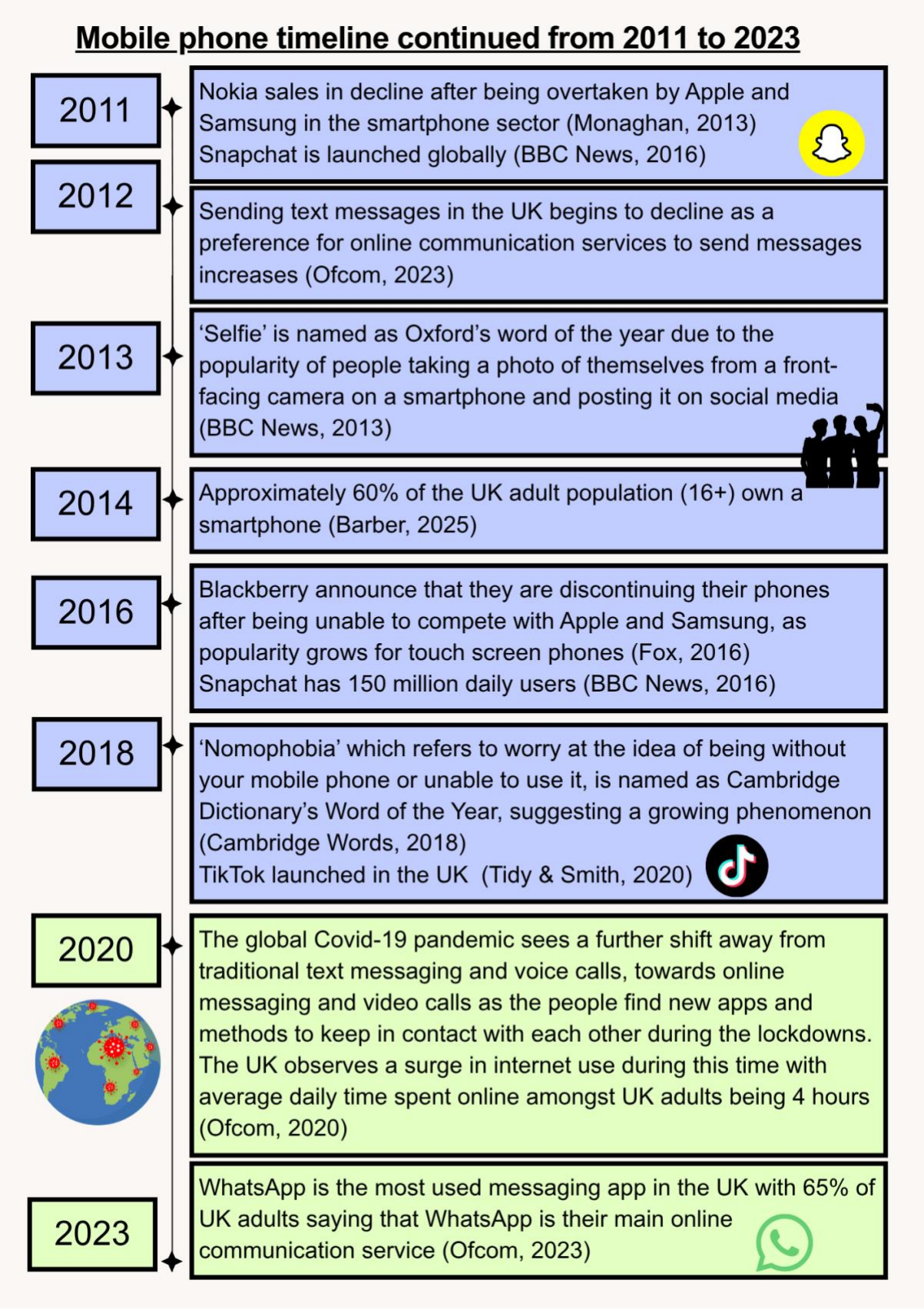
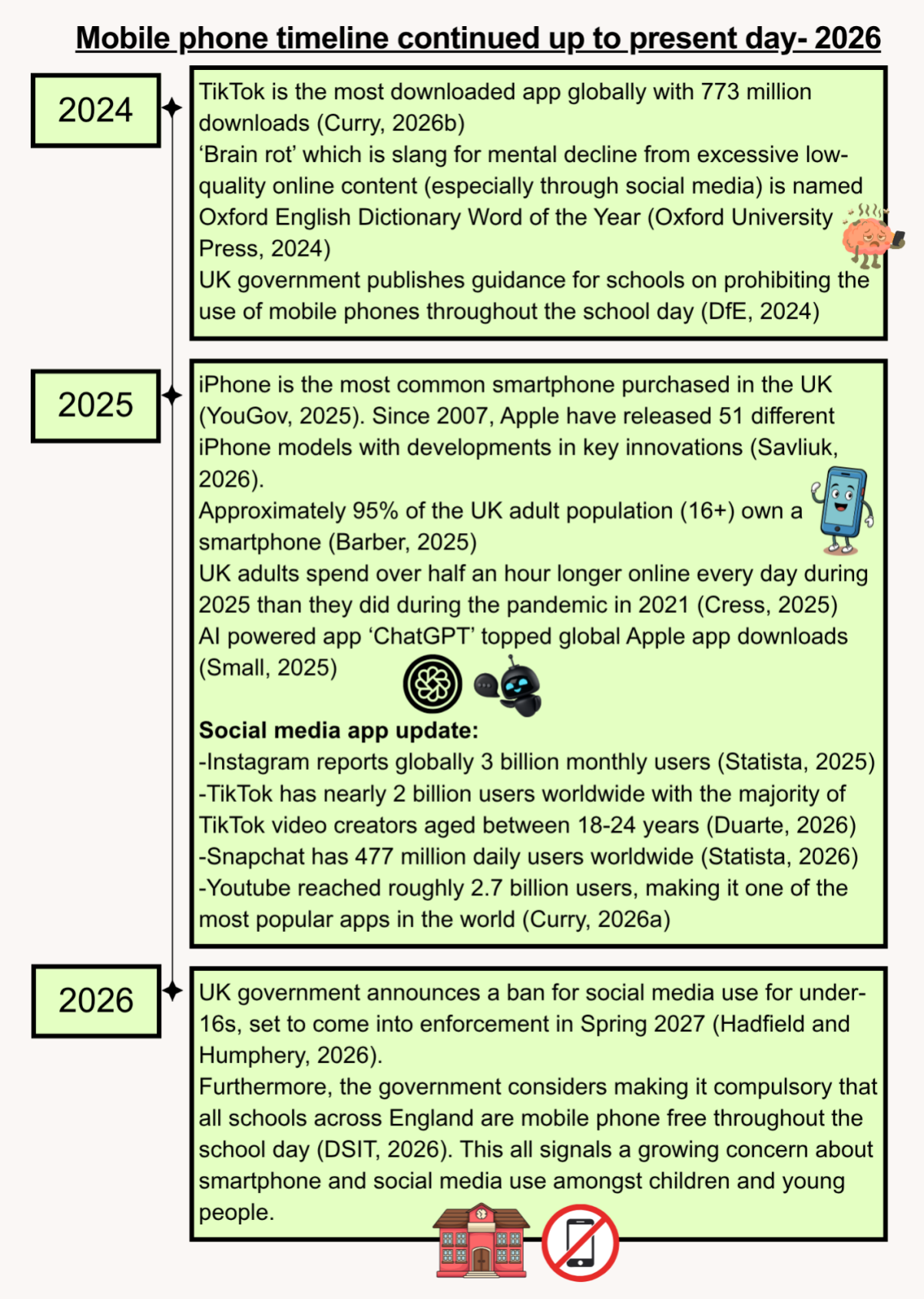


Figure 3.

The smartphone timeline continued from 2024 to present day, 2026.



There is widespread media coverage about schools having concerns and wanting to ban smartphone use. This is not just in the UK but also in countries such as France, China (Wakefield, 2021) and Australia, who have introduced a new law banning CYP under 16 years from using social media which is often accessed on a smartphone (Ritchie, 2024). In July 2023, the United Nations (UN) warned that smartphones were a source of distraction for pupils in the classroom (Vallance & Gerken, 2023). Other concerns from the UN included risk to pupil privacy and online bullying, suggesting that schools across the world should investigate restricting the use of smartphones throughout the school day. At that time, just under one in four countries across the world had policies banning smartphones in schools (Vallance & Gerken, 2023).

In June 2024, BBC News reported that headteachers from 16 secondary schools in Southwark, London were calling for higher sanctions on the use of smartphones in school (Warren, 2024). They reported witnessing the negative impact use had on pupils and hoping that this plan would improve mental health, bullying and reduce screen time. This report also mentions that headteachers in St Albans, Hertfordshire have called on parents not to let their children have a smartphone before they were 14 years old (Warren, 2024). Furthermore, some schools have taken measures to only allow ‘brick’ phones on school sites with no access to the internet and functionality restricted to just texting and calling (Lynch, 2024). These concerns link to guidance, policy and legislative changes that have been published.

1.4 Legislative and policy changes

The UK Government passed the Online Safety Act (2023) in October 2023. The legislation aims to protect CYP from the most harmful content online by placing

responsibility on social media providers to actively monitor their platforms for illegal and harmful content, such as content promoting self-harm or suicide. If technology companies fail to prevent and rapidly remove illegal content, they will face fines that could reach billions of pounds (DSIT, 2023). It is hoped that these measures “will make Britain the safest place in the world to be a child online” (DfE, 2024 p.4).

Following this, the DfE decided to publish guidance for schools on the use of smartphones throughout the school day. This guidance was released in February 2024 and stated that one of greatest challenges facing schools is the presence of smartphones (DfE, 2024). The guidance suggests that schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and calm environment so pupils can learn and thrive, however the use of smartphones risks causing unnecessary distraction, disruption, and diversion (DfE, 2024). Therefore, it encouraged schools to prohibit the use of smartphones throughout the school day, including at break and lunchtimes. This guidance highlights several concerns about the use of smartphones in schools such as the loss of focus/distraction from learning, classroom disruption, peer pressure/possible stigma, online bullying, less face-to-face interaction with peers and impacts on the physical and mental health of pupils.

There is a recognition throughout the guidance that all these concerns impact upon the culture of the school environment (DfE, 2024). There is also hope that through prohibiting the use of smartphones, schools will be a safer environment for CYP. The DfE (2024) guidance acknowledges that at present there is large variation in how different schools are managing the use of smartphones. The guidance suggested that schools should develop a smartphone policy along with the behaviour policy that prohibits the use of smartphones throughout the school day (DfE, 2024). It also acknowledged that the smartphone policy should reflect the school’s individual

contextual needs; whilst under the Equality Act (2010) schools should make reasonable adjustments where pupils are vulnerable or disabled and require access to a smartphone. There are four suggested options from the DfE (2024) to enable a mobile-free environment to be achieved, these are:

1. No smartphones on the school premises (pupils do not bring phones to school and they must be left at home with parents)
2. Smartphone handed in on arrival (pupils give in their phones before school and collect them at the end of the day)
3. Smartphones to be kept in a secure location, which the pupil does not have access throughout the school day (having phones stored in lockers or secure storage places)
4. Never used, seen or heard (pupils keep possession of their smartphones under strict measures that they are not used, seen or heard in school).

In February 2026, the DfE has published further guidance stating that all schools should be smartphone-free environments by default, meaning that it expects schools to implement a policy whereby pupils do not have access to a smartphone throughout the school day (DfE, 2026b). If all schools in England followed this guidance, it would bring an end to permissive policies where pupils are allowed access to their smartphones at times, to all schools having restrictive policies. This guidance states that schools should still make reasonable adjustments and adaptations for pupils who are disabled. However, it states it does not provide an exhaustive list of exceptional circumstances, and schools should assess and make decisions on each case. This could lead to wide variation throughout the country around which pupils are allowed their smartphones in schools, with potentially some schools having more inclusive approaches than others.

However, there have been suggestions from opposing political parties and the House of Lords that the guidance does not go far enough, and the government is at present looking to introduce a legal ban on smartphones in schools across England (Standley, 2026). This would involve an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill making it a legal requirement for schools to enforce smartphone restrictions. Furthermore, from April 2026, schools' smartphone polices will be monitored as part of Ofsted inspections (Standley, 2026) which will increase pressure on schools to move towards restrictive policies.

There has also been growing political momentum to introduce a social media ban for under-16s, after Australia made this ban in 2025 (Seddon, 2026). This is due to widespread concerns that social media use is harmful in many ways for CYP such as viewing content that is not intended for their age (Seddon, 2026).

In March 2026, the government began a three-month consultation called 'Growing up in an online world: a national consultation' to gather views from CYP, parents/carers and members of the public on regulations put in place around social media use and use of smartphones in schools (DSIT, 2026). The Government consultation found that 90% of parents backed minimum age of 16 for social media with 85% of parents saying the risk of social media outweigh the benefits (Hadfield and Humphery, 2026). This was a key finding cited in the rationale behind the UK government introducing a social media ban for under 16s. In a speech announcing the social media ban for under 16s, former prime minister Sir Keir Starmer spoke about social media platforms making children unhappy, making it easier for cyberbullying to take place and platforms being designed to be addictive. He also spoke about social media preventing children from going to bed at a decent hour, doing their homework, reading and playing with their friends (Hadfield and

Humphery, 2026). The UK social media ban for under 16s will include platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X (and these are some of the top social media platforms used by CYP). The ban will aim to also block livestreaming and stranger communication with children for under-16s. The government claim that these restrictions together with the ban will go further than any other country and will apply to a range of online services, including gaming sites (Hadfield and Humphery, 2026). The legislation is expected to be brought to Parliament before Christmas, with rules expected to come into forces in Spring 2027. Other countries considering or planning social media bans are France, Spain, Greece, Denmark, Portugal, Norway and Canada (Hadfield and Humphery, 2026).

1.4.1 Critiques of the policy changes.

There are criticisms of the guidance that state it is an attempt to distract the public away from deeper problems faced by the educational system such as teacher shortages, a high pupil-teacher ratio and a record increase in the achievement gap between the wealthiest and poorest students (Rahali, Kidron & Livingstone, 2024). The general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, Geoff Barton, stated “We have lost count of the number of times that ministers have now announced a crackdown on mobile phones in schools. It is a non-policy for a non-problem” (Rahali, Kidron & Livingstone, 2024). In addition, the head of the Association of School and College Leaders said that the legal backing for the guidance does not change very much because most schools already enforce their own bans (Standley, 2026). They instead suggested that it would be more helpful for the government to make funding available to schools to enforce policies such as lockable pouches and to take regulatory action to tackle harm caused by social

media and excessive use of smartphones which happens outside of school time (Standley, 2026).

1.6 Linking psychological theory to smartphone use in CYP

1.5.1 Impact on behaviour

Nearly 25% of CYP use their smartphones in a way that is consistent with a behavioural addiction (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024). From a neurological viewpoint, notifications from smartphones can activate the chemical reward system in the brain providing a burst of the hormone dopamine which is linked to pleasure (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2020). The behaviour of checking a smartphone therefore is positively reinforced over time and becomes repetitive, increasing in frequency (O'Donnell & Epstein, 2019). A habit can occur "beneath" our conscious decision-making, which can make it difficult to change (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2020). The restrictions on the use of smartphones in schools may be an attempt to prohibit these habitual behaviours and decrease digital distraction from learning. This is of particular interest to the topic at hand as one in three secondary school pupils report that smartphones are used in school without permission in most lessons (DfE, 2023). This causes distraction not only for the pupil using the smartphone, but also other pupils in the class and the teacher (DfE, 2024).

1.5.2 Impact on cognition

Smartphone use can impact upon executive functioning skills in the classroom as pupils' attention is divided between learning and the use of smartphones for unrelated purposes (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2020). The mere presence of a smartphone

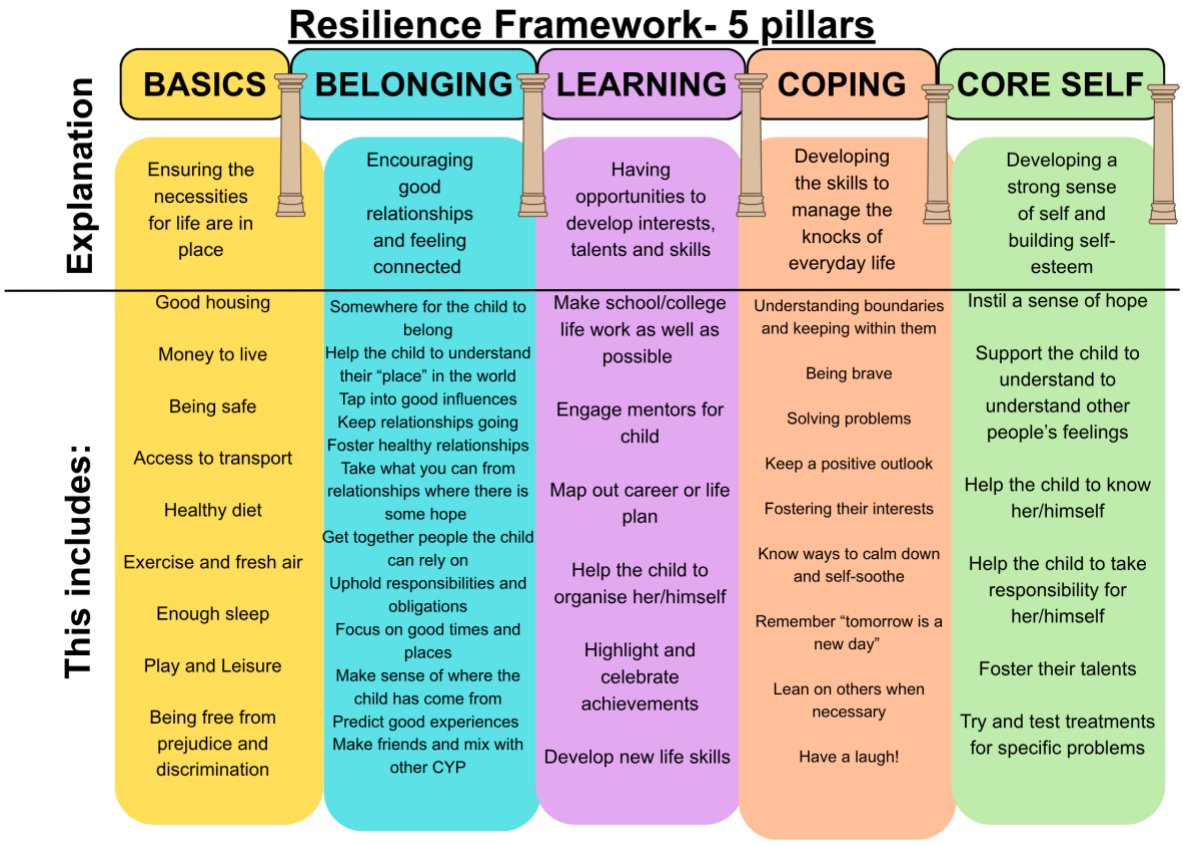
has been found to reduce capacity for learning in secondary school pupils when completing cognitively challenging tasks due to the dual processing that can take place with a smartphone present (McKay, 2024).

1.5.3. Impact on motivation

The DfE (2024) guidance mentions that pupils should also be taught the benefits of having a smartphone-free environment to help “create intrinsic motivation to support the school culture” (DfE, 2024). This links to self-determination theory and the idea that a person feels more motivated when they feel in control, and they are engaging in activities for the reward of the behaviour itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This could suggest that the banning of smartphones in school is being proposed to increase wellbeing and school belongingness of pupils to help create a positive ethos. This also relates to the resilience framework (Hart, Blincow & Thomas, 2007) which proposes five pillars for feeling resilient (see figure 4) and that knowing you have the basics, a sense of belonging, learning opportunities and the ability to cope and feel good within your core self promotes wellbeing. This research draws on the resilience framework to understand smartphone use and restrictions.

Figure 4.

The Resilience Framework (CYP) adapted from Boingboing (2012) summary (Hart, et al., 2007).



1.5.4 Impacts of the wider system.

The systems around the individual as demonstrated in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can have a big impact on a young person's smartphone use, as mapped out on figure 5 (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The young person will have their own worldviews, personal interests, values and attitudes which will shape their behaviour around smartphones and what they decide to look at on smartphone. In microsystem and mesosystem, the way that parents/carers, siblings, peers and school staff use their smartphones will influence how a young person uses their

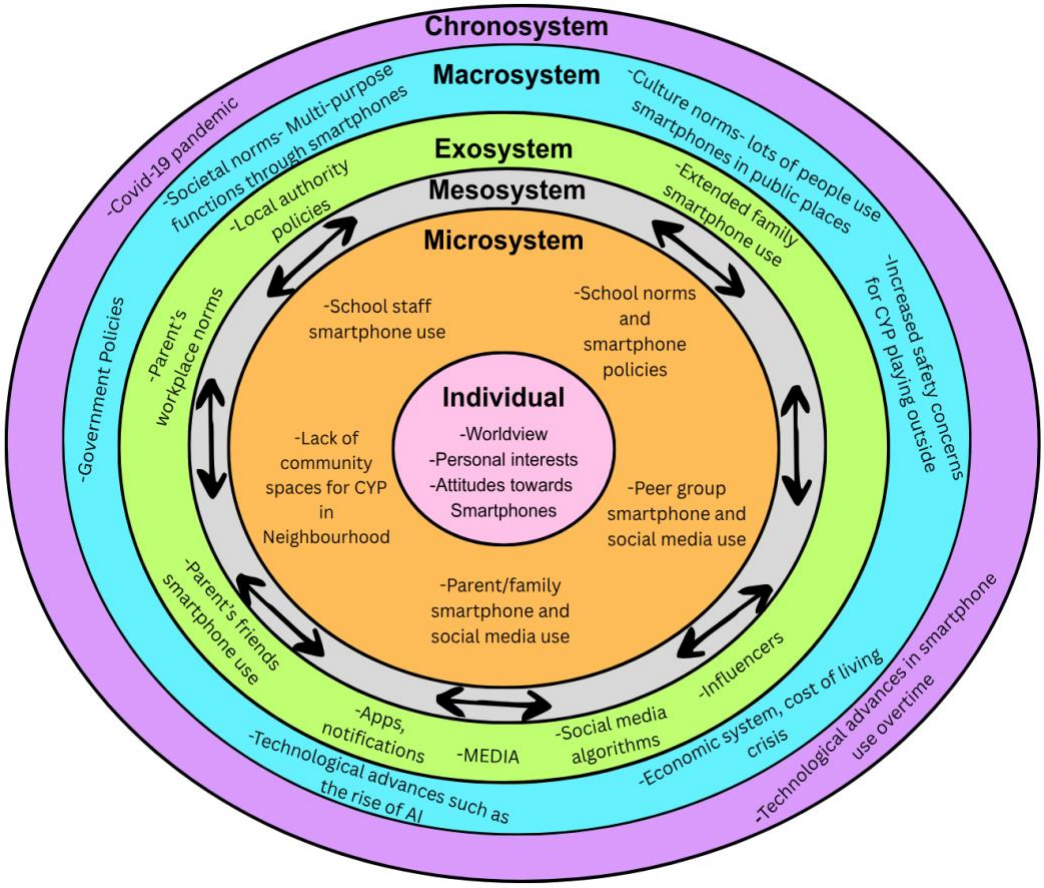
smartphone through modelling behaviours. Modelling which is a social learning theory concept where a person learns how to behave by observing others (Bandura, 1977). For example, if those in the microsystem are excessively using their smartphones, a child is going to see behaviour and enact excessive smartphone use as it is normalised. In addition, there has been what has been termed as an ‘anti play culture’ with the amount of time CYP spend outside declining by 50% in a generation due to playground closures, reduction in school break times and a lack of money for public play facilities (Stephens, 2025). On top of this, more than 1,000 youth centres between 2010 and 2023 have closed (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2025). Furthermore, more than a third of secondary school pupils do not participate in any enrichment activities in schools and a similar proportion do not participate in any activities outside of school (DfE, 2025a). There are also greater safety concerns around CYP playing outside in the community (Stephens, 2025). This can increase screen time on smartphones and devices due to less opportunity for outdoor play and in-person socialising.

In the exosystem, wider influences are considered and the interactions they have with the microsystem. Examples include the local authority smartphone policies that will impact on school policies and the connections a young person’s parent has, such as their friends or work colleagues who are likely to impact upon the way their parent then uses their smartphone which then influences the child. There is also the influence of social media consumption and what a child is exposed to through a smartphone application or accessing the internet on a device. The macrosystem considers wider contextual influences, for example the cost-of-living crisis which is likely to mean that potentially a child may potentially be going out less with their family and therefore at home using their smartphone more often. There are also

cultural and societal influences to consider as smartphone use is very normalised throughout society (for example, people can be seen on smartphones in most public places) and they are designed to have multiple purposes which means that people can be reliant on them for a variety of functions such as being a music player. Lastly, the chronosystem considers the impact of events across time such as the advancements in technology and the Covid-19 pandemic which saw lockdowns where CYP were unable to go out and socialise face-to-face, therefore smartphones were used to facilitate contact. This research will also draw on ecological systems theory to understand smartphone use and restrictions.

Figure 5.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory applied to smartphone use in CYP.



1.6 The role of EPs.

The theory and research suggest that it is important that EPs consider the impact of smartphone use on a young person's cognition and learning, social, emotional, and mental health and all the systems around the child when completing an assessment of needs and planning recommendations. This could inform future training courses for parents, teachers or pupils around internet safety and smartphone use. This is in line with the DfE (2024) guidance which suggests that pupils should be taught about the risks associated with the use of smartphones so that they can understand the decision to prohibit the use of smartphones throughout the school day.

It is also important for EPs to challenge the effectiveness of smartphone policies as Every Child Achieving and Thriving (DfE, 2026) White Paper outlines the need for reforms in education system to create a more inclusive environment to meet a diverse range of pupil needs by 2030. Therefore, any policies being introduced will need to be reviewed as to whether they help promote inclusivity and help to achieve the objectives. This research will be beneficial for EPs in informing the psychological advice provided to CYP, schools and parents regarding the use of smartphones.

1.7 Personal and professional interest in the area

I have some personal curiosity about what it must be like to be a secondary school pupil in modern times with access to a smartphone with easy internet access and several applications on it, including social media, streaming music and video platforms, camera and videoing capabilities. I attended secondary school between 2005-2010 and commonly pupils owned what is referred to these days as "brick" phones where it had limited purposes and you were not so readily able to access the internet. I also do not recollect getting out my phone much at school apart from

sending text messages infrequently and it did not interfere with social interactions. If I did not feel like socialising or was on my own, I would listen to my iPod/MP3 player or read a book, not pull out my phone. I do not remember phones in school during this time being a cause for concern in the range of areas described throughout this thesis. I use these points to illustrate the fact that I think a lot has changed in 16 years, technology has advanced and so has the potential impacts on humankind. As an adult in my early thirties, I do find myself these days at times “glued” to my smartphone with a higher screen time than I like to admit. I do wonder about the long-term impacts, especially amongst younger generations where their brain is still developing fully up until age 25 (Arain et al., 2013) especially with more recent evidence suggesting this development continues up to age 32 (Mousley et al., 2025). Therefore, I am interested to find out if more restrictions in school around smartphone use leads to any difference in attention/concentration, physical activity, screen time, social interactions in school, wellbeing, cyberbullying and behaviour in the classroom. Additionally, I am curious about pupil and teacher views about the use of smartphones in schools today.

1.8 Purpose of this research

As most secondary schools in England place restrictions on how adolescents use their phones currently (Randhawa et al., 2024), this study recruited a school that was introducing tighter restrictions on smartphone use from September 2025. They were implementing one of the four suggested options for a phone-free environment in the DfE (2024) guidance. This study used a survey to explore a range of factors that have been identified in the guidance and research literature as concerning. These are: concentration/attention in the classroom, rule-breaking/behaviour in the

classroom, mental health, physical activity, online bullying, screen time and school belongingness. The survey focus groups with pupils and teachers were held to gain their views about smartphone use and restrictions. The purpose of this research was to see whether there is a change in the concerning factors related to smartphone use after its use in a school has been restricted.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter highlights that technology is increasingly becoming ingrained in the lives of CYP and advances in smartphones are occurring all the time. Therefore, it is critical that there is evidence to inform the decisions made around the usage of smartphones in schools. This is particularly pertinent as there are contrasting views between the government guidance and some school leaders (Rahali, Kidron & Livingstone, 2024). Therefore, it will be important to contribute further to the evidence base to see whether tighter restrictions around smartphone use make a difference to the lives of CYP.

2. Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will summarise and critically appraise the most current research on smartphone use in schools from around the world, where countries are imposing tighter restrictions to smartphone use in schools. It will look specifically at factors that are driving smartphone use restrictions and how pupils and teachers view smartphone use in schools. The literature review purpose, literature research questions (LRQs) and review method will be covered; the research will be described and critically appraised, which will be followed by a thematic analysis of the main findings. To conclude the contribution of the current literature to the LRQs will be reviewed and gaps identified.

2.2 Literature review purpose and method

The purpose of literature review is to bring together the available evidence to synthesise and critique one or more literatures to provide an overall picture of the extent, nature and quality of evidence so far in relation to a particular LRQ (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019). A literature review helps to highlight and make sense of what is known about a topic and not known and can be influential in drawing conclusions to inform practice and policies (Siddaway et al., 2019).

A scoping review technique was used to map relevant literature in the field of interest (smartphone use in secondary schools) with the aim of identifying gaps in the existing literature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). A scoping review technique was used due to the lack of empirical evidence surrounding factors driving smartphone

restrictions in schools; therefore, the aim of the scoping review is to summarise what is known currently and what relevant research has taken place in the field. This literature review follows the five stages framework for conducting a scoping review outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) to promote transparency and replicability. These stages are identifying LRQs, identifying relevant studies, selecting studies, charting the data and collating, summarising and reporting the results. This literature review included a range of different study designs and quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and reviews to provide a clear understanding of the evidence base.

2.3 LRQs (Stage 1)

This literature review aims to collate the most current knowledge and evidence base, and to synthesise findings in relation to the following two LRQs:

1. What is driving tighter restrictions around pupil smartphone use in secondary schools?
2. How do secondary school pupils and school staff feel about smartphone use in school?

2.4 Identifying relevant studies (Stage 2)

2.4.1 Search Strategy

A search of the literature was carried out in August 2025 using two renowned online research databases in psychology and education which were APA PsychINFO and ERIC via EBSCOhost platform. In addition, manual searches were conducted on google scholar and snowballing techniques were used which involved looking at cited articles of relevant research papers and reviewing reference lists of relevant

research to capture papers that met the inclusion criteria. An updated search of the research literature took place on 18th February 2026 for LRQ2, and no additional relevant papers were found.

The DSIT had published a paper online in January 2026 called 'Understanding the impact of smartphones and social media on children and young people: Executive summary' (Orben et al., 2025) which has relevance to LRQ1. Therefore, I undertook a further literature search for LRQ1 on 16th July 2026, removing the subject mapping terms around restricting smartphone use. This was to establish that I had not missed any key sources.

2.4.2 Search terms

The search terms were generated based on key elements in the LRQs. For LRQ1 the key elements identified were smartphone use, in schools, with CYP and restricting smartphone use (see Table 1) and the revised search included the same subject mapping terms apart from restricting smartphone use (see Table 2). For LRQ2 similar key elements were identified however the search terms differed to look specifically at views of secondary school pupils and teachers (see Table 3). Search terms were developed looking up synonyms, considering variations of English language such as American English to capture international research and singular versus plural forms of words. Truncation symbols were used to search for variations of the search terms. The Boolean operator "OR" was used to search together key terminology and the operator "AND" was used to combine all search elements together. As the literature review primarily focused on smartphone use in schools and views of school staff and pupils, these were searched for within the 'title' field of

research papers, whilst other relevant key elements were searched for within the 'abstract' field.

Table 1.

Literature review search terms for LRQ1.

Subject Mapping terms	Key word search terms	Field
1. Smartphone use	smartphone* OR cell phone* OR mobile phone*	Title
AND		
2. In schools	school* OR secondary school* OR high school* OR education OR classroom*	Title
AND		
3. CYP	child* OR young people OR adolescent* OR youth OR student* OR pupil* OR teenager* OR youngster* OR juvenile* OR kid* OR minor*	Abstract
AND		
4. Restricting smartphone use	ban* OR restrict* OR limit* OR regulat* OR control* OR prohibit* OR moderat* OR forbid* OR disallow* OR polic*	Abstract

Table 2.

Revised literature review search terms for LRQ1.

Subject Mapping terms	Key word search terms	Field
1. Smartphone use	smartphone* OR cell phone* OR mobile phone*	Title
AND		
2. In schools	school* OR secondary school* OR high school* OR education OR classroom*	Title
AND		
3. CYP	child* OR young people OR adolescent* OR youth OR student* OR pupil* OR teenager* OR youngster* OR juvenile* OR kid* OR minor*	Abstract
AND		

Table 3.

Literature review search terms for LRQ2.

Subject Mapping terms	Key word search terms	Field
1. Smartphone use	smartphone* OR cell phone* OR mobile phone*	Title
AND		
2. In schools	school* OR secondary school* OR high school*	Title
AND		

		OR education OR classroom*	
	3. CYP	child* OR young people OR adolescent* OR youth OR student* OR pupil* OR teenager* OR youngster* OR juvenile* OR kid* OR minor*	Abstract
AND			
	4. Views of secondary school pupils and teachers	feel* OR think* OR thought* OR view* OR opinion* OR notic* OR perceive OR perception* OR ident* OR observ* OR experience* OR perspective*	Title

2.4.3 Limiters and expanders

All searches were limited to research papers that had been published in the English language and within the last six years. It was important to select research that had been peer-reviewed to ensure high-quality, however, the search was expanded to include grey literature including doctoral theses and dissertations to avoid publication bias. Research was included in the literature review if the sample included the target population in terms of age for pupils and profession for school staff.

2.5 Study selection (Stage 3)

2.5.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion are provided in Table 4. These were developed based on the LRQs before searching the literature, in line with best practice recommendations (Siddaway et al., 2019).

Table 4.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for both LRQs, with indication when the criteria specifically apply to a LRQ.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Publication date	Published since 2020 (within the last 6 years).	Published before 2020.	Research was looked at from the last six years due to escalating concerns around smartphone use in schools and the increase in tighter restrictions and bans that have come about since the global covid-19 pandemic and the government guidance on ‘Mobile phones in

			schools' policies' (DfE, 2024).
Population	For LRQ1: Participants aged between 11-16 who are secondary school pupil age. For LRQ2: Teachers/school staff and/or participants aged between 11-16 who are secondary school pupil age.	For LRQ1: Children younger than 11 (Primary age) and adolescents older than 16 (College age). For LRQ2: Other professionals who do not work in schools/education or parents only. Children younger than 11 and adolescents older than 16.	For LRQ1: The researcher is only interested in CYP who are secondary school age between 11-16 years. For LRQ2: The researcher is only interested in the views of educational staff and CYP are secondary school age between 11-16 years.
Subject of interest	For LRQ1: Evidence/concerns driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in secondary schools.	For LRQ1: Topics not relevant to evidence/concerns driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in	To ensure that literature reviewed is relevant to the research question.

		schools (or for Primary schools or colleges). For LRQ2: Topics not relevant to school staff and/or pupils' feelings, thoughts and opinions etc. on smartphone use in schools.	
Peer-reviewed	Peer-reviewed research including doctoral theses/dissertations.	Not peer-reviewed or a doctoral theses/dissertation.	To ensure that the literature review has high-quality research studies that have been peer-reviewed.
Methodology	Empirical research or systematic reviews which has systematically gathered and analysed evidence. There is quantitative	Not empirical research, for example a theoretical or opinion paper.	To ensure that the literature review focuses on original empirical or systematic evidence with measurable data.

	and/or qualitative data obtained.		
Location	Research papers that have been published internationally.	N/A	There is limited published research in the UK on this topic and the use of smartphones in schools/amongst adolescents is of international interest/concern.
Language	Only research papers written in English.	Research papers written in another language other than English.	English is the only language spoken by the researcher.
Full text available	Only research papers where the full article can be accessed for review.	Not able to access the full article for review.	The full text of the research paper needs to be available, so the researcher can critically appraise the paper.

2.5.2 Selection Process

The three PRISMA diagrams in Appendix A, B and C demonstrate the results from the searches and the selection process for the review. For the initial search for

LRQ1, 99 research papers were found from searching databases and manual searchers and the revised search returned 29 papers. For LRQ2, 59 papers were initially found and these numbers decreased once duplicate articles were removed. These searches and references were saved to an EBSCOhost account and judged against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Titles and abstracts were scanned for suitability leaving 40 articles across the two research questions. Full texts of articles were then reviewed for relevance to LRQs, leading to 11 articles being excluded and 29 articles being included (see Appendix D for an overview of the full texts reviewed with rationale for inclusion/exclusion). This resulted in 29 studies included in the literature review overall.

2.6 Charting the data (Stage 4)

2.6.1 'Charting' and Critical Appraisal

The 29 studies included were summarised in a table found in Appendix E. All the studies included within the literature review were critically appraised using a tool to assess the research quality based on the research design (see Appendix F for the full critical appraisal of studies). This was completed to inform what conclusions and implications can be drawn from the findings. This will be discussed further within the literature overview and appraisal section.

The tools listed below were used as frameworks to critique the papers reviewed:

- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist (CASP, 2013a).
- Evaluation tool for quantitative research studies (Long et al., 2002).

- Mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT) Version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018).
- CASP Systematic Review Checklist (CASP, 2013b).

2.6.2 Organisation of literature review

When searching the literature there appeared to be a number of studies which discussed data relevant to both LRQ1 and LRQ2. It appears there is a lack of empirical evidence on the use of smartphones in schools causing adverse impacts on pupils. So far it seems that what is driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in schools is subjective views from teachers and others who have observed negative impacts, however it has not been measured objectively as much. Therefore, for the overview of studies they have been arranged in relation to studies relevant to just LRQ1 or just LRQ2 or for both LRQ1 and LRQ2. The eight studies that were found during the revised search of LRQ1 are mentioned in section 2.6.3, the overview of studies for LRQ1.

Seven out of 29 papers reviewed were doctoral theses/dissertations. I felt that it was important to include them to incorporate the most up-to-date evidence and to avoid publication bias. Furthermore, the findings from the theses/dissertations add a richness to the data and interpretations.

2.6.3 Overview of studies for LRQ1 only

2.6.3.1 Aims and Focus. There were 13 studies selected for LRQ1. The aims of two studies looked at the impact of tighter restrictions on smartphone use in schools, and its effects on psychological wellbeing in adolescents (Baggio, et al., 2025; Goodyear, et al., 2025), Goodyear et al., (2025) also focused on impacts upon sleep, physical activity and educational outcomes. One study aimed to discover if smartphone

restrictions improved academic performance amongst pupils (Kessel, Hardardottir & Tyrefors, 2020). Five studies looked specifically at problematic smartphone use (PSU) in adolescents (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023; King, et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023; Kliesener et al., 2022; Nagata et al., 2026) looking at associations with a range of factors such as mental health, academic engagement, amount of school-day smartphone use, sociodemographic characteristics, bullying and self-esteem. An additional four papers looked at mobile phone addiction and associations with factors such as suicidal behaviours (Yu et al., 2025), social media usage, gaming behaviour and nomophobia (Aydin & Kus, 2023). As well as depression, cyberbullying (Wu et al., 2022), cognitive function and physical activity levels (Al-Amri et al., 2023). There was a review paper which aimed to explore how research of the causal relationships between digital technology use and CYP developmental outcomes can be improved (Orben et al., 2025).

2.6.3.2 Methodologies. All 12 studies were quantitative and one was a review paper which undertook two searches using a systematic approach with PRISMA frameworks (Orben et al., 2025) and discussed findings in a narrative synthesis. A couple of studies were quasi-experimental looking at the before and aftereffects of tighter smartphone restrictions (Baggio et al., 2025; King et al., 2024). One was a comparison study between two different conditions e.g. restrictive vs. permissive mobile phone policy (Goodyear et al., 2025). Eight other studies were cross-sectional (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023; Nagata et al., 2026; Al-Amri et al., 2023; Aydin & Kus, 2023; Kliesener et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2022) with one aiming to look at observations in educational data across 21 years (Kessel et al., 2020). Li et al., (2023) conducted two studies, the first study was a quantitative

longitudinal approach where self-report data was collected in two waves, and the second study was a quantitative cross-sectional design.

2.6.3.3 Methods of data collection. Self-report surveys were the method of data collection used across these studies (Baggio et al., 2025; Goodyear et al., 2025; Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023; King et al., 2024; Kessel et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Kliesener et al., 2022; Aydin & Kus, 2023). It is important to consider that self-report surveys may have inaccuracies due to biases. Nagata et al., (2026) also used self-report measures but also measured passive sensing data from devices to obtain smartphone use during school hours. Al-Amri et al., (2023) also collected data via a mixture of surveys and in-person computer based cognitive testing. The review paper searched MEDLINE, CDSR, PROSPERO and Google Scholar databases to find relevant papers (Orben et al., 2025).

2.6.3.4 Data analysis techniques. All the studies used descriptive statistics for analysis, as well as 11 studies using regressions and correlations to analyse data (Baggio et al., 2025; Kessel et al., 2020, Goodyear et al., 2025; King et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2022; Nagata et al., 2026; Li et al., 2023; Kliesener et al., 2022; Aydin & Kus 2023). One study used a one-way ANOVA to analyse data (Spiratos & Ranasiripong, 2023). One of the studies was a secondary analysis from a larger project involving evaluation of the 2023 South Australian school phone ban (Baggio et al., 2025). Another study used a mixture of inferential tests such as a one-way MANOVA which mapped onto each research question (Al-Amri et al., 2023).

2.6.4 Overview of studies for LRQ2 only

2.6.4.1 Aims and Focus. There were five studies selected for LRQ2. Four studies were focused upon teachers' experiences with pupil smartphone use within schools and their perspectives of the use of smartphones within the school environment (Morrin, 2022; Thomas, Hylen & Carter, 2024; Tricoli, 2023; Lloret-Catala, Suarez-Guerrero & Mateu-Lujan, 2024). One study gathered educator views on the perceived impact of smartphone use in schools on the social and emotional wellbeing of pupils (Martin, 2025).

2.6.4.2 Methodologies. Three of the studies were qualitative, one was quantitative (Thomas et al., 2024) and one was a mixed methods study (Martin, 2025) in gathering views. One was a longitudinal cross-sectional design (Thomas et al., 2024). The other studies were explorative, looking at in-depth views on the use of smartphones in schools.

2.6.4.3 Methods of data collection. A self-report survey was used for one study (Thomas et al., 2024). Another used just semi-structured interviews (Morrin, 2022) and focus groups were used as the main method with teachers for one study (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). One study used both interviews and focus groups (Tricoli, 2023) and another used a quantitative card sorting activity (ranking statements) with qualitative interpretation of open-ended follow-up responses (Martin, 2025).

2.6.4.4 Data analysis techniques. Two studies used a thematic analysis (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; Tricoli, 2023). One study descriptively interpreted the qualitative information (Martin, 2025). One study used descriptive statistics and a one-way

ANOVA for analysis (Thomas et al., 2024), another used Q-factor analysis and Pearson correlation (Martin, 2025) One study used interpretive phenological analysis (IPA) (Morrin, 2022).

2.6.5 Overview of studies relevant for both LRQ1 and LRQ2

2.6.5.1 Aims and Focus. There were 11 studies which covered both LRQ1 and LRQ2. Most of the relevant studies looked at teachers' experiences with pupil smartphone use in the classroom (Botelho, 2023; McCrea, 2024), as well as principals' perceptions of smartphone use within school (Toth, 2022). One study focused on understanding teachers' perceptions as well as specifically in relation to social, psychological and academic effects on high school pupils (Aloteibi, Ratanasiripong & Priede, 2024). A range of focus for the studies were also on teachers' views in relation to decision making on smartphone policies in school (Aloteibi et al., 2024; McCrea, 2024). Two studies focused on pupil views which included investigating pupil views on the benefits and drawbacks on smartphone use in schools (Wike, 2020) and views regarding tighter restrictions on smartphone use (Bar et al., 2025). One study combined looking at educators and pupils' perspectives on smartphone use in schools and whether they are in favour of tighter restrictions (Gath et al., 2024). One other study aimed to understand pupil attitudes towards smartphone use in the school environment and impact of smartphone restrictions (Kopecky et al., 2021). One study looked at comparing the implementation of smartphone policies across secondary schools in England, gathering pupil, teacher and senior leadership views (Randhawa et al., 2024). Finally, scoping reviews with a systematic approach aimed to look at whether pupil smartphone use at school was beneficial or disruptive to engagement and looked at the impact on academic

outcomes, wellbeing and cyberbullying (Campbell et al., 2024) and the impact of smartphone bans in schools (Bottger & Zierer, 2024).

2.6.5.2 Methodologies. There was a mixture of methodologies which is a strength of the evidence because it offers greater opportunity for triangulation of different methods and in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon. Four of the studies were mixed methods designs, two were qualitative (Botelho, 2023; Bar et al., 2025) and two were quantitative (Aloteibi et al., 2024; Kopecky et al., 2021). Most of the studies were cross-sectional (Aloteibi et al., 2024) with an explorative element (Botelho, 2023, Gath et al., 2024; McCrea, 2024; Toth, 2022). One was quasi-experimental, looking at before and aftereffects (Bar et al., 2025) and two were comparative between permissive and restrictive smartphone policies (Kopecky et al., 2021; Randhawa et al., 2024). Two were systematic reviews analysing data from five studies (Bottger & Zierer, 2024) and 22 studies (Campbell et al., 2024).

2.6.5.3 Methods of data collection. Eight studies used self-report surveys (Aloteibi et al., 2024; Bar et al., 2025; Botelho, 2023; Kopecky et al., 2021; Gath et al., 2024; Wike, 2023, Toth, 2022; Randhawa et al., 2024). Three studies also used semi-structured interviews (Botelho, 2023; McCrea, 2024; Wike, 2020)**.** Reviews searched renowned databases presenting PRISMA diagrams (Bottger & Zierer, 2024; Campbell et al., 2024).

2.6.5.4 Data analysis techniques. Six studies used descriptive statistics (Aloteibi et al., 2024; Kopecky et al., 2021; Gath et al., 2024; Toth, 2022; Wike, 2020; Randhawa et al., 2024). Five studies used a thematic analysis (Bar et al., 2025; Gath

et al., 2024; McCrea, 2024; Wike, 2020, Toth, 2022). Two used statistical tests such as a one-way ANOVA (Aloteibi et al., 2024) and chi-square tests (Kopecky et al., 2021). One study was a secondary analysis from a larger project involving evaluation of the 2023 South Australian school phone ban (Bar et al., 2025). Meta-analyses were conducted for Bottger and Zierer (2024) and Campbell et al., (2024).

2.6.6 Participants and sampling across studies

Participants from the studies were predominately pupils for both LRQs, with the sample or part of the sample aged between 11-16 years and/or school staff (which included principals, teachers, counsellors, preservice/trainee teachers and administrators). Table 5 provides an overview of the sample sizes across studies; generally sample size was relative to methodology and size of research team with doctoral theses tending to have less participants. Only Gath et al., (2024) and Randhawa et al., (2024) looked at both pupil and educators' views, the rest of the studies looked at either pupils or the school staff's perspectives. Looking at a range of perspectives helps with triangulation of the data. The studies listed below mostly took place in Western parts of the world such as Europe, North America and Oceania with typically individualistic cultures and in more economically developed countries. In addition, five studies were conducted in Asia and took place in China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This would mean that the most recent research into this topic area may not be generalisable to Eastern/collectivist cultures and less economically developed countries. Most studies used purposive and convenience sampling which seemed appropriate given that a lot of them were looking for a specific population with an experience of pupil use of smartphones in schools (e.g.

looking for a school which had implemented a smartphone ban). However, an important limitation that was acknowledged in research studies to note is findings may be bias towards participants who have stronger views on smartphone use in schools as they are more likely to volunteer to take part in the research study.

Table 5.

An overview of participant groups and sample sizes from empirical studies.

Study	CYP	School staff
Al-Amri et al., (2023)	196	-
Aloteibi et al., (2024)	-	248
Aydin & Kus (2023)	427	-
Baggio et al., (2025)	1062	-
Bar et al., (2025)	1549	-
Botelho (2023)a	-	46
Gath et al., (2024)	332	217
Goodyear et al., (2025)	1,227	-
Kliesener et al., (2022)	564	-
Li et al., (2026)	Study 1 had 289, Study 2 had 432	
Lloret-Catala et al., (2024)	-	72
Kopecky et al., (2021)	27,177	-
Kessel et al., (2020)	-	*1,086 provided data on observations*

King et al., (2024)	1,282 at baseline, 1,256 at follow-up	-
Martin (2025)a	-	16
McCrea (2024)a	-	46
Morrin (2022)a	-	8
Nagata et al., (2026)	640	-
Randhawa et al., (2024)	1198	83
Spiratos & Ratanasiripong (2023)	-	319
Thomas et al., (2024)	-	545
Toth (2022)a	-	212
Tricoli (2023)a	-	14
Wike (2020)a	450	-
Wu et al., (2022)	1,297	-
Yu et al., (2025)	26, 394	-

Note. a- Doctoral theses/dissertations

2.6.7 Reflexivity and ethics of studies

Throughout the research, apart from the theses, there appears to be a lack of attention to the relationship between the researcher and the participants which could impact the findings. The theses demonstrated reflexivity through having reflexivity protocols to monitor the researcher's role and potential biases (Botelho, 2023; Martin 2025; Morrin, 2022; Tricoli, 2023; Wike 2020). As well as to consider their own

similarity to participants and any relationships they may have to them (McCrea, 2024).

The studies state that their research has gained ethical approval from a university or institution and some detail about gaining informed consent from participants, confidentiality, anonymity and right to withdraw. However, there is less attention to attempts to minimise harm and debrief.

2.7 Collating, summarising and reporting the results (Stage 5)

2.7.1 Synthesis

The aim of the synthesis was to integrate findings from quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies. A reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) which is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022) which was used to bring together the results of multiple studies for both LRQ1 and LRQ2. To bring together qualitative and quantitative data within the analysis, codes were first developed from the qualitative findings to identify patterns. The quantitative data were then mapped onto the identified codes which triangulated the claims with statistical evidence. These were then reviewed and grouped together into themes, please refer to Table 6 for an overview of the RTA phases and application to the literature review. To add greater richness to the analysis, researchers' interpretations/conclusions in the discussion were reviewed and considerations were given to the quotes of participants that the researchers had provided in relation to identified themes.

Table 6.

RTA phases and application to the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

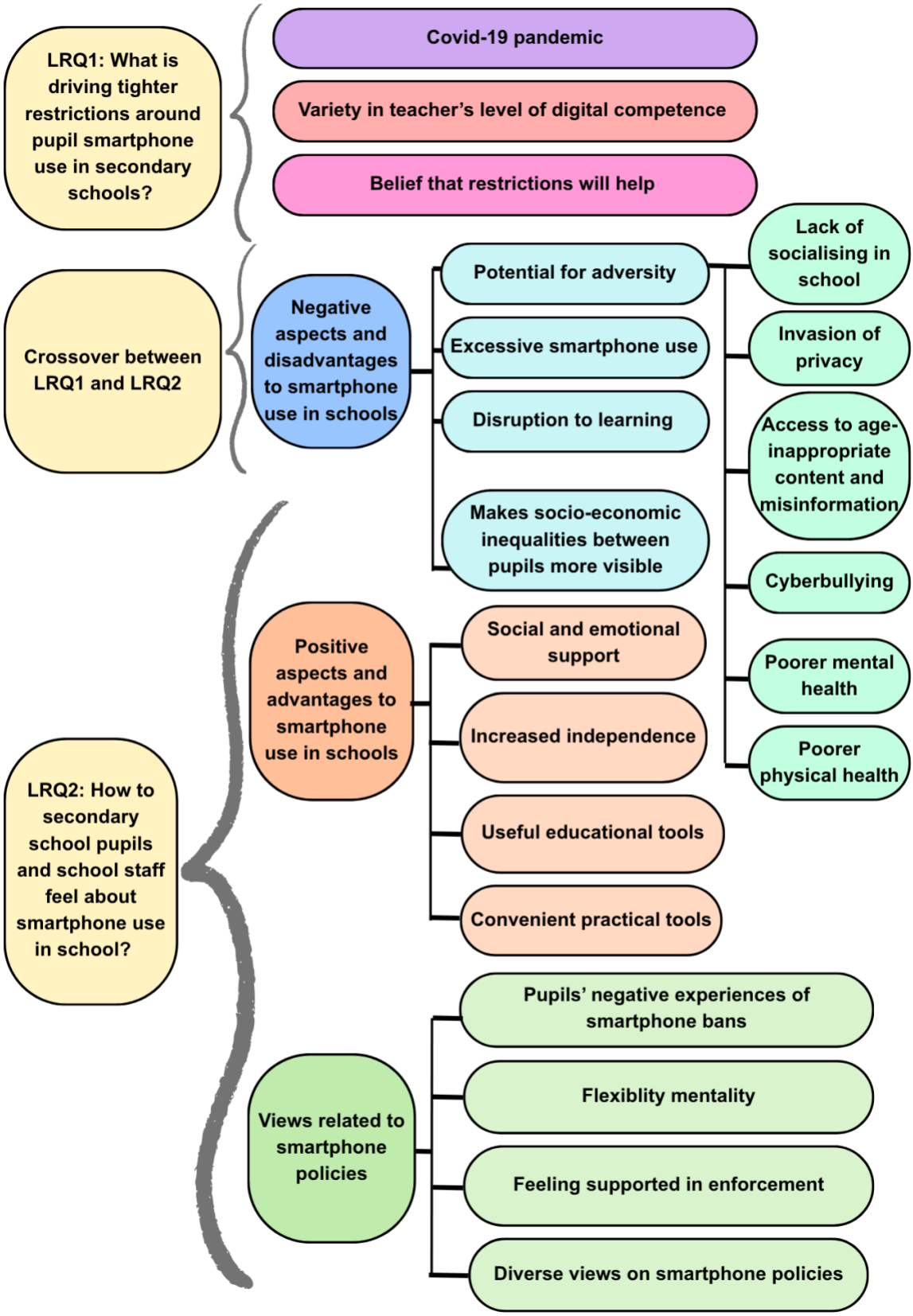
Phase	Application to the literature review
Familiarisation with the data	I read through the papers and summarised findings and discussion points throughout the paper to give an overview of what the study had found.
Generating initial codes	I used post it notes to label meaningful pieces of relevant data to help organise and categorise the findings. This was put into a word document which had codes next to the findings. I started with reviewing the qualitative findings to identify patterns, then the quantitative data were mapped onto the identified codes which triangulated the claims with statistical evidence.
Generating initial themes	I thought about which codes are very similar and the story they tell about what is known about smartphone use in CYP and in schools. I then grouped them into themes. This was completed by writing out the codes and noticing overarching commonalities which could be grouped together in a theme.
Reviewing themes	I discussed the themes and subthemes created with my research supervisor and checked to make sure the codes represented the themes and subthemes represented the codes.

Define and name themes	I named and defined themes with support of my research supervisor to ensure that the names represented what was being described. AI was used to help with naming themes by describing what the theme was about.
Write up	Themes and subthemes are written up section with descriptions of findings and quotes of participants from qualitative studies to illustrate points made to answer LRQs.

2.7.1.1. Literature Review Themes. The themes that were constructed for both LRQs at points do crossover and therefore were discussed together. There were unique themes identified for each LRQ as well as common themes which were relevant to both LRQs. The themes will be presented below as themes for both LRQ1 and LRQ2, themes for LRQ1 and themes for LRQ2. Please see Figure 6 for a diagram of an overview of the themes identified for the LRQs.

Figure 6.

Literature review thematic map.



2.7.2 Themes and subthemes identified for LRQ1 (What is driving tighter restrictions around pupil smartphone use in secondary schools?) and LRQ2 (How do secondary school pupils and school staff feel about smartphone use in school?)

2.7.2.1 Overarching theme 1: Negative aspects and disadvantages to smartphone use in schools.

2.7.2.1.1. Theme 1: Potential for adversity. Within the research there were concerns about the potential for adversity with smartphone use in schools across a range of areas such as lack of socialising, poor mental health, bullying, privacy violations, exposure to age-inappropriate content, social media, academic dishonesty and negative impacts upon teacher's wellbeing and competence. These factors appear to be driving smartphone restrictions as well as being the opinions of teachers and pupils.

2.7.2.1.1.1. Subtheme 1: Lack of socialising in school. Pupils and teachers referred to the negative impact that smartphones can have on social interactions which reflected a need for tighter restrictions (Bar et al., 2025; Gath et al., 2024; Aloteibi et al., 2024; Botelho, 2023; Martin 2025). Teachers spoke about pupils being more socially withdrawn (Botelho, 2023) and smartphones having a negative impact of on peer relationships (Martin, 2025). Gath et al., (2024) noted that both pupils and educators recognised that pupils spend less time engaging in face-to-face interactions when smartphones are around. In contrast, Kopecky et al., (2021) found that approximately a third of pupils reported feeling bored during break times regardless of smartphone policy (therefore, not necessarily engaging in more social interactions without smartphones present). Also, there was no significant effects on

improving school belonging amongst pupils in schools where smartphone bans had been implemented (King et al., 2024). Some pupils reported feeling left out when their friends are on their smartphones (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils recognised that access to a smartphone during the sociable times of the school day could hinder or interrupt face-to-face social interactions, for example a pupil reported that it was upsetting when they want to engage in a conversation and the other person just sits on their smartphone (Bar et al., 2025; Gath et al., 2024). There was also recognition that the use of smartphones decreases social and interpersonal skills. This is because some pupils felt that they did not know what to talk about without their smartphone available to provide imagery or photos to stimulate conversation. Further concerns were raised about smartphone use leading to pupils have less empathy with others (Bar et al., 2025).

On the other hand, pupils noticed that a smartphone ban in school improved social interactions with an increase in face-to-face conversations and improved quality of interactions (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils also noticed that there was an increase in mindfulness of others and the environment around them, for example a pupil mentioned that more people are paying attention to what is happening around them (Bar et al., 2025). Other benefits reported by pupils were that the school environment became more prosocial and safer, with less fighting and more making friends (Bar et al., 2025). This is in line with findings from a systematic review which found a significant positive impact on the social well-being of pupils, with improved pupil satisfaction as pupils feel safer with reduced conflicts and less competition (Bottger & Zierer, 2024).

2.7.2.1.1.2. Subtheme 2: Invasion of privacy. Another thread in the theme of potential for adversity is the harmful consequences of smartphone use in adolescents and therefore the need for tighter restrictions. Gath et al., (2024) found a common theme that pupils and educators were concerned about privacy violations through inappropriate phone use such as taking photos, recordings and videos at school and them being shared without consent. Principals also reported feeling concerned about invasion of privacy through inappropriate use (Toth, 2022). This has been echoed in evidence from pupils, with 36% of them reporting that they have experienced photos taken of them by other peers without their consent and roughly 23% have had a video taken of them by peers without their consent (Kopecky et al., 2021). Some pupils reported that they felt embarrassed and ridiculed through being recorded or having picture taken of them without consent by other pupils (Bar et al., 2025).

Teachers were concerned about a loss of power from being undermined potentially when parents encroach on the competence of teachers when they communicate with pupils through the smartphones during the school day (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). There was also worry amongst teachers about a loss of academic freedom and cautiousness due to potentially being recorded by pupils in the classroom, and principals also voiced a concern about an invasion of privacy that smartphones can generate (Toth, 2022).

2.7.2.1.1.3. Subtheme 3: Access to age-inappropriate content and misinformation. Teachers expressed concerns about pupils having access to applications and content that are not intended for their age such as pornography (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; McCrea, 2024). School staff felt it was important to restrict

smartphone use in schools to safeguard adolescents (Randhawa et al., 2024). There was a specific concern raised by teachers about potential misinformation and pupils having difficulty distinguishing between reliable and unreliable information (Martin, 2025). This seems to be driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in schools to protect and safeguard pupils whilst in school.

2.7.2.1.1.4. Subtheme 4: Cyberbullying. From the literature there appears to be some mixed findings about the impacts of smartphones and policies on bullying. Teachers and pupils shared concerns about an increase in cyberbullying (Martin, 2025; Gath et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2024; Toth, 2022; McCrea, 2024). Several studies found a small reduction in bullying incidents after a smartphone ban (particularly in older pupils) (Campbell et al., 2024; Orben et al., 2025). Although some studies found that incidences of cyberbullying where higher in schools that imposed smartphone bans than those that did not (Campbell et al., 2024). It was concluded that banning smartphones from schools is unlikely to have a significant impact on cyberbullying (Campbell et al., 2024). In addition, King et al., (2024) found that both the smartphone ban and non-ban group reported decreases in bullying overtime, but that the ban group had slightly higher bullying levels overall. A possible explanation could be that schools enforcing smartphone bans were promoting a punitive negative school climate for pupils (Davis & Koepke, 2016, *as cited in* Campbell et al., 2024).

Furthermore, when pupils were asked about whether cyberbullying, sexting (sending/receiving sexual images and/or text messages) and keeping up with online communication with friends harmed their ability to learn at school, most pupils disagreed or felt neutral about it (Wike, 2020). Although almost a quarter of pupils

strongly agreed or agreed that cyberbullying had an impact on their learning at school and around a fifth of pupils felt that sexting had an impact (Wike, 2020). Wu et al., (2025) found that pupils who had mobile phone addiction were more likely to be cyberbullied which in turn increased depression. Consequently, victims of cyberbullying were more likely to go on to perpetrate it themselves and this was more likely to occur in boys (Wu et al., 2025).

A systematic review found that smartphone restrictions were found to reduce bullying and cyberbullying incidents. This in turn created a more positive school climate (Bottger & Zierer, 2024). When a ban was implemented, pupils noticed a decrease in cyberbullying or other forms of violence such as fewer fights in school (Bar et al., 2025). Although it was felt by pupils that in-person bullying persisted or got worse due to pupils bullying out of boredom from not having access to their smartphone (Bar et al., 2025). There were also concerns that some pupils might steal or break other pupil's smartphones if they are allowed in school (Gath et al., 2024).

2.7.2.1.1.5. Subtheme 5: Poorer mental health. There was a strong view from teachers and pupils about smartphone use in schools leading to poorer mental health amongst pupils which linked with the drive for further restrictions (Gath et al., 2024; Martin, 2025). Educational stakeholders are found to believe that the use of smartphones in schools have a negative impact on pupils' mental health, however other research reports that pupils are more likely to feel anxious if they are unable to check their smartphone (Campbell et al., 2024). This is in line with smartphones being found to be a source of FOMO which is the Fear of Missing Out on something which may lead to anxious behaviours (Wike, 2020, Martin 2025). Pupils reported

that smartphone use in school created feelings of anxiety for several reasons such as fear of losing the smartphone, running out of battery on the smartphone, receiving notifications, feeling left out by others and awaiting responses from messages (Wike, 2020).

Furthermore, Spiratos and Ratanasiripong (2023) found strong correlations between PSU and stress and depression in adolescents, and negative correlations between PSU, and self-esteem and grit. This would suggest that a higher amount of smartphone use leads to stress, low mood, lower self-esteem and less grit in secondary aged pupils. Predictive models found that increased grit and self-esteem were protective factors of PSU (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023), suggesting that there could be a causality consideration where adolescents with poorer mental health may be more prone to PSU (rather than the PSU causing poorer mental health outcomes).

In addition, Wu et al., (2025) found that mobile phone addiction was directly linked to higher depression amongst adolescents. Yu et al., (2025) found that adolescents with mobile phone addiction had higher odds of suicidal ideation and attempts, compared to those without. It was found that depression, anxiety and sleep duration only partially explained this association. With these studies it is hard to determine causality as it could be that PSU/mobile phone addiction leads to adverse mental health or that adverse mental health leads to PSU/mobile phone addiction or a combination of both factors causing each other.

Baggio et al., (2025) found that from examining psychological impacts of smartphone use restrictions on secondary school pupils that a smartphone ban was associated with reduced psychological distress and reduced negative affect. However, they found no significant effect for increased positive affect in adolescents

from smartphone restrictions. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that smartphone bans in schools have an improved effect on the psychological wellbeing of adolescents (Baggio et al., 2025). On the contrary, a large study in the UK found there was no significant differences in wellbeing (anxiety or depression) between adolescents attending schools with restrictive versus permissive smartphone policies (Goodyear et al., 2025). This finding is also echoed in Orben et al., (2025) which suggests that mental health and wellbeing outcomes are likely context-dependent and determined by both in- and out- of school factors.

Although, strong associations were found between time spent on smartphone and social media and overall decreased wellbeing, increased levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents (Goodyear et al., 2025). This was also found in a review paper where adolescents who spent more time on social media reported poorer mental health (Orben et al., 2025).

A trend of nomophobia (anxiety about not having access to a smartphone) was also recognised with pupils reporting feeling anxious if they mistakenly leave their smartphone at home (Wike, 2020). Teachers felt that pupils needed training and education from childhood to prevent nomophobia (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). Teachers noticed that pupils developed anxiety when separated from their smartphones after the pandemic and had difficulty focusing in class after returning to in-person learning (Tricoli, 2023). Similarly in another study teachers observe that smartphone addiction negatively impacts pupils' mood, attitudes and behaviours, with pupils becoming "moodier", withdrawn and that they have greater extreme reactions when smartphones are restricted (Botelho, 2023). Additionally, teachers felt that social media use on smartphones increases anxiety and perfectionism when pupils make unrealistic social comparisons (Martin, 2025). Therefore, impact on

wellbeing, focus and perfectionism seem to be concerns from teachers and pupils driving smartphone restrictions.

2.7.2.1.1.6. Subtheme 6: Poorer physical health. There were some concerns raised from educators and pupils that use of smartphones in schools has a negative impact on physical health such as not getting enough sunlight or physical exercise (Gath et al., 2024). CYP who were addicted to their smartphones were found to have much lower physical activity levels, whereas non-addicted CYP had mostly moderate to high physical activity levels (Al-Amri et al., 2023).

Pupils reported that one of the benefits of a smartphone ban was that pupils get more exercise and play more sports (Bar et al., 2025). A review paper found that restrictive phone policies increased physical activity in school (Orben et al., 2025).

There were also concerns from the research that smartphones impact upon sleep in pupils, with teachers expressing that use of smartphones at night leads to sleepiness in class the next day (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). Goodyear et al., (2025) found from a large-scale UK study that increases in smartphone use and social media reduced sleep efficacy and duration, resulting in decreased physical activity. Furthermore, Kopecky et al., (2021) found that when smartphones were restricted 29% more pupils engaged in sports activities at break times. This could be part of driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in schools, especially at break and lunch times to promote more physical activity, going outside and engagement in sports.

2.7.2.1.2 Theme 2: Excessive smartphone use. Excessive smartphone use and dependency reflected both the drive for tighter restrictions and how staff and pupils

felt about smartphone use in schools. A strong theme of excessive smartphone use and dependency was evident across a number of studies (Botelho, 2023; Wike, 2020; Martin, 2025; Aloteibi et al., 2024; Gath et al., 2024; Bar et al., 2025). Aloteibi et al., (2024) found that teachers were significantly worried about addiction like behaviours amongst adolescents around smartphone use. Teachers spoke about addiction-like behaviours they had observed in CYP, with impulsivity concerns around smartphone use (Martin, 2025) and believed that pupils smartphone use needs to be regulated for their own good to prevent smartphone addiction and to encourage healthy habits (Gath et al., 2024). Spiratos and Ratanasiripong (2023), has shown that approximately a fifth of pupils met the criteria for PSU and roughly an additional 68% were approaching PSU thresholds. Trends also revealed that on average pupils reported that they spent 3-9 hours on their smartphones daily and PSU was significantly higher in older adolescents aged 15 and up (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023). Kliesener et al., (2022) found that only 2.3% of CYP had PSU which is lower than rates reported in other countries (this study took place in Germany). However, they did find that those with PSU were more likely to be an older adolescent, female and used their smartphone for intensive use of social networking, gaming and video watching.

Nagata et al., (2026) found that adolescents spent average of about 70 minutes on their smartphones during school hours unregulated, with social media accounting for the largest amount of time spent, followed by video and gaming applications. Older adolescents (16 years and over), black pupils and those from lower-income households showed significantly higher school day smartphone and social media time. Pupils with higher PSU spent more time on their smartphone in school (Nagata et al., 2026) which could suggest that smartphone policies may help

regulate use among CYP who would have PSU. Orben et al., (2025) found that restrictive phone policies had been successful in reducing screen time during school hours.

Li et al., (2023) found that PSU predicted lower school engagement overtime, but that lower school engagement did not predict likelihood of experiencing PSU. This shows that PSU can lead to disengagement from school and researchers explain that it does so in part by increasing procrastination and worsening sleep quality (Li et al., 2023). In addition, Kliesener et al., (2022) found that PSU was a strong predictor of poorer outcomes such as more behavioural difficulties, lower quality of life and school performance. Aydin and Kus (2023) found that nomophobia was positively associated with smartphone addiction and social media usage, as well as smartphone addiction being positively associated with social media usage. Aydin and Kus (2023) conclude that social media use appears to be a key mechanism driving nomophobia and smartphone addiction.

However, the impact of tighter restrictions in school on PSU has found little difference in pupils' overall use. For example, Goodyear et al., (2024) found that pupils in restrictive schools had a significantly lower screen and social media phone time during school hours, however there was no evidence that this had an impact on usage time on weeknights or weekends. Furthermore, King et al., (2024) found no significant difference in PSU between a smartphone ban and non-ban group, and that PSU was reported only by 2.6% of pupils. Pupils reported observing other pupils checking their phones often (Wike, 2020) and some pupils described excessive smartphone use, an example was given of a pupil's being on their smartphones whilst walking down the stairs (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils reported that a positive of a smartphone ban was that pupils were not "glued" to their smartphones anymore (Bar

et al., 2025). Educators and pupils spoke about smartphone restrictions helping to promote self-regulation of using smartphones, so pupils are not excessively using them (Gath et al., 2024).

2.7.2.1.3 Theme 3: Disruption to learning. There is a prominent theme throughout the research that pupils and teachers felt smartphones in schools were distracting, preventing concentration and disruptive to learning (Wike, 2020; Bar et al., 2025; Gath et al., 2024; Aloteibi et al., 2024; McCrea, 2024; Toth 2022; Botelho, 2023). Therefore, it appears that tighter restrictions to smartphone use in schools is being driven by subjective opinions rather than objective evidence of the impacts. However, as data suggests that smartphone restrictions and academic achievement is not correlated (Kessel et al., 2020). Furthermore, Al-Amri et al., (2023) found no difference in working memory between CYP addicted to their phone and those who were not. There was also no significant difference between these groups in reaction time on tasks, however, children addicted to their phones were more accurate in their responses on the tasks than those who were not addicted to their phones. Al-Amri et al., (2023) suggested that higher accuracy on tasks in CYP addicted to their phones might be due to practice effects of the sensorimotor/attentional skills that heavy smartphone use builds, that can be transferred to computer-based tasks. However, this may not transfer over into a classroom environment.

Aloteibi et al., (2024) found that teachers were significantly concerned about learning disruption caused by smartphone use. Thomas et al., (2024) found a significant decline from 2018 to 2022 in trainee/preservice teachers' beliefs about smartphone use supporting learning in the classroom; and that around 70% of preservice teachers felt that smartphones caused classroom disruption. There also

were newer concerns emerging about smartphones distracting both pupils and teachers in the classroom (Thomas et al., 2024). Teachers specifically appear to be concerned about the impact upon pupils' cognitive abilities and executive functioning with views that smartphone use is impairing pupils focus (Botelho, 2023; McCrea, 2024) decreasing attention and reducing information retention through constant distractions from notifications (Martin, 2025). Principals were also found to be concerned about learning-related issues brought about by smartphone use such as distraction from learning tasks (Toth, 2022). In general, school staff spoke about restricting phone use to minimise risks to academic attainment and reduce disruption in the classroom (Randhawa et al., 2024).

Some teachers expressed worries about changing thinking patterns of pupils where they are no longer able to think deeply about a topic and expect instant answers to everything (McCrea, 2024). A further trend from the research were worries about academic dishonesty amongst pupils with 76-83% of preservice teachers concerned about cheating on schoolwork in class (Thomas et al., 2024). Specifically, teachers discussed concerns about pupils using artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT to cheat and plagiarise information rather than produce their own work (McCrea, 2024). This could lead to negative outcomes in examinations when they are unable to use the internet or AI tools to produce their work. These concerns could be driving tighter restrictions on smartphones in schools as teachers want to be sure that a pupils' work is their own and not produced by AI or internet searches.

Teachers also spoke about smartphones creating challenges teaching in the classroom when they are having to manage pupil's smartphone use (Botelho, 2023; McCrea, 2024). This was echoed by Morrin (2022) which reported pupils going off

task to look at their smartphones and go on applications such as TikTok and Netflix created behaviour management challenges. Pupils often mentioned how much of a distraction smartphones are in the classroom preventing themselves and other pupils from concentrating on their work (Gath et al., 2024). Things like receiving notifications (Wike, 2020), discussion about things seen on a smartphone or playing videos/music whilst in class (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils also described that smartphones reduced their motivation to learn, suggesting that they made them “not in the mood” for schoolwork and can end up spending extended amounts of time on their smartphone when they are just checking it for a break (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils also recognised that more teaching time is taking up with policing smartphone use which is frustrating and disruptive for both teachers and pupils (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils acknowledged that smartphones were more distracting than a laptop as you can become sucked into social media but that they may also help with concentration by providing brain breaks (Wike, 2020). Pupils reported with a smartphone ban that they noticed that their concentration levels increased in class as well as engagement with schoolwork (Bar et al., 2025). One pupil highlighted that banning smartphones removed an opportunity to cheat on tests or exams enabling the school to get accurate data on how the pupils perform (Bar et al., 2025). One study found that most pupils were neutral about whether using their smartphones for unrelated content at school affects their learning (Wike, 2020). In general, there seems to be mixed findings around whether pupils can use their smartphone in class and concentrate at the same time, suggesting that this could vary depending on the individual. This shows that there seems to be many different ideas on the impacts to learning and little evidence for a universal truth.

Teachers reported that they felt that pupils who used their smartphones in a problematic way were more likely to be perform lower academically (Botelho, 2023). Teachers believed that the loss of good study habits and prerequisite skills during online learning has caused a decline in academic achievement (Tricoli, 2023). Principals also believed that smartphones had a moderate negative impact on academic performance, with 19% of principals believing that smartphones were responsible for 30% to 40% of the negative impact and that just under less than 10% believing that smartphones were responsible for more than 50% of the negative impact on academic performance by their pupils (Toth, 2022). However, the evidence contrasts these assumptions with PSU showing a weak negative relationship with grade point average (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023). Tighter restrictions to smartphone use were also found to have no effect on secondary school pupils' academic performance (Kessel et al., 2020). In King et al., (2024) study the smartphone ban group improved slightly overtime with academic engagement but there were no significant differences between the ban and the non-ban group at the follow-up. Similarly, a systematic review found a lack of significant evidence that smartphone bans improved test scores or grades. Bottger and Zierer (2024) suggest that this could be due to 29% of pupils reporting that they use smartphones anyway despite restrictions which could reduce the effectiveness. However, it was concluded by Campbell et al., (2024) that there are some small negative impacts of smartphone use on academic outcomes and it suggests that it might be beneficial for some pupils (e.g., those from disadvantaged backgrounds) but makes no difference to other pupils.

2.7.3 Themes identified for LRQ2.

2.7.3.1. Theme 4: Makes socio-economic inequalities between pupils more visible. A key theme from Gath et al., (2024) was that a ban on smartphones in school promoted equality as not all pupils have smartphones, therefore it creates a more equitable environment. Some pupils reported that they sometimes experienced downward social comparisons focused on smartphone ownership with some pupils having newer smartphones and making fun of pupils who have older smartphones (Bar et al., 2025). Teachers also recognised that using smartphones for educational purposes could contribute to a socio-economic divide between pupils in terms of comparisons of what smartphone they have (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024).

2.7.3.2 Overarching theme 2: Positive aspects and advantages to smartphone use in schools.

2.7.3.2.1. Theme 5: Social and emotional support. Smartphones help pupils to feel connected to one another and their support networks (Wike, 2020; Gath et al., 2024, Bar et al., 2025; Randhawa et al., 2024). Teachers also identified that smartphones in school can help connect pupils to family, peers and teachers, especially in emergencies (McCrea, 2024). A 100% of pupils indicated in a survey that they use their phone in school to communicate with their friends (Wike, 2020) and felt that their smartphones made them feel closer and more connected to their peers. From interviews with pupils, a theme emerged that smartphones help with inclusion due to ease of communication with friends, parents and teachers. Pupils spoke about how using their smartphone in school reduced feelings of loneliness and allowed them to check in on their friends to make sure they were ok (Bar et al.,

2025). Pupils also reported using their smartphones to enhance their emotions and regulate difficult emotions. These difficult emotions mainly revolved around reducing anxiety and escaping stress as pupils mentioned that the smartphones helped them when they were struggling with stress, feeling left out or feeling anxious (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils also felt that smartphones supported their safety when travelling to and from school (Randhawa et al., 2024).

2.7.3.2.2. Theme 6: Increased independence. Smartphones were seen as a tool to increase independence as part of growing up and heading towards becoming an adult (Wike, 2020; Gath et al., 2024; Bar et al., 2025). Around 70% of pupils surveyed in one study said that they used their smartphone to support them with completing schoolwork independently and look up topics of interest (Wike, 2020) and Randhawa et al., (2024) found that pupils felt smartphones supported their learning in the classroom. Some pupils referred to being able to find out answers to issues independently from school services, an example used was a girl getting her period and being able talk to her mother about what to do next (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils spoke about liking being treated like an adult in terms of being able to practice responsible smartphone use and that the use of smartphones in schools provided a sense of trust and privilege (Bar et al., 2025). Educators also recognised that allowing smartphones in school would lead to increased trust and the opportunity to develop autonomy to self-manage smartphone use (Morrin, 2022; Gath et al., 2024). Furthermore, pupils spoke about learning to regulate smartphone use as preparing them for entering the workplace. There was recognition that the smartphone will not necessarily be stored away when they are working with indication that it does not prepare them for dealing with the distractions in everyday life (Bar et al., 2025).

2.7.3.2.3. Theme 7: Useful educational tools. There are multiple recognised educational benefits to smartphone use across studies (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; Gath et al., 2024; Wike, 2020; Morrin, 2022; McCrea 2024). Teachers felt that smartphones in school were useful for being able to use a range of platforms for learning and feedback (such as google classrooms, google forms, Mentimeter), having language translation tools available, having a timer/stopwatch, picture/video editing tools, research in class, having a backup when other devices such as laptops fail and subject-specific applications such as being able to use maps for humanities or photography/videography for creative lessons (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; Gath et al., 2024; Morrin 2022; McCrea 2024). Over 80% of pupils reported using their smartphone in school for educational purposes such as being able to access educational apps or software, the internet for research purposes and to access document storage platforms such as the google drive (Wike, 2020). Similarly, in another study 78% of pupils reported they used their smartphones in class for learning support (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023). A third of pupils in this study reported that they used their smartphone in school 1-3 times per day for educational purposes and felt that this was important (Wike, 2020). It was also recognised that using a smartphone for these purposes was sometimes quicker and easier than using another device such as a laptop. A smartphone can provide instant access to being able to check calendars, timetables, homework and look up quick facts/information on the internet in moments of curiosity (Wike, 2020). Pupils described how features of a smartphone helped with their learning, for example taking photos of the whiteboard when falling behind and being able to revisit it later (Wike, 2020). Applications on smartphones that help with planning, organisation and

productivity were mentioned by pupils as being particularly helpful in managing their time effectively. Some pupils also mentioned that their smartphone can help with their concentration on a school task as they can listen to music or use their smartphone to take a break when needed (Wike, 2020).

2.7.3.2.4. Theme 8: Convenient practical tools. The research highlighted views of teachers and pupils as seeing smartphones in schools as convenient for quick communication with others through platforms such as WhatsApp and emails (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). Some expressed that smartphones could be used to prevent bullying by providing evidence of wrongdoing (Bar et al., 2025). Other benefits described were use of smartphones for entertainment purposes (around 80% of pupil use their smartphones in school to access social media accounts and 70% use it to watch videos on YouTube or TikTok (Wike, 2020)), listening to music, for financial management and contactless phone payments for lunch in the canteen for example (Bar et al., 2025) and it was also mentioned as a way to record memories (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils reported that using smartphones in school during the sociable hours of break and lunch time is fun and enjoyable (Gath et al., 2024). Interestingly, teachers acknowledged a teacher-pupil double standard as pupils have restrictions on their smartphone use in schools, however many teachers feel justified in using their smartphones during class practically, mainly for family emergencies and for communication as parents (Morrin, 2022). Likewise, McCrea (2024) found that teachers used smartphones throughout the day for various teaching-related tasks such as timers, communication with staff and making contact in emergencies.

2.7.3.3 Overarching theme 3: Views related to smartphone policies.

2.7.3.3.1. Theme 9: Pupils' negative experiences of smartphone bans. Pupils reported feeling that a ban on smartphones in schools lead to a loss of connections with others and that it led to less connections (Bar et al., 2025; Gath et al., 2024). Some pupils spoke about not being able to contact parents if they are struggling with friendship issues or to keep them updated on school-related things activities. Some mentioned that it contributed to feelings of loneliness if you do not have friends in school to talk to (Bar et al., 2025). These restrictions caused some pupils to describe feeling more vulnerable and nervous in school (Bar et al., 2025). Consequently, some pupils felt that smartphone bans led to experiencing negative emotions and that they were unable to regulate these emotions due to having developed strategies to cope through use of a smartphone (Bar et al., 2025). Plus, some pupils detailed increased unease and tension in the school environment between the pupils and teachers due to frustration for the pupils caused by the ban (Bar et al., 2025). Some pupils generally felt frustrated with bans feeling like they are being "micro-managed" by school staff leading to a loss of independence and trust (Bar et al., 2025). Some also commented that they disliked the loss of privacy with school staff contacting parents on their behalf (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils spoke about the bans leading to them losing access to these practical and fun aspects of smartphone use as well as losing a tool that supports school-related work (Bar et al., 2025). However, it was felt that a ban on smartphones would encourage pupils to utilise other devices for learning such as tablets (Gath et al., 2024). It is important to recognise that Randhawa et al., (2024) found decisions about smartphone use in schools were made by the senior leadership team without consulting with the pupils in the school.

This meant that pupils in restrictive policy schools were less likely to agree that pupils in their school supported and followed phone rules compared with pupils in permissive policy schools (Randhawa et al., 2024).

2.7.3.3.2. Theme 10: Flexibility mentality. There were views from teachers in the research that enforcing the bans in reality is hard (Morrin, 2022; Tricoli, 2023; McCrea, 2024; Botelho 2023). Teachers frequently expressed feeling conflicted about enforcement, questioning whether policing smartphones was worth the classroom interruption and part of their job responsibility (Morrin, 2022). It has been felt from some teachers that there is a lack of guidelines on when smartphone use is appropriate versus prohibited leading to confusions and knowing when to enforce rules (Tricoli, 2023). Policy confusion also came up from another study, which lead to teachers creating their own rules at times (McCrea, 2024). Lloret-Catala et al., (2024) spoke about teachers wanting to have freedom to adapt the restrictions to the context, for example being able to use smartphones for educational purposes on occasion. Botelho (2023) found that teachers use different classroom strategies to manage smartphones, and they tended to report that relationship building approaches were more effective than strict restrictions which can cause conflict and be difficult to implement overtime consistently. Pupils have reported teachers not being strict enough with enforcement or being too strict with it for example taking a smartphone away before the school day has started (Bar et al., 2025).

2.7.3.3.3. Theme 11: Feeling supported in enforcement. Teachers have reported that to enforce smartphone bans, they need to feel that they have the support from school leaders/administrators, fellow teachers and parents (Morrin, 2022; Tricoli

2023). Teachers suggested that it was easier to enforce policies when all pupils were provided with a device such as a Chromebook or iPad (Morrin, 2022). One study found that teachers felt unsupported by school leaders/administrators in enforcing smartphone policies and that parents frequently contacted their children on their smartphone during school hours despite knowing about the smartphone policy (Tricoli, 2023). On the other hand, there was also reported mistrust as school leaders believed that teachers were not consistently enforcing the rules (Tricoli, 2023).

2.7.3.3.4. Theme 12: Diverse views on smartphone policies. There has also been mixed support in the research as to whether teachers support smartphone bans (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; Martin, 2025; Gath et al., 2024), although there is a significant correlation between teachers' negative beliefs and stricter classroom policies, with teachers who had the strongest negative beliefs having the most restrictive policies (Aloteibi et al., 2024). It appears from the research that both teachers and pupils have mixed views on what policies should be, for example some believe smartphones should be allowed for certain purposes e.g. messaging parents, some think that smartphones should be locked away, have allotted times to check them (such as break and lunch times), rules dependent on age of the pupil, and total ban approach (Gath et al., 2024; Bar et al., 2025).

2.7.4 Themes identified for LRQ1

2.7.4.1. Theme 13: Covid-19 pandemic. Research reported an increase in tighter restrictions on smartphone use in schools since the Covid-19 pandemic took place during 2020-2022. Teachers have shared concerns that school closures and remote

learning have increased dependency on smartphones for a lot of pupils (Tricoli, 2023; McCrea, 2024), with some reporting concerns about smartphone addiction (Botelho, 2023). Teachers spoke about noticing that pupils had developed anxiety when being separated from their smartphones after the pandemic and as a result had difficulty focusing on class when returning to in-person learning again (Tricoli, 2023). Thomas et al., (2024) found an intriguing trend that support for smartphones in the classroom fluctuated amongst trainee/preservice teachers' overtime with 45% showing support in 2015, rising to 55% showing support in 2018 and then decreasing to 40% in 2022. As well as a sharp increase in uncertainty about smartphone use in schools from 25% in 2018 to 41% in 2022 indicating a dramatic attitude change in a short space of time due to increasing concerns around smartphone addiction and mental health impacts. Researchers conclude this is in line with many schools tightening up smartphone policies and introducing bans (Thomas et al., 2024). Researchers from these studies ultimately recognise that the pandemic has fundamentally changed the relationship between pupils and their smartphones in ways that schools are still addressing.

2.7.4.2. Theme 14: Variety in teacher's level of digital competence. Teachers reported having to quickly adapt to using smartphones and assisted technology during the pandemic, however largely reported that they had felt unprepared for this change from their teacher training (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). This caused some recognition of a generation gap between teachers and pupils with teachers feeling like "outsiders in their students world" within the technological sphere (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). Some teachers expressed that they felt incompetent and that they need training on how to integrate smartphones as educational tools, so they are on the

same level as the pupils (Tricoli, 2023; Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). This seems to be a factor driving tighter restrictions on smartphone use in schools as some teachers feel incompetent in knowing how to use or incorporate smartphone technologies.

In addition, teachers felt that pupils were not digitally competent enough to use their smartphones as educational tools and that they are only competent in using them for communication and leisure purposes (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). It appears from the research that the generation gap and level of familiarity with technology/smartphones influences whether teachers view smartphone use in schools as positive or negative. Tricoli (2023) found that teachers who used a great amount of technology during their higher education (and within the last 10 years) had more positive views of smartphone use in schools. Whereas older teachers with limited technology exposure during their higher education were more likely to view smartphones negatively. This trend was also found in Thomas et al., (2024) where younger trainee/preservice teachers (under the age of 22) were consistently more supportive of smartphone use within schools than older ages. On the other hand, Toth (2022) found no statistically significant relationship between a principals age, gender, years of experience or school type in their perceptions (positive or negative views) about the impact of smartphones in schools.

2.7.4.3. Theme 15: Belief that restrictions will help. A number of studies have found that pupils and teachers' beliefs are driving tighter restrictions of smartphone use in schools for several reasons already mentioned (Gath et al., 2024, Aloteibi et al., 2024). King et al., (2024) found limited to no evidence that smartphone bans had the expected positive effects on pupils when comparing findings from schools that had implemented bans and those that had not. The researchers concluded that

imposing tighter restrictions may not impact the underlying psychological mechanisms driving PSU amongst adolescents. A UK study looking at the impact of tighter restrictions of smartphone use found limited evidence that tighter smartphone policies improve adolescent outcomes or reduce overall smartphone or social media use (Goodyear et al., 2025). The research summarised in this section shows that there is limited concrete evidence to why smartphone restrictions are being introduced and it appears to be based much more in subjective views. Overall, this has made it challenging to answer LRQ1.

2.8 Literature review conclusions, implications and chapter summary

It has been difficult to answer LRQ1 due to limited empirical and mixed evidence as well as negative subjective views appearing to drive tighter smartphone restrictions in school. It seems that it is the views of school staff, pupils and policy makers that may be driving the tighter restrictions rather than objective findings of the impact smartphones in school. It is evident that these concerns have escalated since the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the research perhaps is still catching up since this global event. School staff and pupils seem to be mostly in favour of some restrictions on smartphone use in school. However, both school staff and pupils acknowledge that there are advantages and disadvantages to smartphone use in schools.

Key implications so far have been that more evidence is required to inform policies and the most effective method of managing smartphone use in schools. It is mentioned that some teachers feel incompetent using smartphones as educational tools in the classroom and it is suggested that this could be covered in teacher training or continued professional development. This is important as society and the

workplace is becoming more technological; therefore, it will be crucial that pupils are skilled in using and managing smartphones and applications. It is also suggested that pupils should be provided with psychoeducation around the impacts of PSU and how to manage screen time.

From the literature there is currently mixed evidence on the before and aftereffects of tighter smartphone restrictions, particularly testing whether tighter smartphone restrictions make a difference to a lot of the concerning themes reported by school staff and pupils in the research. So far, there has been a lack of evidence asking pupils about these issues of concern. No research specifically has held focus groups for pupils asking about the use of smartphones in school and tighter restrictions. There is generally a lack of research in the field from a UK context and recent pupil, and school staff views are not evident in the literature from the UK. These gaps in the research will look to be addressed in the current study. This study will use a pre- and post-measure survey to investigate the impact of the introduction of a tighter restriction on the use of smartphones in schools on a range of factors that have been identified as a concern. This will occur alongside gathering pupil and school staff views through focus groups.

3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will cover the research orientation, looking at ontological and epistemological positions. The research purpose and questions will be highlighted, and the methodological approach will be discussed. This chapter will go through how the data was collected, how participants were recruited and how the data was analysed. As well as discussing research quality, validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research orientation

3.2.1. Ontology

Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of existence (Collins, 2024). It looks at the nature of reality and beliefs about what exists in the world (Killam, 2013). The ontological positioning of this research is critical realism which is underpinned by a belief that there is a truth to be discovered but it is difficult to know and considers the influence of context (Killam, 2013). Whereas realism believes that there is a universal reality that is context-free and relativism believes that the truth is subjective with multiple realities/meanings that are influenced by context and may change accordingly (Killam, 2013).

Critical realism looks for an explanation through a focus on what people can achieve in the social context in which they are operating (Stutchbury, 2022). It sees reality as being like an iceberg, most of reality is invisible to the observer and we see

only the tip of the iceberg (Stutchbury, 2022). The causal mechanisms exist below the surface and are invisible but influence the experiences and events. Critical realists think of reality in three levels of depth, these are the empirical level (the experiences and sensed perceptions of participants), the actual level (objects and events that occur in the real world) and the ‘real’ level (causal mechanisms and deeper-lying structures which can be triggered or blocked depending on the context) (Stutchbury, 2022).

Critical realism applies to this study because it holds that an objective reality exists independently of individual perception, because the use of smartphones in educational settings is a worldwide issue with similar concerns raised and policies introduced (Campbell et al., 2024). However, this study also recognises that reality is only ever partially and contextually knowable, meaning that the outcomes of policies and concerns brought about by smartphone use may have empirical outcomes shaped by the specific conditions in which they operate. For example, in this instance the socio-political context and educational system in the UK is different to other countries. The knowledge known and shared is also shaped by influences such as culture, government initiatives/policies and the media/press. We know that smartphones exist but the way they are perceived (which could be more positively or negatively) is largely determined by the context they are used in and could be shaped by dominant narratives in the media, for example. Also, a similar smartphone policy such as lockable pouches for smartphones will produce different outcomes in different schools because of how it interacts with factors such as staff enforcement, peer culture or school ethos. Therefore, findings from this study should be understood not as universal truths but as context-dependent expressions of broader

mechanisms meaning that any conclusions will need to be interpreted considering the specific structural and cultural conditions of secondary schools in the UK.

3.2.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, especially the critical study of its validity, methods and scope (Collins, 2024). Epistemology looks at how the researcher discovers what there is to be known (Killam, 2013). This epistemological stance of this study is also critical realism as it seeks to explain the objective reality underpinning a phenomenon, taking into consideration the context (Killam, 2013). Scientific knowledge can be gained by including experiences and feelings of the pupils and school staff through allowing their interpretative meaning, whilst also accepting an overarching explanation for a phenomenon; therefore, reaching a shared understanding about smartphone use in schools is possible (Seamon & Gill, 2016).

3.2.3. Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves a disciplined practice of critically reflecting on what we do, how we do it and why we do it as this could impact and influence how we carry out research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I have reflected on my interest and experience with the topic in the introduction and my own views around smartphone use in mind maps, see figure 7 and 8. I see many benefits to smartphone use but I also feel there are drawbacks, particularly when smartphone use is excessive. The aim of this reflexive activity was to think about how my feelings about the drawbacks may influence the interpretive lens that I view my data with. I recognise that some of my

own concerns with smartphone use have been factors and survey questions that I have chosen to focus on in my study such as asking about if smartphones are distracting and are anxiety inducing.

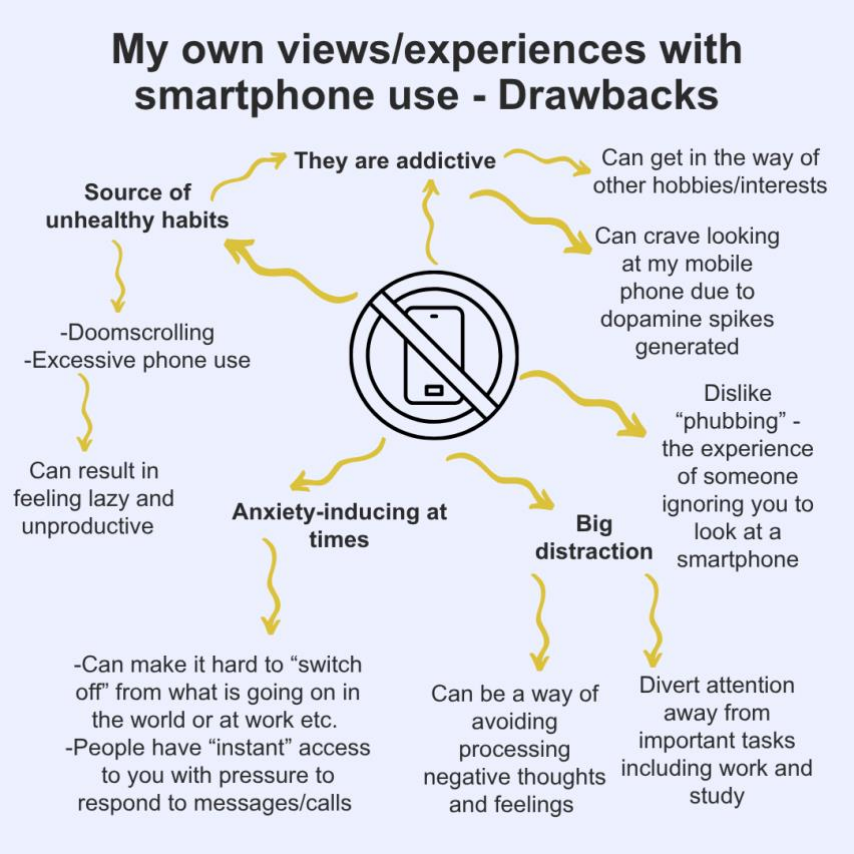
Figure 7.

A mind map of my views on the benefits of smartphone use.



Figure 8.

A mind map of my views on the drawbacks of smartphone use.



3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the research is to explore, through gathering pupil and staff perspectives, the impact of tighter restrictions on smartphone use in secondary school on a range of factors. These are attention/concentration in the classroom, behaviour/disruption in the classroom, wellbeing, cyberbullying, physical activity, screen time and school belongingness. These factors have been identified in the government guidance (DfE, 2024), media news reporting and research as a cause for concern around smartphone use in schools.

3.3.1. RQs

This study consisted of two research questions (listed below). RQ1 linked to the quantitative elements explored which are: attention in class, behaviour, wellbeing, cyberbullying, screen time, physical activity and school belongingness. RQ2 related to the qualitative exploration of pupil and teacher views on the use of smartphones in school.

RQ1: What difference do smartphone restrictions make?

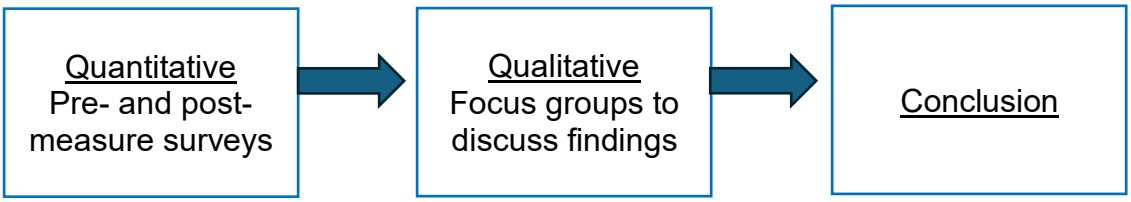
RQ2: What are pupil and teacher views on the use of smartphones in school?

3.4. Research design

This study was an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (see figure 9). It included both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a more holistic, better understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative data (surveys) informed the qualitative data (focus groups) which provided more explanation and insight into the quantitative data. There was no control group for this study. However, this research is comparative, as it compared two data sets completed at different time points to see if there were any changes (time 1, the summer term of 2025 without further restrictions to use of smartphones in school and time 2, the autumn term in 2025 when further restrictions were introduced). It is also explorative as pupils and teachers were asked for their views on the findings when comparing two data sets with the aim of generating a deeper understanding of the results and impact.

Figure 9.

A diagram of the research design for this study.



3.4.1 Reasons for not choosing purely quantitative or qualitative methods

A short survey was used quantitatively to collect responses from as many pupils as possible and to compare the impact pre- and post- measure policy changes. A mixed methods approach was chosen to allow for triangulation to help improve accuracy of interpretations of the data as the qualitative data helped to contextualise the quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). This study chose not to use a purely qualitative method as it was interested in descriptive statistical comparisons across time as well as participants lived experiences. It is an abductive combination approach to allow for the generation of new ideas and future directions for research (De Brito & Van der Laan, 2010). Furthermore, focus groups were chosen over conducting interviews as this research is exploring shared experiences of a phenomenon and allowed participants to draw out collective experiences to build upon each other's views.

3.5. Data Collection

3.5.1 Quantitative: pre- and post- measure surveys

To gather quantitative data about the range of factors for pupils: concentration/attention in the classroom, behaviour/disruption in the classroom,

mental health, amount of physical activity, likelihood of experiencing online bullying, screen time and level of school belongingness, I designed the surveys by selecting the factors to ask about. I created the questions which involved deciding how the responses would be collected, either by a categorical answer or by ranking on a scale. My research supervisor reviewed the surveys after I had designed them to check phrasing of questions and answers, as well as to make any suggestion improvements. The surveys were non-validated measures because they aimed to explore specific concerns raised in the DfE (2024) guidance, please see Table 7 for reasons for exploring each factor (as they were mentioned in the DfE (2024) guidance). There are currently no validated measures that explore these specific concerns, and the validated measures do not necessarily measure the research questions this study is investigating. The survey was designed to be contextually relevant for the target population and short (5-10 minutes) so it could be completed at the start of a lesson or tutor time. However, a limitation of using a non-validated measure is that without established reliability and validity testing it is uncertain that the items are measuring the intended constructs accurately and consistently because they might be interpreted differently. This may limit the generalisability of this study's findings to other studies that have used validated measures.

The surveys had closed questions and factors were measured by asking scaling questions, for example, "On a scale of 1-5, how close do you feel to your classmates/peers in school?" or categorical questions, for example "How many days per week do you engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity (running around, playing sports, walking etc.)?" The surveys also collected demographic data such as year group/age, gender and ethnicity (see appendices G and H). This data was collected to identify any trends in the data (for example if there was a particular year

group experiencing cyberbullying more frequently, this could be fed back to the school) and to consider the demographic characteristics of the sample when interpreting the findings. The pre-measure questionnaire had 12 questions (see appendix G for the questions asked). The post-measure questionnaire had 13 questions (see appendix H for the questions asked). The online surveys were designed so pupils were unable to submit the questionnaires without providing an answer to every question and to only select one answer per question.

Both surveys were administered online via Google Forms and for some questions pictures related to the question were included to make it more engaging for pupils to complete (representation of genders and races were considered in the picture selection). Google forms were selected over other platforms (for example, Microsoft forms, Survey Monkey etc.) as this was the platform that was compatible with the school online system. Both surveys were also designed to be short, taking approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, so they could be completed quickly during tutor time or at the start of a lesson. This is so a member of staff could be available if pupils want to discuss anything with them in relation to the survey (please see appendix I for guidance teachers were given for pupils completing the surveys).

3.5.1.1. Design of surveys. The surveys were designed by myself and reviewed by my research supervisor. The gatekeeper in the secondary school also reviewed both surveys to ensure that they were satisfied with questions asked and pupils completing it. I thought of and selected the factors to ask about based on what I had read about the concerns of smartphone use in schools (see Table 7 for more information). The pre-measure questionnaire was piloted on small group of pupils in

a secondary school prior to releasing it to the larger sample. This was to ensure that all the questions made sense and could be answered easily by adolescents.

Table 7.

The basis for exploring factors asked about in the survey.

Factor	Reason for exploring
Attention/concentration in the classroom	DfE (2024) guidance suggests that prohibiting smartphones can create an environment free from distraction so all pupils can be fully present and engaged in the classroom to receive the education they deserve.
Behaviour/disruption in the classroom	The DfE (2024) guidance states that smartphones risk unnecessary disruption in the classroom. One in three secondary school pupils report that smartphones are used in most lessons without permission (DfE, 2023) which can divert the teacher away from teaching.
Mental Health	The DfE (2024) guidance suggests that by removing smartphones CYP can spend more time being active and socialising face-to-face with their peers, and these activities will have a positive impact on their wellbeing.
Physical activity	The DfE (2024) guidance suggests that prohibiting smartphones during the school day will lead to more CYP spending more time staying active during the school day.

Cyberbullying	The DfE (2024) guidance describes the importance of keeping pupils safe whilst in school and that one in five pupils have experienced cyberbullying (ONS, 2020). The guidance suggests that removing smartphones from the school day creates a safe school environment where pupils are protected from the risks and dangers associated with social media and cyberbullying.
School belongingness	DfE (2024) guidance suggests that removing smartphones will lead to more pupils socialising face-to-face with their peers, and that in turn the whole culture of the school changes for the better.
Screen time	DfE (2024) guidance mentions that time spent on smartphones can prevent pupils completing other activities such as spending time exercising or socialising face-to-face with their peers which impacts on their wellbeing. Extended screen time has become increasingly prevalent for CYP, with nearly 25% of CYP using their smartphones in a way that is consistent with a behavioural addiction (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024).

3.5.2 Qualitative: focus groups

After the quantitative data was collected, two focus groups were held (one for pupils, one for school staff). The purpose of the focus group was to gather views and

discuss further the findings from the surveys to generate meaning-making. The focus groups for the study took place in November 2025 and in a private room at school, during school hours (in lesson time). The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed manually by me afterwards. I had a topic guide of questions to follow, please see appendix J for pupil guide and appendix K for staff guide. The topic guide was designed to take 30-45 minutes, and each focus group was roughly 35 minutes long. I asked questions generally about the use of smartphones in school and the policy before presenting a paper copy of a poster with pre- and post- measure survey findings to each participant (see appendix L). Both staff and pupil focus groups saw the same poster and were asked similar questions about their views on the findings. The poster was designed to be easily accessible and meaningful to feedback for pupils and staff and therefore I chose to focus on a few key areas to help develop the discussion.

3.6. Participants

3.6.1. Recruitment of a school

This study originally looked at the recruitment of one or two secondary schools that were introducing tighter restrictions on smartphone use from September 2025. Schools had to meet an inclusion criteria (see Table 8 for the inclusion and exclusion criteria). The school that took part was recruited by volunteering and agreeing to take part in the study.

Secondary schools were approached in the first instance in the local authority that I am on my educational psychology service (EPS) placement in to see if they meet the inclusion criteria. I informed the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP)

within the EPS about my study and asked if I could approach local authority secondary school headteachers via email with information about my study. This would be to scope whether they were implementing or thinking about making changes to their smartphone policy. The PEP agreed to this, and school link EPs were CC'd into any emails about the study with their link schools so they were aware of the research and that their school had been contacted (in case any queries came up at the school about the research, in which they would know to direct to the researcher).

A recruitment poster for the study (see appendix M) was also circulated to a selection of secondary schools in my home county via email to the school admin or headteachers email addresses. I also shared my recruitment poster to other Trainee EPs and course tutors at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust to increase awareness of the project and to ask if they knew of any schools in their local authorities or areas introducing tighter restrictions to their smartphone policies that I could approach with the recruitment poster. Careful consideration was given to the possibility that more than two secondary schools could come forward expressing interest to take part and meet the inclusion criteria. It was agreed upon that the fairest way to address this would be that I select the schools to take part on a first come, first served basis.

A couple of schools expressed interest but did not meet the inclusion criteria of introducing tighter restrictions to their smartphone policy (see Table 8). One school initially expressed interest and were making changes to their smartphone policy, however felt they were unable to commit to the study. Another school expressed interest but were only making changes to the smartphone use in school for the Year 7 cohort starting in September 2025, therefore did not meet inclusion criteria.

Fortunately, one school in my placement local authority did express interest and met the inclusion criteria for the study. This involved having an initial meeting with me to see if the research was feasible to complete in their school and that they were making a change to their smartphone policy which fitted within the timeframes (see section 3.6.2 for more information). The headteacher in this school requested that I contact a member of staff who was taking the lead on introducing changes to the smartphone policy to discuss the project further. For the rest of the data collection, I liaised with this member of staff who I will call the "gatekeeper".

After one school was recruited and found to meet the inclusion criteria a decision was made not recruit anymore schools for the project. This was to keep in line with thesis deadline timescales and the consideration that different schools might have different smartphone policy changes which might make it difficult to generalise and compare findings.

Table 8.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for a school to take part in the study.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
School type	The school must be a secondary school with pupils aged between 11-16. The study will be inclusive towards different types of schools (e.g. faith schools, academies, single sex schools) depending upon who expresses interest. However, if a special educational needs school requests to	Primary schools and colleges with pupils younger than 11 and older than 16.

	take part, it will need to be thought carefully about whether the online survey would be accessible for the pupils and whether appropriate support could be put in place to make it accessible.	
Co-operation with the researcher	Any school that expresses interest in the study will need to be able to have a meeting with the researcher to determine whether it is feasible to conduct this study in their school within the timeframe (Can they commit to completing the online surveys and holding the focus groups?).	Not able to have a meeting with the researcher. The school cannot commit to all parts of the research study (the surveys and focus groups).
Timeframes	Introducing tighter restrictions to smartphone use in September 2025 or towards the end of the summer term.	Not introducing tighter restrictions to smartphone use within the desired timeframe.
Location	The school's location must be accessible for the researcher; therefore, the recruitment process will favour schools that are located closer to the researcher's base.	Schools outside of the UK or located within the UK but too far for the researcher to travel.

3.6.2 Smartphone policy change

The secondary school recruited was introducing lockable phone pouches for pupils (see figure 10 for an example image of what this looks like). Upon arrival to the school each day, pupils are provided with a lockable pouch by a member of staff who oversees the pupils securing their smartphone into the pouch. Pupils keep their smartphone in the pouch on them throughout the school day, however, are unable to go on their smartphone as it is stored in the pouch. Throughout the school day (including all lessons, breaktime and lunchtime) the smartphones remain locked in the pouch until the end of the school day. At the end of the school day pupils can unlock their phone pouches at designated unlocking stations situated throughout the school before leaving the school premises. The lockable phone pouches are unlocked using a device with a magnet (see figure 10). This smartphone policy change is a combination of recommendations C. (Smartphones kept in a secure location, which the pupil does not access throughout the day) and D. (Never used, seen or heard) in the DfE (2024) guidance on smartphones in schools. The gatekeeper informed me that the smartphone policy before the change was purely D. (that pupils should not be getting their smartphones out during school hours and it should be in their school bag switched off). Although, it was felt that despite this rule being in place, that tighter restrictions were required as pupils would still access and regularly use their smartphones in school.

Figure 10.

An example image of what lockable phone pouches look like, with the device that enables them to be unlocked.



Note. Image taken from Meredith (2025) BBC news report.

3.6.3 Recruiting for pre- and post- survey completion

This research aimed for a sample of pupils in years 7,8,9 and 10 to complete the pre-measure online survey in the summer term of 2025 before the changes to the smartphone policy were implemented. The same sample of pupils were then asked to complete the post-measure survey in the autumn term (meaning that it was pupils in year groups 8, 9, 10 and 11 completing the post-survey in autumn term). It was acknowledged that the sample size for the online surveys depended upon the number of pupils attending the secondary school, however the study aimed to have at least 30-50 pupils from each year group complete the survey using a non-probability quote sampling technique, with those same pupils completing the survey pre and post. However, due to relying on the gatekeeper and school staff to organise and distribute the surveys and the nature of schools being busy places, I did not

obtain exactly what I intended from the survey samples. However, I did get 106 responses on the pre-measure and 180 responses on the post-measure surveys. It needs to be recognised that some of the sample that completed the pre-measure and post-measure are different pupils which may have impacted upon the findings. Specifically, that the post-measure had a larger and younger sample than the pre-measure (see Table 9 for pupil year group distribution for surveys). The mean age of participants for the pre-measure was 14.1 years (Standard Deviation (SD): 0.8) and for the post-measure was 13.8 years (SD: 1.2) (see figure 11 for the ages). Gender and race/ethnicity data was also collected for the surveys (see Table 10 for gender and Table 11 for race/ethnicity). I anticipated that different participants would respond to the post-measure based on the sample collected for the pre-measure and that I could not analyse matched pairs as the data was anonymous, so I did not know exactly which participants completed both the pre- and post-measure survey. Therefore, I felt it was important to include question 13 (which was, “Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to... your concentration, your behaviour, your wellbeing, your level of physical activity, screen time and social interactions in school”) to gather the views of a range of pupils rather than solely relying on the cross-comparison of pre- and post-measure data sets.

Table 9.

The Year Group of pupils who completed pre- and post- measure surveys.

Year Group	Pre-measure survey		Post-measure survey	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Year 7	2	1.9%	-	-

Year 8	10	9.4%	87	48.3%
Year 9	48	45.3%	40	22.2%
Year 10	46	43.4%	12	6.7%
Year 11	-	-	41	22.8%

Figure 11.

The age of pupils from the pre- and post- measure survey.

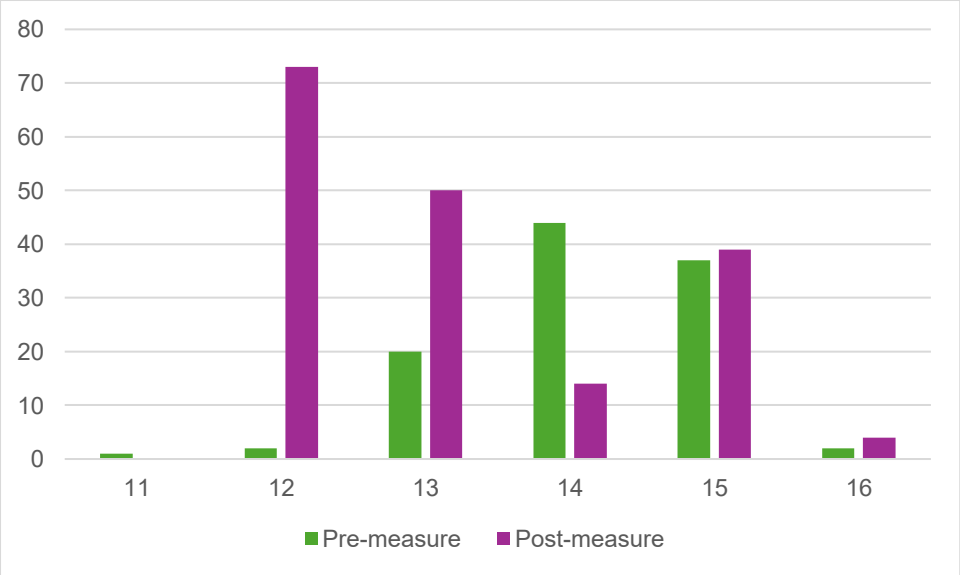


Table 10.

The gender of pupils who completed pre- and post- measure surveys.

Gender	**Pre-measure survey**		**Post-measure survey**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	48	45.3%	66	36.7%
Female	54	50.9%	104	57.8%
Non-binary	2	1.9%	4	2.2%
Transgender	1	0.9%	1	0.6%

Prefer not to say	1	0.9%	5	2.8%

Table 11.

The Race/ethnicity of pupils who completed pre- and post- measure surveys.

Race/ethnicity	**Pre-measure survey**		**Post-measure survey**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
White (including British, Irish, Polish and any other White background)	42	39.6%	87	48.4%
Black (including British, African, Caribbean, any other black background)	10	9.3%	13	7.2%
Asian (including British, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, any other Asian background)	39	36.6%	53	29.5%
Mixed heritage	7	6.6%	8	4.5%
Any other ethnic group	5	4.7%	10	5.6%
Prefer not to say	3	2.8%	9	5%

3.6.4 Recruiting for the focus groups

I intended to recruit a selection of 8 pupils (2 from each year group) to take part in the focus group after completion of the post-measure survey. They were selected in a nested purposive sampling technique as school staff/the gatekeeper selected pupils they felt would contribute well to the focus group. Due to the survey sample being culturally diverse, I asked the gatekeeper if the sample of the focus group could be representative of some of the different cultures in the school and I asked for both male and female pupils to take part in the group. There were 6 pupils who took part in the pupil focus group (see Table 12 for demographic information about participants). The gatekeeper had aimed for 8 pupils, however 2 of the parental consent forms had not come back in time for the focus group which meant that they were not able to take part.

I aimed to recruit 6-8 members of school staff for the staff group. The teacher focus group was recruited in a voluntary convenience sampling technique as it was based upon which staff members were available at the time of the focus group and interested in taking part. There were 3 teachers who took part in the staff focus group (see Table 13 for demographic information about the participants). It was explained to me on the day by the gatekeeper that there were would be less staff available for the focus group due to staff needing to cover lessons due to staff sickness and that we would be expecting 4 members of staff for the focus group. However, at the time of the focus group, one female member of staff that was expected to come to the room did not show (we waited 5 minutes but needed to make a start due to timings).

Table 12.

Pupil focus group demographic data.

Pupil Participant (Pseudonyms used)	Year Group	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Rohan	11	16	Male	Indian
Poppy	11	15	Female	White British
Ryan	10	14	Male	White British
Luca	8	12	Male	Other: Romanian
Ben	10	14	Male	White British
Kirsty	9	13	Female	White British

Table 13.

Staff focus group demographic data.

Staff participant (Pseudonyms used)	Occupation	Age	Gender	Ethnicity

James	Teacher	25-34	Male	White British
Sam	Teacher	25-34	Male	White British
Richard	Teacher	25-34	Male	Black African

3.7. Data Analysis

3.7.1. Quantitative: Descriptive statistics

Data from the surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics to compare pre- and post-measure surveys to see if there has been any change or improvement in the different factors. As well as pupil views on if there had been any changes to the factors. These were calculated by looking at frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. These statistics were calculated using SPSS.

The findings from the surveys were initially automatically generated using software from the survey engine (Google forms) to calculate descriptive statistics (pie charts and graphs) and these were shared with the focus groups on a poster (see appendix L). Most of the questions asked required a categorical answer, which meant that nominal data was produced, therefore these were analysed by calculating numbers/percentages to compare between the pre- and post- policy change. There were two questions about attention/concentration in class, and closeness to classmates/peers in school which produced scaling answers which were analysed by generating mean scores to compare pre- and post- policy change (Field & Hole,

2003). Some of the data on the factors such as cyberbullying was examined closely to see if there were any notable differences in terms of demographically who was reporting experiencing it as this was of interest from an educational psychology perspective and to feedback to the school. Inferential statistics were not used in this research to compare pre- and post-policy change due to differences in sample sizes pre- and post-policy change and being unable to identify matched pairs due to the survey data being anonymous.

3.7.2. Qualitative: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

The information gathered from the focus groups were analysed using RTA which involved a systematic process of data coding to develop themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The RTA involved transcribing the conversation and becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and then defining the themes (see Table 14 for an overview of the RTA phases with application to this study). When coding the data, no pre-existing codes were used to code as this study is using an explorative approach (see appendix N for an example of coded data and appendix O for an overview of codes, with themes and subthemes).

Table 14.

RTA phases and application to this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Phase	Procedure for the step	Application to this study

Familiarisation with the data	Read transcripts and summarise every couple of sentences what is there to give an overview.	I read through the transcripts for the focus groups and summarised the information page by page to familiarise myself and make sense of the answers that were provided to my questions.
Generating initial codes	To label meaningful pieces of relevant data to help organise and categorise the data.	I used post it notes to stick codes next to quotations on transcripts which I eventually put into a word document which had codes combined with relevant quotations from both focus groups.
Generating initial themes	To organise the codes into themes by analysing similarities and patterns within the data set and thinking about where they all link to a central point or idea.	I thought about which codes link together and the story they tell to group them into themes. This was completed by writing out the codes and noticing overarching similarities which could be

		grouped together in a theme.
Reviewing themes	To spilt themes up into separate subthemes and checking to see if themes matched the coding.	I discussed the themes and subthemes created with my research supervisor and checked to make sure the codes represented the themes and subthemes represented the codes.
Define and name themes	To clearly define and label themes by coming up with a description of what it is about.	I named and defined themes with support of my research supervisor to ensure that the names represented what was being described. AI was used to help with naming themes by describing what the theme was about.
Write up	To include the description and quotations and to relate back to the RQs.	Themes and subthemes are written up in the findings section with descriptions and quotes

	to illustrate points made to answer RQs.

3.7.3. Critique of RTA

While RTA was the most appropriate method for analysing the qualitative data in this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. RTA has a degree of subjectivity in the analytic process as themes are actively generated by the researcher and through their interpretive lens rather than passively emerging from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This could lead to some biases in interpretation; therefore, it was important that I was aware of my own views on the topic and discussed my themes with my research supervisor.

3.8 Research quality, validity and reliability

3.8.1. Quantitative data collection and analysis considerations

3.8.1.1. Content validity. The questionnaire was designed by myself; it was reviewed carefully by myself and my research supervisor to ensure that it was measuring what it intended to find out before being given to the participants of the study. It was piloted with a small group of young people before it was sent out to ensure it was easily accessible. It was also reviewed by the gatekeeper in the school.

3.8.1.2 Internal validity. This study did not have a control group; therefore, it is possible that changes in the factors might be due to something other than the restriction of the use of smartphones in schools. For example, the levels of physical activity amongst pupils were decreased in the autumn survey compared to the summer survey, and this could be due to less outdoor opportunities for physical activity due to the weather and daylight hour changes rather than anything to do with smartphones. Similarly, regression from the mean may be an issue if participants produce extreme scores on the pre-measure, by chance they may score closer to the mean on the post-measure. This can be particularly a problem for a study investigating effects of a policy that has been introduced in response to a perceived problem (Field & Hole, 2003). Therefore, it was important for this study to have the focus groups to help with interpretation of any findings.

3.8.1.3 External validity/Ecological validity. This research took place in one secondary school in the UK. Depending upon the school type, school rules, area and demographics the findings may not be applicable to all schools.

3.8.2. Qualitative data collection and analysis considerations

3.8.2.1 Researcher competence and reactivity. I recognised the importance of having self-awareness of my own interpretations and how they could interact with the focus group. This is because I may subtly and unconsciously bias the results by the way I interact with the group. This would have led to demand characteristics where the participants will say what they think I want them to say. I also considered group dynamics and facilitated the group in a way that everybody in the group had an

opportunity to share their views. This was to ensure that the findings from the focus group are representative of all who took part.

3.8.2.2 Construct validity. I ensured that the data presented in the focus group, questions and discussion prompts were relevant to the research questions. This helped to ensure that the discussion was purposeful and valuable to the study.

3.8.2.3 External validity. Teachers volunteered to take part in the focus group and may have volunteered because they have stronger opinions on the use of smartphones in school. It is also worth acknowledging that the gatekeeper who had a key lead role in implementing the smartphone policy changes took part in the focus group. Knowing the gatekeeper's role may have influenced the other staff members responses in the focus group. It has also been found that volunteers for research studies tend to be more intelligent, better educated, have higher social status and are more sociable than non-volunteers (Rosentnal & Rosnow, 1975 *as cited in* Field & Hole, 2003). Similarly, pupils selected by school staff to be part of the focus group may have also had some of these characteristics. These aspects are recognised as limitations to the focus group sample.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were followed in relation to four ethical principles in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021) (respect, competence, responsibility and integrity) and four principles of the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) (respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals groups and the community, scientific integrity, social responsibility and

maximising benefit and minimising harm. They were enacted through the processes discussed below.

3.9.1 Approval

Ethical approval for this research was gained through the Trust Research Ethics Committee at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (see appendix P). Before, completing my research with the school I informed them that I had ethical approval from my university and checked whether any further approval was required.

3.9.2 Informed Consent

3.9.2.1. Surveys. Prior to the surveys being administered, an information and opt-out consent letter was sent home to parents to inform them of the research taking place and providing an opportunity for them to withdraw their child from the research (see appendix Q). Pupils were provided with information (such as what the research involves, the purpose of the study, confidentiality and anonymity, data protection and the right to withdraw) and gave informed consent before completing both surveys (see appendix G and H). Pupils that clicked “No” to providing consent were removed from the pre- and post- measure data set (this was roughly 6 pupil responses from both surveys).

3.9.2.2. Focus groups. All the participants read an information sheet about the focus group and signed an informed consent form before taking part (see appendix R for pupil form and appendix S for school staff form). For the pupil the focus group, parental opt-in consent was gained prior to the focus group with a letter sent home for parents to sign and return to school (see appendix T).

3.9.3 Right to Withdraw

3.9.3.1. Surveys. I ensured that the pupils knew from the information provided that the survey was not a test and that it will not affect their education if they do not answer something or withdraw their data. Before submitting the surveys, it was explained to pupils that by clicking the submit button they would be unable to withdraw their responses (see appendices G and H). This is because once the survey was submitted it was anonymised (therefore, unable to identify individual participant responses).

3.9.3.2. Focus groups. Before participating in the focus groups, I made it clear from the information provided and verbally that participants had the right to withdraw from the group or not respond to questions asked. Participants were given a week after the focus group to withdraw their data as their data will be identifiable until anonymised by myself. This is because in line with UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), participants are entitled to withdraw their data up until the point of anonymisation. They were informed that after this timeframe they would not be able to withdraw their responses as the analysis and anonymisation of their data will have begun. Participants had a copy of the researcher's email address to contact if they wished to withdraw their data from the focus group.

3.9.4 Minimising Harm and debrief

3.9.4.1. Surveys and focus groups. Before submitting the surveys, a debrief information box was provided on both surveys with links to Young Minds and Childline if they had been affected by any questions asked (see appendices G and H). The parent letter sent prior to the surveys and focus groups also included

information about organisations to go to if their child had been affected by any of the questions asked on the survey or in the focus group. Some of the factors asked about in the surveys are emotive topics such as mental health and bullying. I thought about how this may bring up concerns for pupils and staff. Therefore, I made sure that in the debrief there were contact details of relevant organisations and pupils were encouraged to talk to a trusted adult or the gatekeeper. This was also important for if they felt concerned about their smartphone use after completing the survey or discussing findings (that they have somewhere they can go for advice). Furthermore, pupils were given the option to opt-out of these questions by selecting that 'I do not wish to answer' on the surveys.

For the focus groups**,** ground rules were set at the beginning to ensure that all participants are respectful and allow everyone a turn at speaking. For the pupil focus group there was a member of staff present to introduce the group to help make the pupils feel more settled and ground rules were set to help create an environment where participants felt safe. Within the focus group I ensured that there was no pressure to contribute to certain questions or topics that could be distressing. For the focus group I followed a distress protocol, see below.

Distress protocol for focus group:

1. To make clear at the start of the focus group that they do not need to contribute to any items/questions if they do not want to and that they have the right to withdraw at any time and can speak with a trusted adult afterwards.
2. If I notice any participants becoming distressed, to check in with them, or give them the option to take a moment outside of the room.

3. If any participants do become distressed, to ensure that I or a member of school staff follow up with them after the group to make sure they have been debriefed and supported appropriately.

3.9.4.2. General safety. I had an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for working with CYP that had taken place within the last three years, and I have experience of working in settings such as health and social care with vulnerable CYP. The school the research took place at also had safeguarding procedures in place to protect pupils and staff if anything concerning were to have arisen from the focus groups. I have had experience of administering surveys to secondary school pupils in previous research projects around topics such as bullying which helped with knowing how to phrase questions sensitively, ensuring informed consent is gained and that they are debriefed with relevant organisations.

3.9.5 Confidentiality and anonymity

3.9.5.1. Surveys. The purpose of the anonymity on the surveys was to support honest responding to questions where pupils might have felt exposed providing their views on certain factors or the school's smartphone policy. To keep the surveys anonymous was an ethical dilemma as there were questions on the surveys around emotive topics such as bullying and mental health which if a pupil had disclosed harm, there was no way to identify or follow up with the individual. Therefore, in discussion with my research supervisor we decided to keep questions that explored bullying and mental health as just 'Yes', 'Sometimes' or 'No' responses rather than scaling them to avoid data that would be more concerning if anonymised. I also kept all questions closed on the surveys which further prevented obtaining information

that would be sensitive and required to be reported. This was important as participants were anonymous upon submitting the survey as I did not collect identifiable data such as their name or date of birth. These aspects of the survey were submitted with my ethical approval form which was reviewed and approved by the Trust's Ethics Committee.

However, if I was to complete these surveys again, I would consider whether anonymity was the right approach and if there was a way that participants could be identifiable to enable safeguarding to take place if required. This would be to allow for safeguarding procedures to take place given the young population of participants and the sensitivity of some of the questions asked. This would have enabled me to fulfil a duty of care to safeguard any pupils who may have disclosed information which could have suggested that they were at risk of harm. Anonymity protects participants data and identity however safeguarding would override anonymity if a participant was thought to be of harm and could be identified. For the surveys, the anonymity limited my ability to safeguard, whereas I was able to safeguard for the focus groups. In acknowledgement of this, I did build signposting into the survey for pupils to refer to if affected (to provide them with the means to reach out) and surveys were completed during school time with an adult present to answer any questions. Furthermore, their parents received a letter with signposting of supportive agencies such as Childline to support their child to reach out if they had been impacted by the questions asked on the survey.

3.9.5.2. Focus groups. The focus groups could not be anonymous as the group format itself made participants identifiable; therefore, I was able to follow a distress protocol to safeguard any pupils if they had been distressed during the focus group.

At the beginning of the focus groups, I discussed the meaning of confidentiality and its limits with participants. I asked that what is shared in the group remains within the group to respect group members confidentiality. I also made clear on the consent form that the focus is on themes of the discussion rather than individual responses to help make participants feel they could contribute more freely and be honest about what they think. I ensured that what individuals have said in focus groups were kept confidential, including from the local authority EPS colleagues and members of school staff. I will only share anonymised and analysed results with them. The focus groups were also held at a time when I knew no other colleagues from the EPS would be visiting the school to keep confidential who took part in the focus groups. Participants were informed that their data would be anonymised a week after participation.

3.9.6 Data Protection

Access to computer files were available to research team by password only and research data was stored on a secure cloud storage location. Hardcopy data such as the consent forms from the focus groups were shredded after relevant information was digitally recorded. The focus groups were audio-recorded on an encrypted and password protected device. Once transcribed, digital recordings were deleted. Research data was encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK. In line with Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, data from this doctoral project will be securely stored for up to 10 years and destroyed afterwards.

3.9.7 Scientific integrity

This research will value the participation of the school and pupils by ensuring that the findings/outcomes are fed back to them through a presentation, poster or newsletter. Having knowledge of the findings and potential implications is likely to be of benefit to the participating school about their smartphone policy, looking at the potential impact on pupils. This may help with making decisions on the policy in the future. Pupils who took part may feel empowered knowing they are contributing to research looking at smartphone policies and whether they make a difference. It was made clear to pupils that choosing to take part had no impact upon their education and that the survey and focus group was not a test.

3.9.8 Responsibility

I made sure that I felt competent in carrying out the focus groups as part of the research, so they were run ethically. Therefore, I made sure I completed some additional reading and thinking with my research supervisor about how to run the focus groups most effectively. I felt having experience running groups in my EPS placement with pupils and staff helped equip me well for the experience of running the focus groups as I was able to feel confident taking up leadership in the groups and anticipate/navigate some potential challenges. These challenges included ensuring all members of the focus group share views (and being mindful of groups dynamics), ensuring participants stay on topic, ensuring there was room space, and that the task was understood by the group. This helped to form the ground rules talked to at the start of both focus groups. The topic structure was developed to help avoid asking leading questions which may relate to my own views on smartphone

use in schools and could influence the participants into displaying demand characteristics. I also practiced prior to the focus groups asking the questions to others including a teacher, to make sure they were able to be understood and answered.

As the data collection was carried out in a school on my EPS placement, I ensured to manage any potential conflicts of interest. For instance, I made it clear when approaching schools within the local authority that participation in the research project is voluntary, that they are not required to be involved and it will not impact upon their relationship with the EPS. Similarly, I ensured that colleagues within the EPS who may have links within the schools approached did not feel obligated to become involved in the research project. I informed both school staff and EPs in the team that any communication about the project needed to be had with myself as the researcher.

3.10 Chapter summary

This study was an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which included both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a holistic understanding of RQs. The quantitative data was gathered through surveys completed by pupils pre- and post-policy change, which informed the qualitative data which was pupil and teacher focus groups which provided more explanation and insight into the quantitative data. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and an RTA to analyse the qualitative data. Throughout the data collection researcher reflexivity, validity, reliability and ethics were considered.

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the quantitative data findings from the pre- and post-measure surveys using descriptive statistics for analysis and qualitative data findings from the focus group using RTA. This study was aiming to answer RQs around whether smartphone restrictions in school make a difference and what are pupil and staff views are about the use of smartphones in school. This was explored through looking specifically at these factors: attention/concentration, behaviour, mental health, amount of physical activity, likelihood of experiencing online bullying, level of school belongingness and screen time.

4.2 Quantitative findings from the surveys

This phase of the study involved a pre-measure survey that took place in the summer term of 2025 before the policy change and a post-measure survey that took place in the autumn term of 2025 after the policy change. The findings of both surveys are compared in relation to the factors outlined above by reviewing the frequencies, percentages and mean scores where applicable. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number and mean/standard deviation scores were reported up to two decimal places. Findings from the 12 questions on the pre-measure survey and 13 questions on the post-measure survey are all presented in this section.

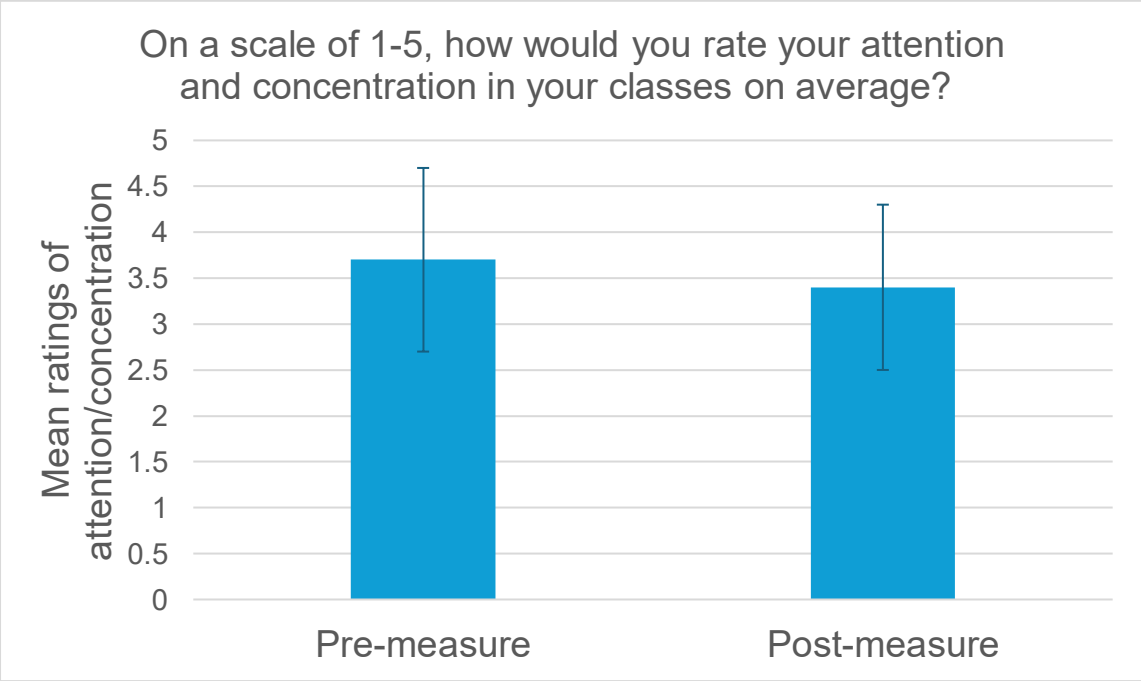
4.2.1 Attention/concentration in the classroom

This first factor investigated was attention/concentration in the classroom. This was explored as the DfE (2024) guidance suggests that prohibiting smartphones can create an environment that is distraction free so pupils can be fully present for their learning. This was researched by asking two questions on both surveys.

On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked 'On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your attention and concentration in your classes on average?' They were asked to rate their attention and concentration on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 'very poor' and 5 being 'very good'. On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how they would rate their attention and concentration in their classes on average 'since September'. This was to ask them to reflect on the new school year only without access to smartphones.

Figure 12.

Pupil ratings of attention/concentration in the classroom from the pre- and post-measure survey.

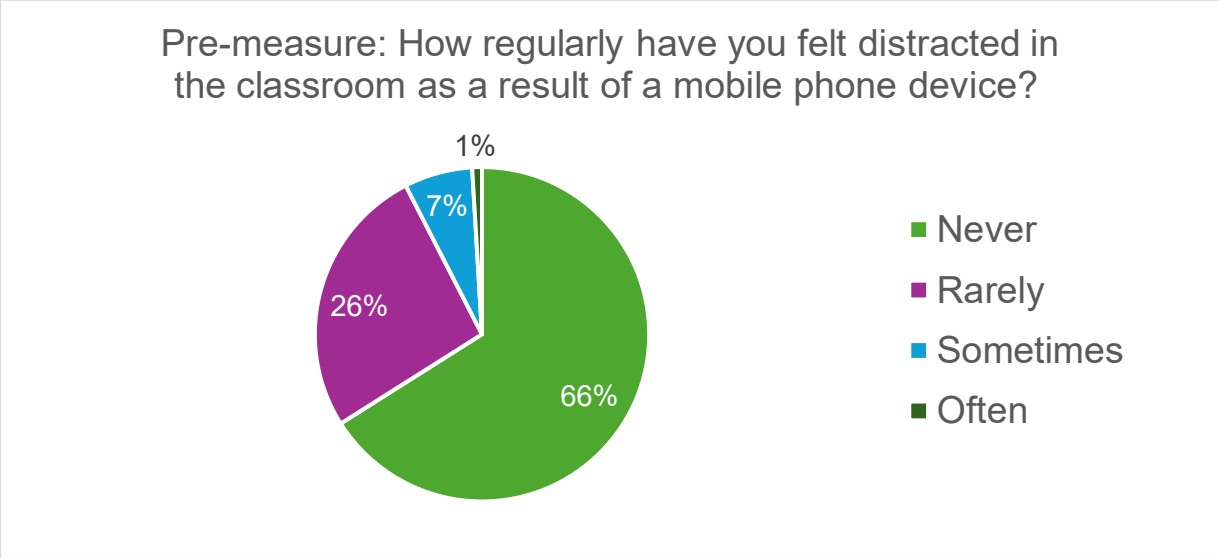


Attention/concentration in class appeared to decrease slightly from pre-policy change (*M*= 3.71 (out of 1-5), *SD* = 0.96) to post- policy change (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 0.89), (see figure 12).

Figures 13 and 14 provide an insight into the pre- and post- responses for the distractibility question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked 'How regularly have you felt distracted in the classroom as a result of a mobile phone device?'. They were given the categorical options to select of either 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Always'.

Figure 13.

Pupil views about how often they are distracted in the classroom from a smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



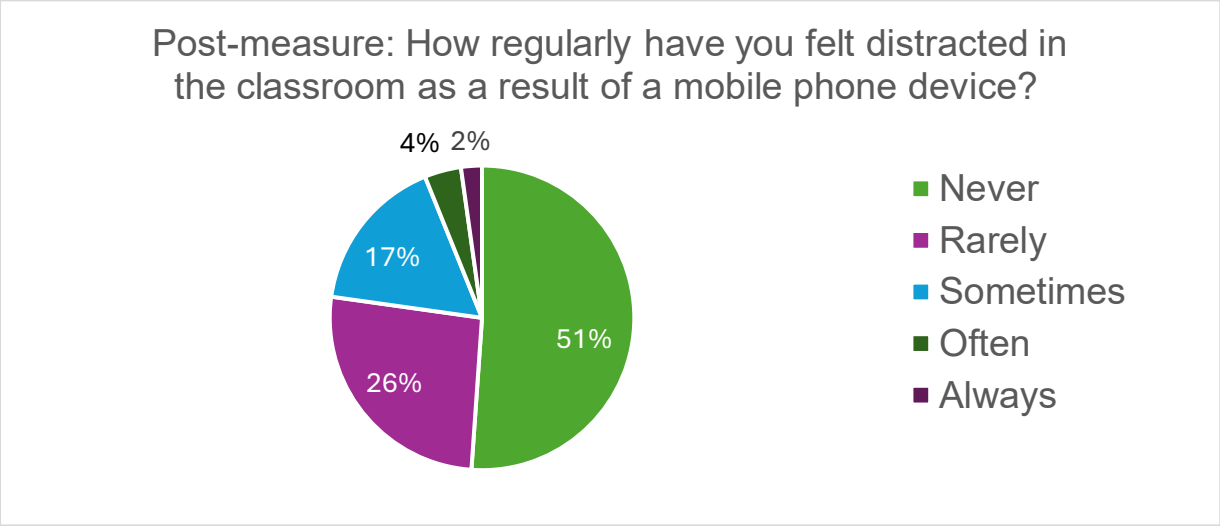
Note. No respondents selected 'Always' option.

On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how they would rate their distraction as a result of a mobile phone device

'since September' only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period without access to smartphones.

Figure 14.

Pupil views about how often they are distracted in the classroom from a smartphone from the post-measure survey.



There was an increase in levels of distractibility post-policy change with 23% of pupils reporting either 'Always', 'Often' and 'Sometimes' feeling distracted because of a smartphone compared to 8% providing these responses pre-policy change. Furthermore, 66% of pupils reported 'Never' feeling distracted by a smartphone pre-policy change compared to 51% post-policy change demonstrating a general increase in pupils feeling distracted due to a smartphone (see figure 13 and 14).

On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to level of concentration. They were asked 'Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any

change to your concentration’. They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘It has very much improved’, ‘It has improved a bit’, ‘No change’, ‘It has got worse’ or ‘Not sure’. For this question the majority of pupils selected "No Change" (*N* = 98 54%) and roughly a quarter selected “It has improved a bit” (*N*= 48, 27%) (see Appendix U, figure 38).

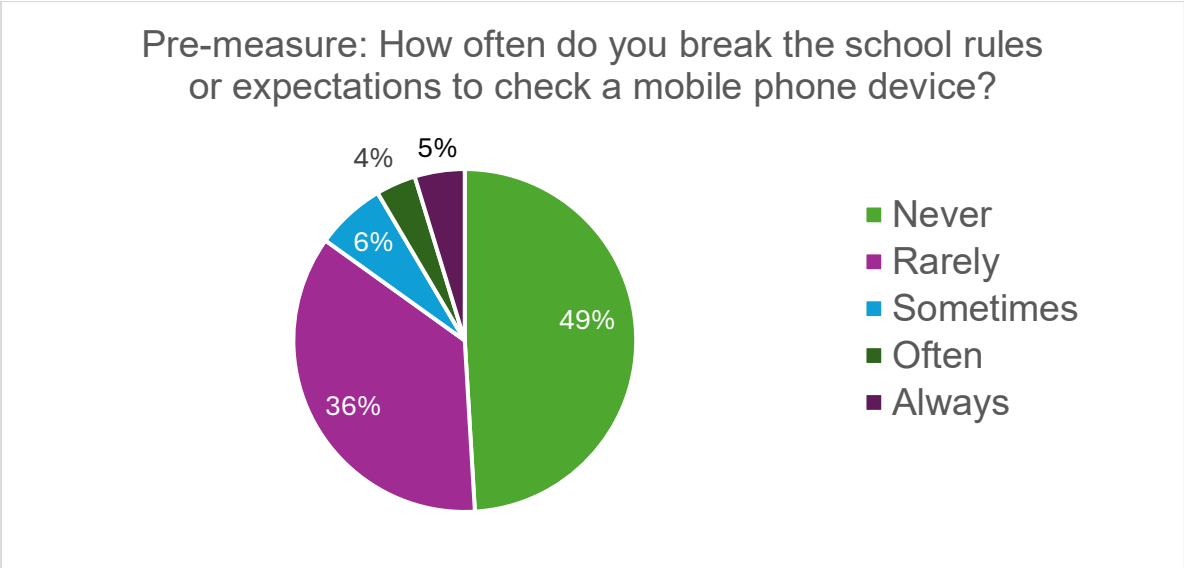
4.2.2 Rule following behaviour

The second factor investigated was behaviour/disruption in the classroom. The DfE (2024) guidance discussed that the use of smartphones causing unnecessary disruption in the classroom where pupils use smartphones in most lessons without permission. This was researched on the survey by asking one question about rule breaking.

Figures 15 and 16 provide an overview into the pre- and post- responses for the rule-breaking question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘How often do you break the school rules or expectations to check a mobile phone device?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Never’, ‘Rarely’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Often’, or ‘Always’.

Figure 15.

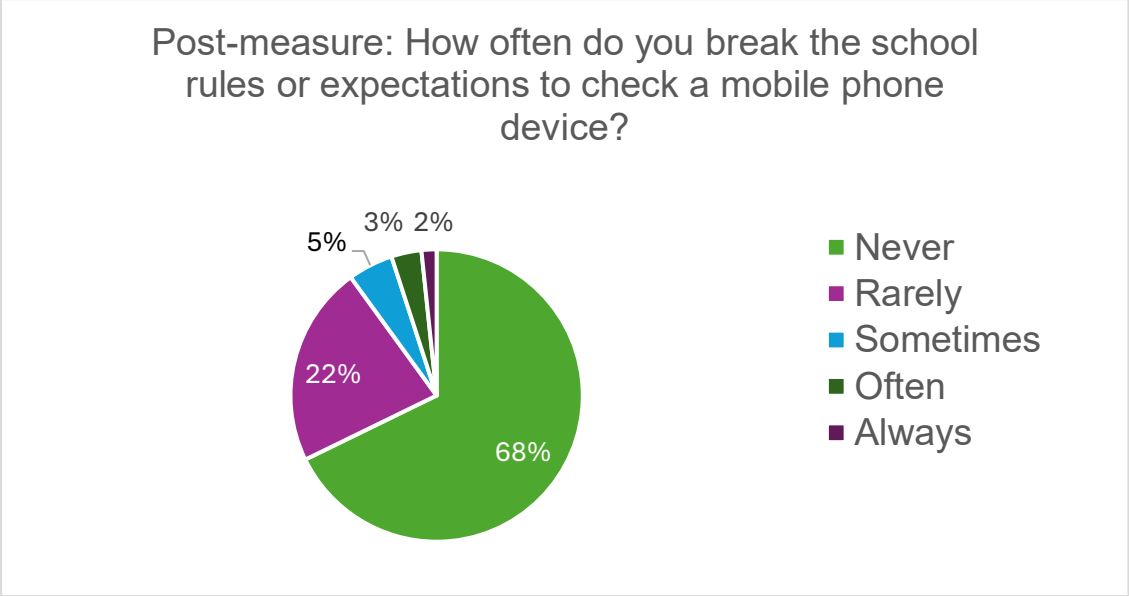
Pupil reported findings about how often they break school rules to check a smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how often they break the school rules or expectations to check a mobile phone device ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 16.

Pupil reported findings about how often they break school rules to check a smartphone from the post-measure survey.



There was a decrease in rule-breaking post-policy change, with 68% of pupils reporting that they 'Never' break the rules to check a smartphone compared to 49% pre-policy change (see figure 15 and 16). In addition, 5% reported that they 'Always' break the rules to check a smartphone pre-policy change compared to 2% post-policy change. These findings show that the smartphone policy change has helped to prevent rule-breaking to check a smartphone, however the percentages for pupils reporting 'Sometimes', 'Often' and 'Always' breaking rules to check a smartphone were not high in the pre-measure survey, suggesting that the smartphone policy before the change was having some impact in preventing rule-breaking.

On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to behaviour. They were asked ‘Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to your behaviour’. They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘It has very much improved’, ‘It has improved a bit’, ‘No change’, ‘It has got worse’ or ‘Not sure’. For this question, most participants selected "No Change" (*N*= 118, 66%), while roughly a fifth of participants selected "It has improved a bit" (*N*= 38, 21%) (see Appendix U, figure 39).

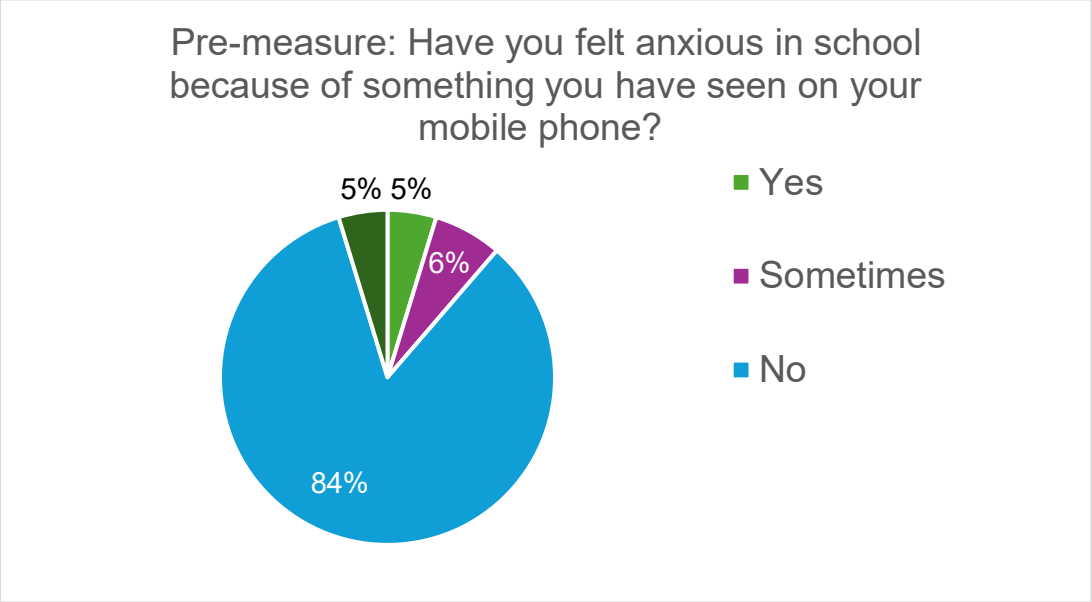
4.2.3 Mental Health

The third factor investigated was mental health. This was examined as the DfE (2024) guidance suggests that removing smartphones takes peers away from activities that will have a positive impact on their wellbeing. There is also literature to suggest that access to smartphones can result in poorer mental health (reference) and results in nomophobia (reference). This was researched by asking two questions on both surveys.

Figures 17 and 18 provide an insight into the pre- and post- responses for the first wellbeing question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘Have you felt anxious in school because of something you have seen on your mobile phone?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Yes’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘No’, or ‘Do not wish to answer’.

Figure 17.

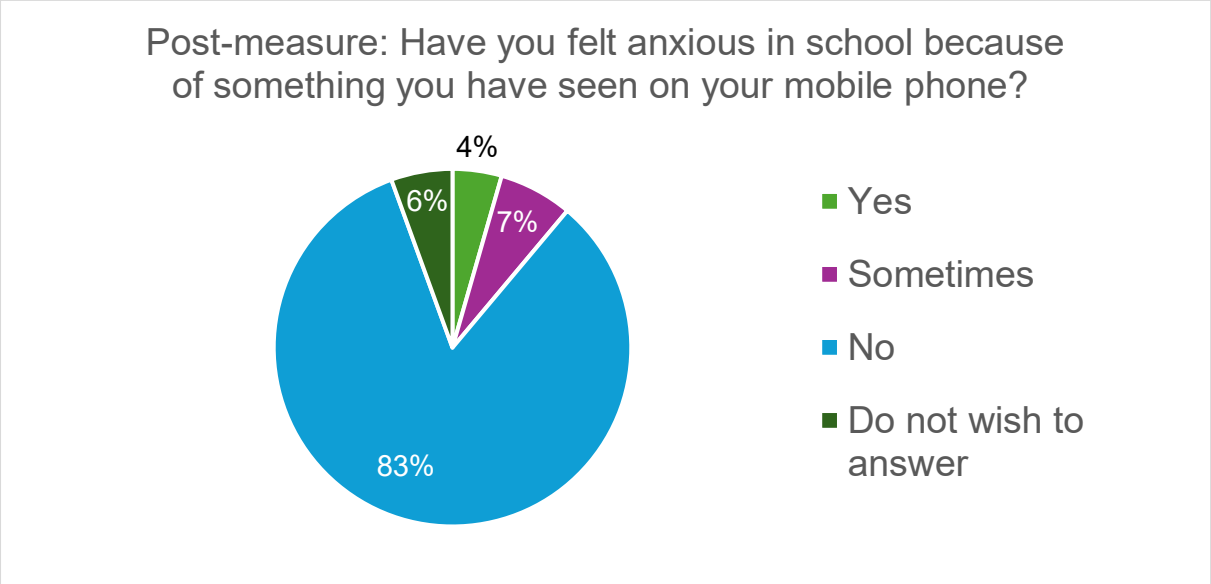
Pupil reported findings about whether they have felt anxious in school because of something seen on a smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking if they felt anxious in school because of something seen on a mobile phone ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 18.

Pupil reported findings about whether they have felt anxious in school because of something seen on a smartphone from the post-measure survey.

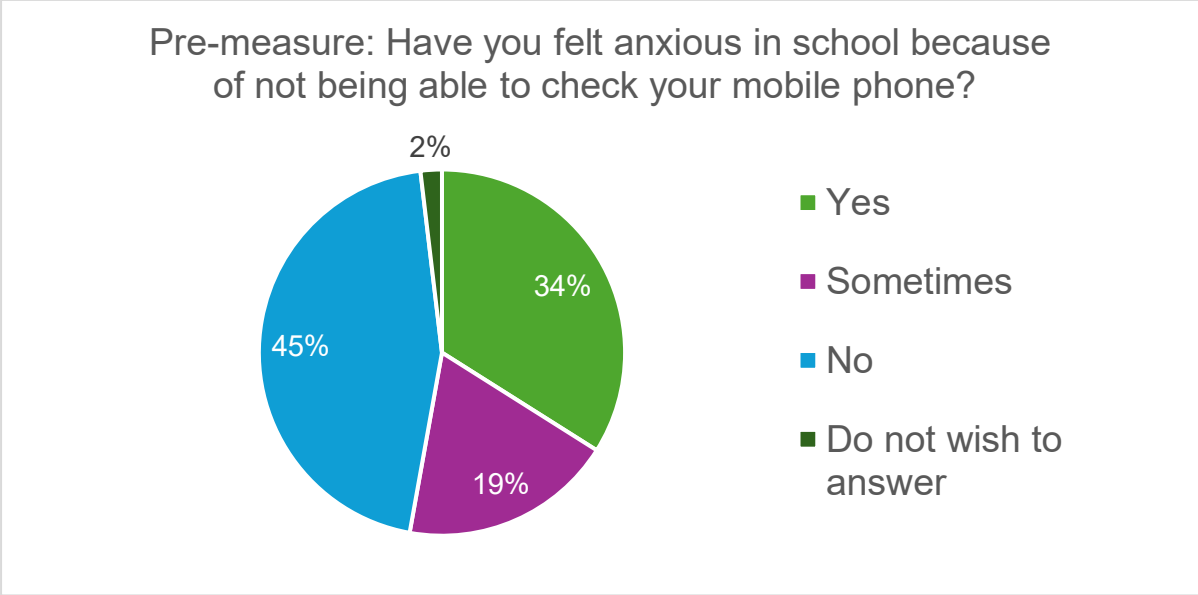


The percentages of pupils reporting ‘No’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Yes’ or ‘Do not wish to answer’ remained consistent from pre- to post-policy change (see figure 17 and 18).

Figures 19 and 20 provide an overview into the pre- and post- responses for the second wellbeing question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘Have you felt anxious in school because of not being able to check your mobile phone?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Yes’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘No’, or ‘Do not wish to answer’.

Figure 19.

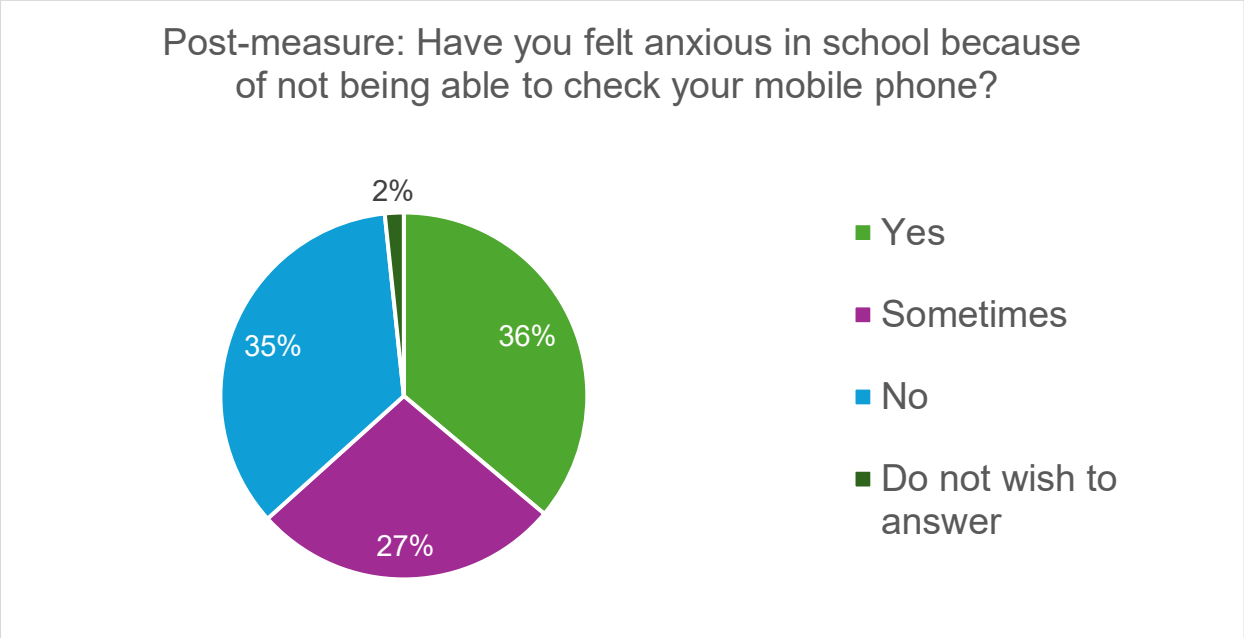
Pupil reported findings about whether they have felt anxious in school because of not being able to check their smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking if they felt anxious in school because of not being able to check their mobile phone ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 20.

Pupil reported findings about whether they have felt anxious in school because of not being able to check their smartphone from the post-measure survey.



It was found that there was a decrease of 10% in the number of pupils that reported ‘No’ post-policy change and an increase of pupils responding that they ‘Sometimes’ feel anxious from 19% to 27% post-policy change. (see figure 19 and 20). This suggests a slight increase in levels of anxiety around not being able to check a smartphone post-policy change.

On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to wellbeing. They were asked ‘Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to your wellbeing’. They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘It has very much improved’, ‘It has improved a bit’, ‘No change’, ‘It has got worse’ or ‘Not sure’. It was found that most pupils selected "No Change" (*N* = 116, 64%) (see Appendix U, figure 40).

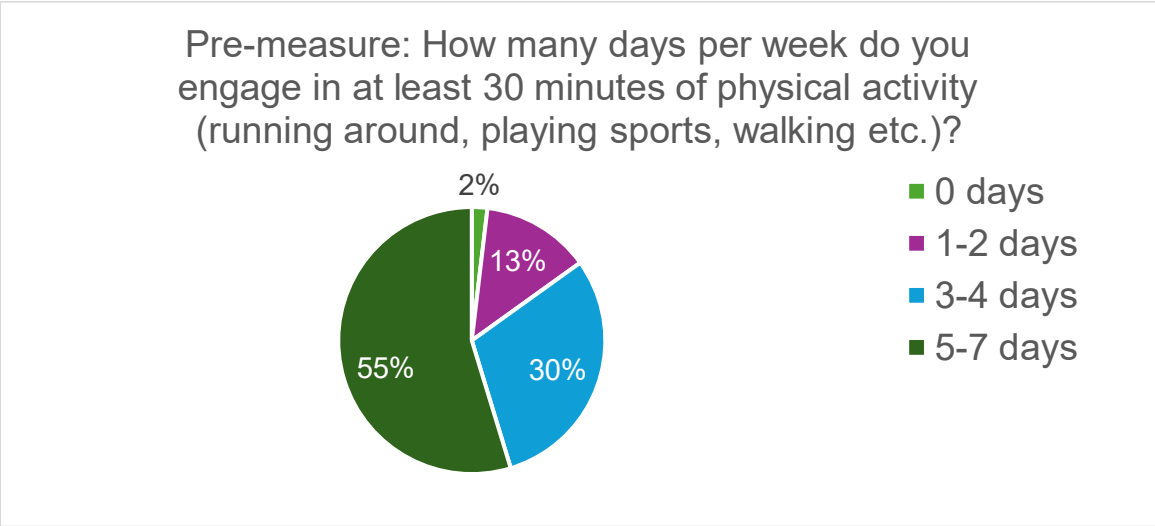
4.2.4 Amount of physical activity

The fourth factor asked about was physical activity. This was looked at as the DfE (2024) guidance suggests that removing smartphones during the school day will lead to pupils spending more time being active during the school day. This was researched by asking two questions on both surveys.

Figures 21 and 22 provide an insight into the pre- and post- responses for the first physical activity question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked 'How many days per week do you engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity (running around, playing sports, walking etc.)?' They were given the categorical options to select of either '0 days', '1-2 days', '3-4 days', or '5-7 days'.

Figure 21.

Pupil reported findings about how often per week they engage in at least 30 minutes of exercise from the pre-measure survey.

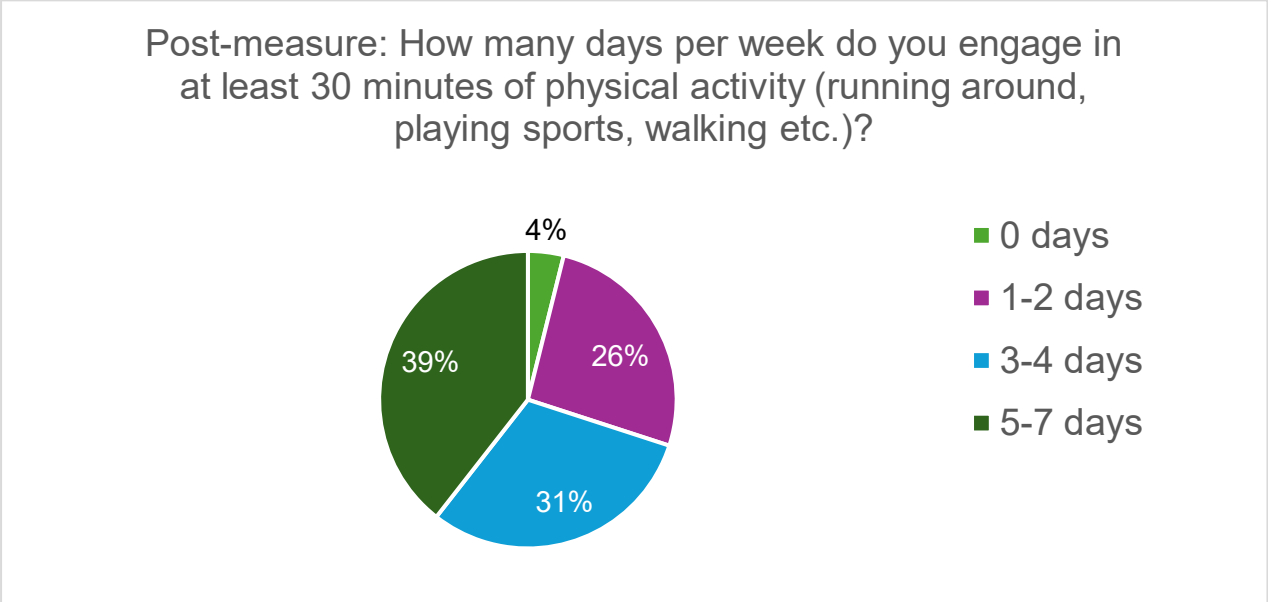


On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how many days per week they engage in at least 30 minutes of physical

activity ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 22.

Pupil reported findings about how often per week they engage in at least 30 minutes of exercise from the post-measure survey.



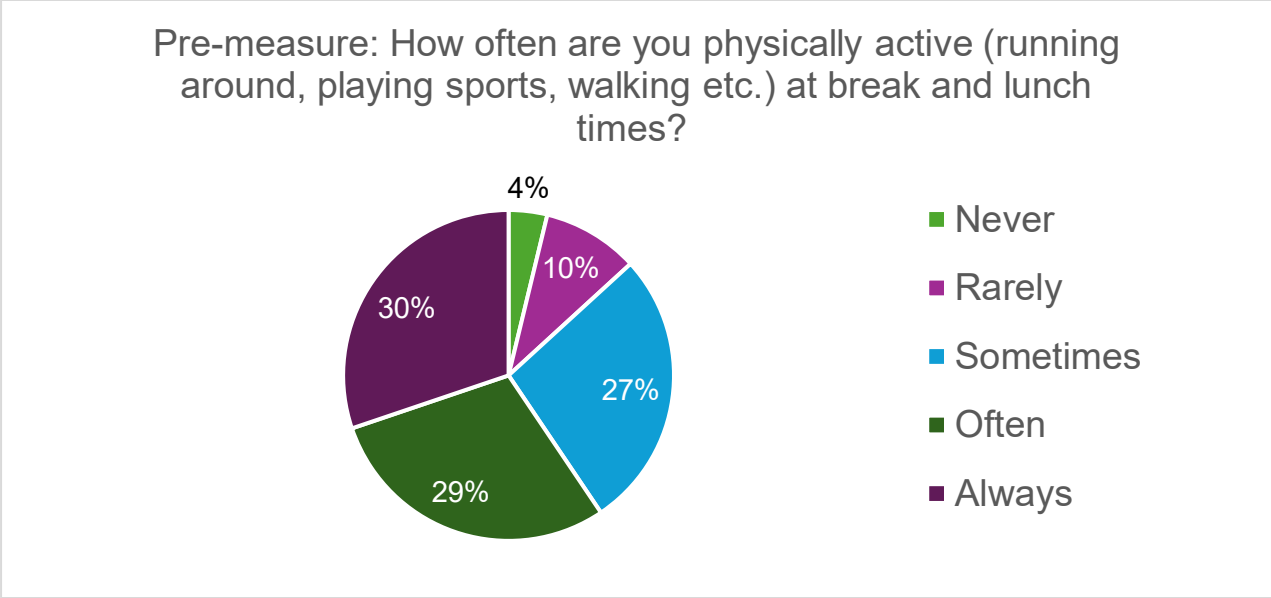
The number of days pupils reported being active for at least 30 minutes decreased between the pre- and post- policy survey, from 85% reporting being active for three days or more to 70% in the post-measure survey (see figure 21 and 22). This is likely because the pre-survey was completed in the summer where there are more daylight hours and better weather to do outdoor activities compared to the autumn when the post-measure survey was completed, rather than related to smartphones.

Figures 23 and 24 provide an overview into the pre- and post- responses for the second physical activity question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked

'How often are you physical active (running around, playing sports, walking etc.) at break and lunch times?' They were given the categorical options to select of either 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Always'.

Figure 23.

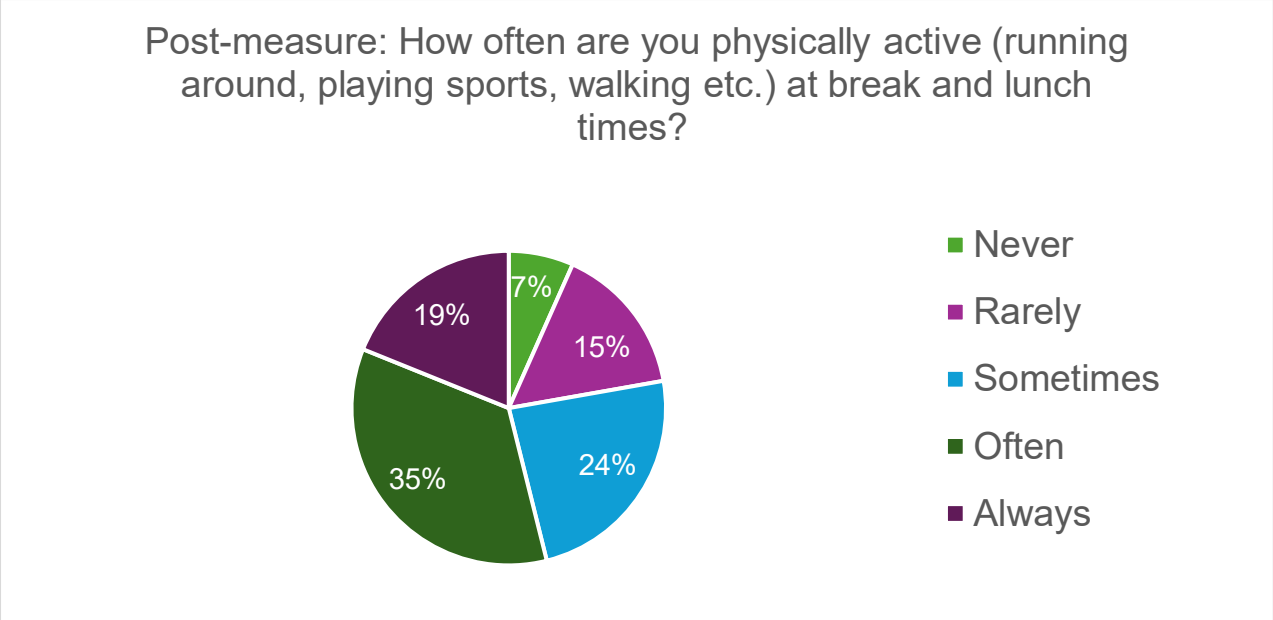
Pupil reported findings about how often they are physically active at break and lunch times from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how often they were physically active at break and lunch times 'since September' only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 24.

Pupil reported findings about how often they are physically active at break and lunch times from the post-measure survey.



There were only minor changes between pre- and post-policy change with a decrease in pupils reporting being ‘Always’ and ‘Often’ physically active at break and lunch times from pre- to post-policy change (see figure 23 and 24). This is also likely to be due to seasonal change rather than smartphone restrictions.

On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to level of physical activity. They were asked ‘Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to your level of physical activity’. They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘It has very much improved’, ‘It has improved a bit’, ‘No change’, ‘It has got worse’ or ‘Not sure’. It was found that most pupils selected "No Change" (*N* = 112, 62%), while almost a quarter of pupils selected "It has improved a bit" (*N* = 43, 24%) (see Appendix U, figure 41).

4.2.5 Likelihood of experiencing online bullying

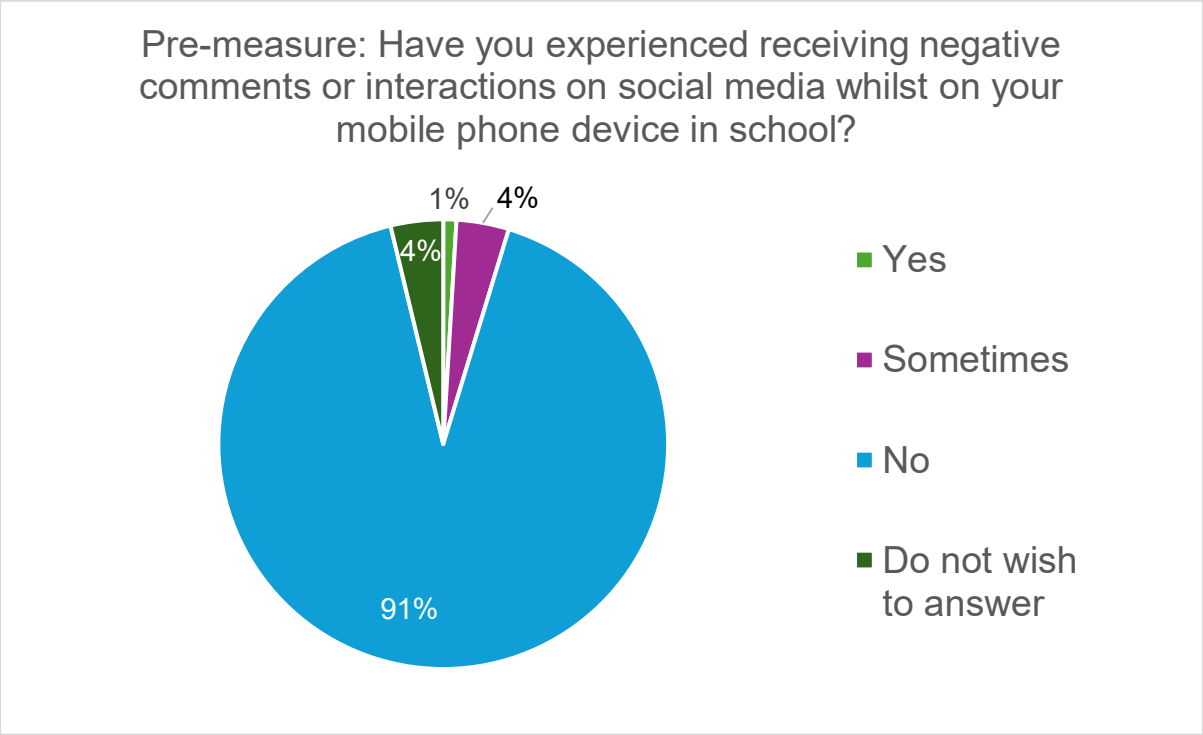
The fifth factor explored was cyberbullying. This was researched as the DfE (2024) guidance describes the importance of keeping pupils safe in school from the risks

and dangers associated with social media and cyberbullying. This was researched by asking two questions on both surveys.

Figures 25 and 26 provide an insight into the pre- and post- responses for the first cyberbullying question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘Have you experienced receiving negative comments or interactions on social media whilst on your mobile phone device in school?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Yes’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘No’, or ‘Do not wish to answer’.

Figure 25.

Pupil reported findings about if they had received negative comments on social media whilst on a smartphone in school from the pre-measure survey.

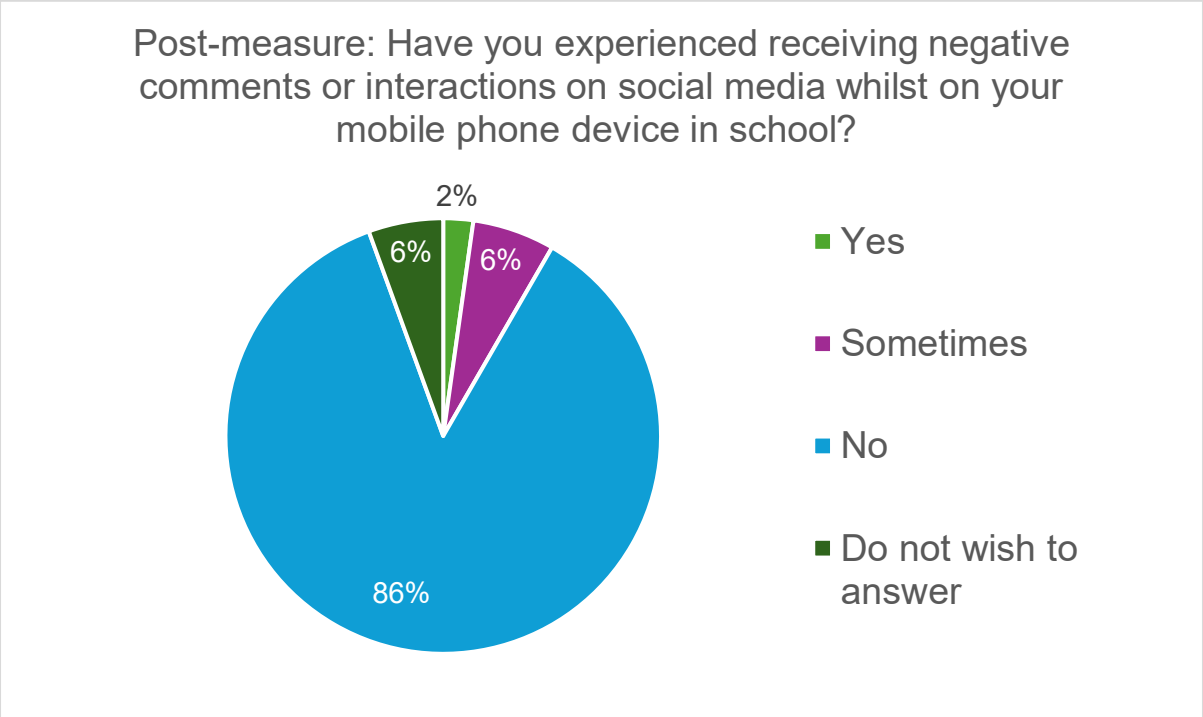


On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but if they had experienced receiving negative comments or interactions on social

media whilst on their mobile phone device in school ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 26.

Pupil reported findings about if they had received negative comments on social media whilst on a smartphone in school from the post-measure survey.



Experiencing negative comments or interactions on social media in school was reported by pupils to show only a small change with 5% reporting ‘Yes’ or ‘Sometimes’ experiencing it pre-policy change to 8% reporting ‘Yes’ or ‘Sometimes’ post-policy change (see figure 25 and 26).

Table 15.

Percentages of year groups across surveys reporting within question 10. Have you experienced receiving negative comments or interactions on social media whilst on your mobile phone device in school?

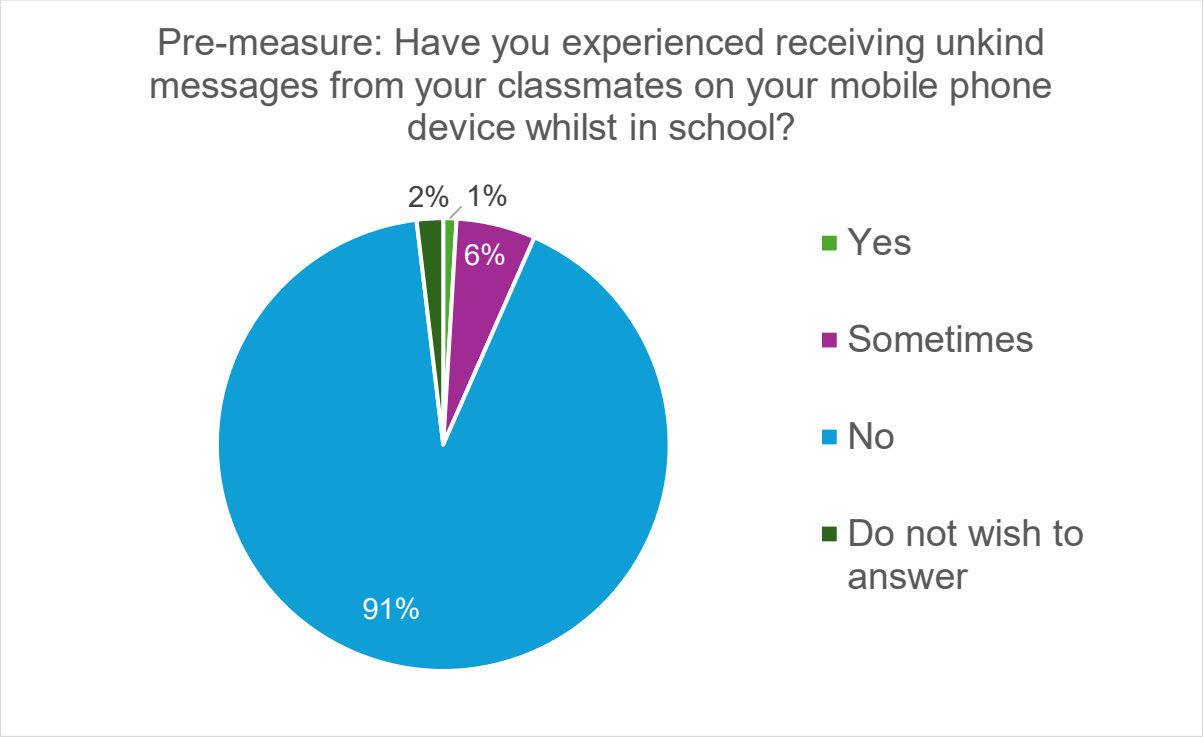
Answer provided	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Yes	20%	40%	0%	0%	40%
Sometimes	7%	46%	27%	13%	7%
No	0%	33%	32%	21%	14%
Do not wish to answer	0%	29%	36%	21%	14%

Upon inspecting the demographics, percentages showed that generally younger year groups from Year 7-9 more often report having experienced negative comments or interactions, or ‘Sometimes’ report experiencing receiving negative comments and put more often ‘Do not wish to answer’ (see Table 15). However, it is worth noting that of the respondents to ‘Yes’ to having experienced negative comments, 40% of them were Year 11 pupils.

Figures 27 and 28 provide an overview into the pre- and post- responses for the second cyberbullying question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘Have you experienced receiving unkind messages from your classmates on your mobile phone device whilst in school?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Yes’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘No’, or ‘Do not wish to answer’.

Figure 27.

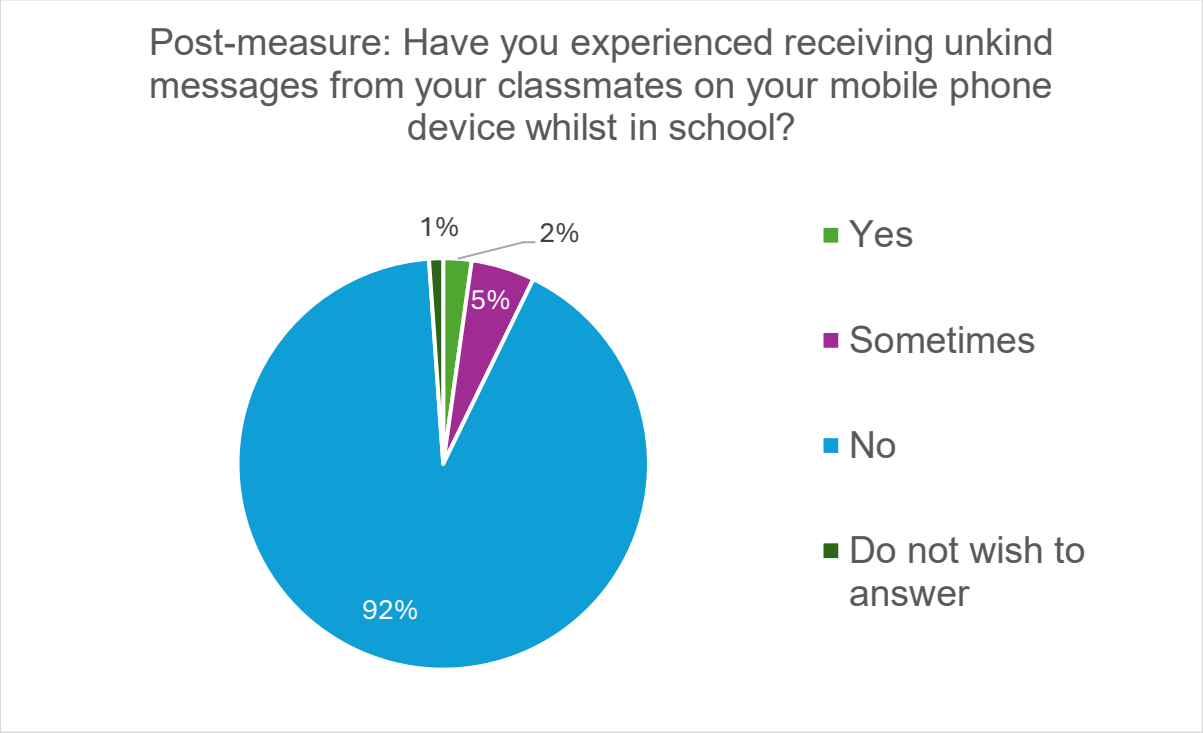
Pupil reported findings about if they had unkind messages from classmates whilst in school on a smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but if they had experienced receiving unkind messages from their classmates on their mobile phone device whilst in school ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 28.

Pupil reported findings about if they had unkind messages from classmates whilst in school on a smartphone from the post-measure survey.



There were no notable changes in pupils reporting likelihood of receiving unkind messages from classmates on a smartphone in school between pre- and post- policy change (see figure 27 and 28).

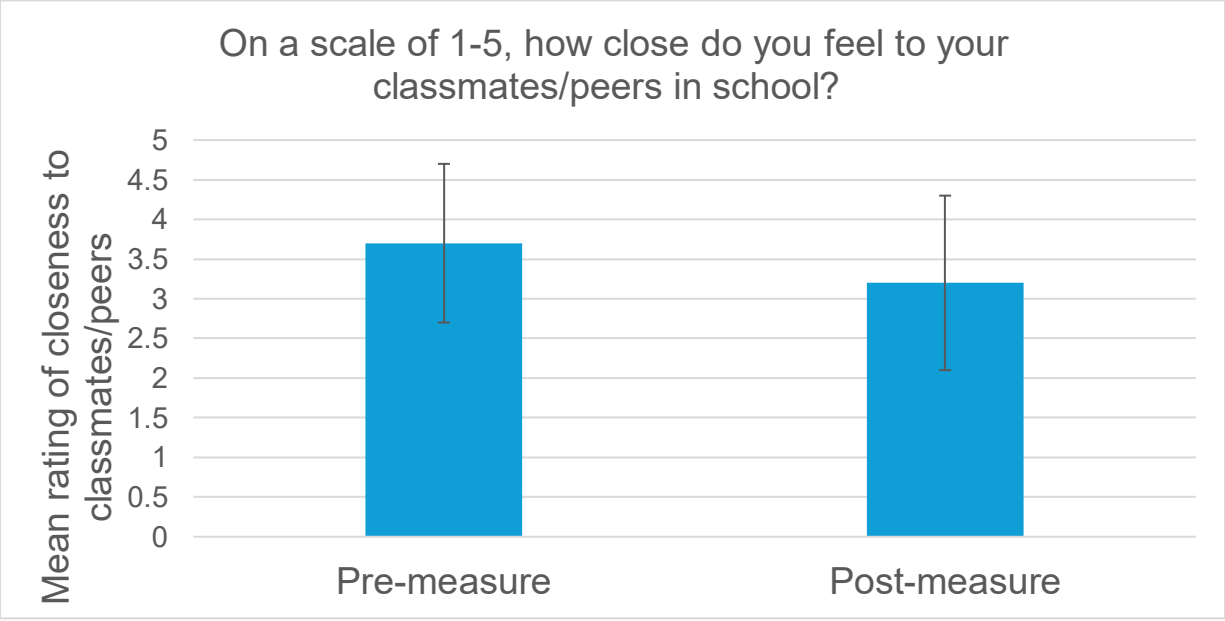
4.2.6 Level of school belongingness

The sixth factor explored was school belongingness. This was investigated as the DfE (2024) guidance suggested that removing smartphones will lead to more face-to-face socialising with peers and improve the whole culture of the school. This was explored through one question on both surveys.

On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘On a scale of 1-5, how close do you feel to your classmates/peers in school?’ They were asked to rate their closeness to peers on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being ‘Not close at all’ and 5 being ‘Very close’. On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but how close they feel to their classmates/peers in school ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 29.

Pupil ratings of closeness to classmates/peers from the pre- and post- measure survey.



There was a slight decrease in rating of closeness to peers from pre-policy change (M = 3.72, SD = 1.01) to post-policy change (M = 3.22, SD =1.14), which would indicate that pupils felt less close to their peer’s post-policy change (see figure 29).

On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to school belongingness. They were asked ‘Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to your social interactions in school’. They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘It has very much improved’, ‘It has improved a bit’, ‘No change’, ‘It has got worse’ or ‘Not sure’. It was found that, most participants selected "No Change" (*N* = 118, 66%) (see Appendix U, figure 42).

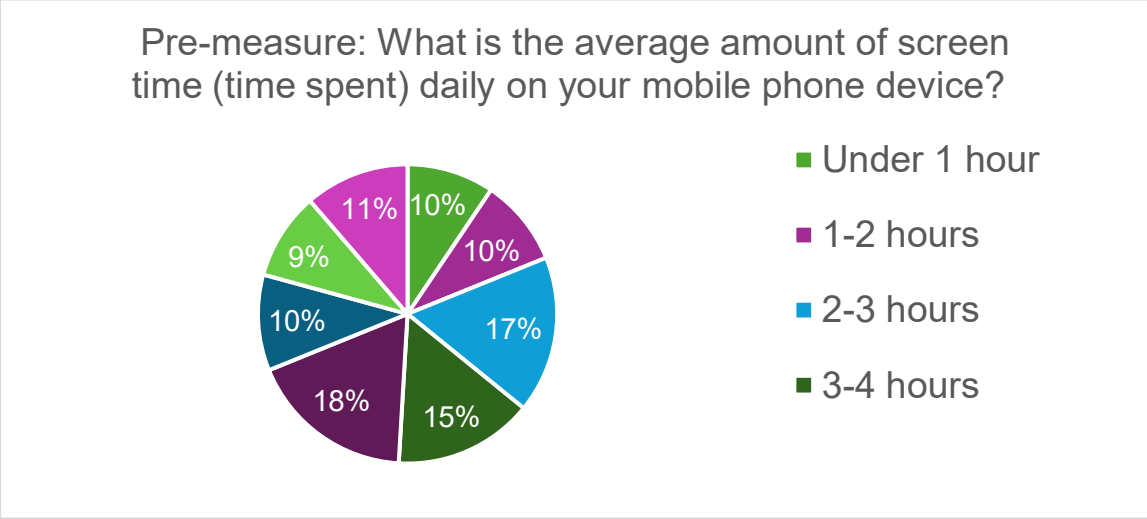
4.2.7 Screen time

The seventh factor asked about was screen time. This was investigated as the DfE (2024) guidance mentioned that time spent on smartphones prevents pupils from completing other activities that supports their wellbeing. Furthermore, extended screen time has been very common for CYP (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024). This was researched by asking two questions on both surveys.

Figures 30 and 31 provide an insight into the pre- and post- responses for the first screen time question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘What is the average amount of screen time (time spent) daily on your mobile phone device?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘Under 1 hour’, ‘1-2 hours’, ‘2-3 hours’, ‘3-4 hours’, ‘4-5 hours’, ‘5-6 hours’, ‘6-7 hours’ or ‘8 hours or more’.

Figure 30.

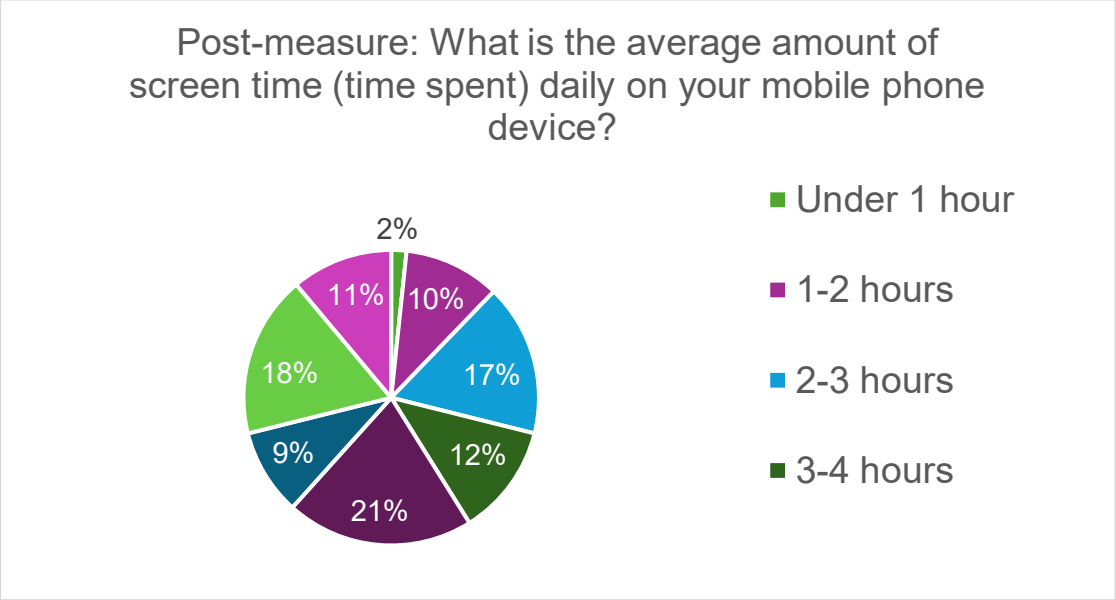
Pupil reported findings about average daily screen time on a smartphone from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking what the average amount of screen time is daily on your mobile phone device ‘since September’ only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 31.

Pupil reported findings about average daily screen time on a smartphone from the post-measure survey.

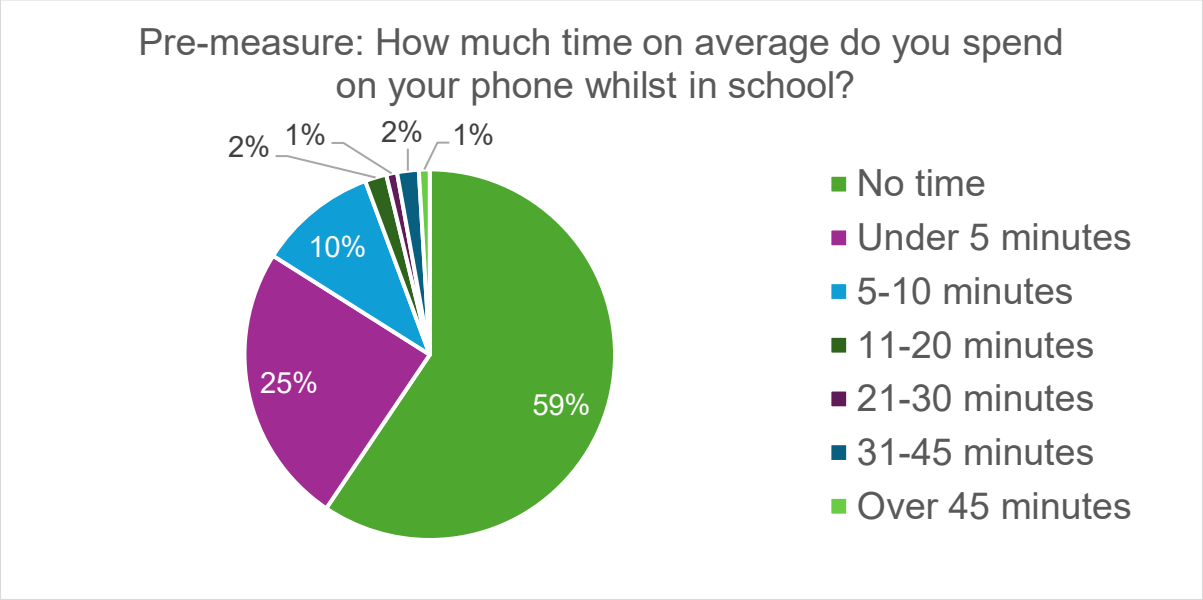


The reported screen time figures remain consistent between the pre- and post- measure survey, with the greatest number of pupils spending on average 4-5 hours per day on their smartphone (see figure 30 and 31). It is worth noting that across both surveys that more than 50% of pupils spend 4 hours or more per day on their smartphone with 11% of pupils across both surveys spending 8 hours or more per day on their smartphone.

Figures 32 and 33 provide an overview into the pre- and post- responses for the second screen time question. On the pre-measure survey, pupils were asked ‘How much time on average do you spend on your phone whilst in school?’ They were given the categorical options to select of either ‘No time’, ‘Under 5 minutes’, ‘5-10 minutes’, ‘11-20 minutes’, ‘21-30 minutes’, ‘31-45 minutes’, or ‘Over 45 minutes’.

Figure 32.

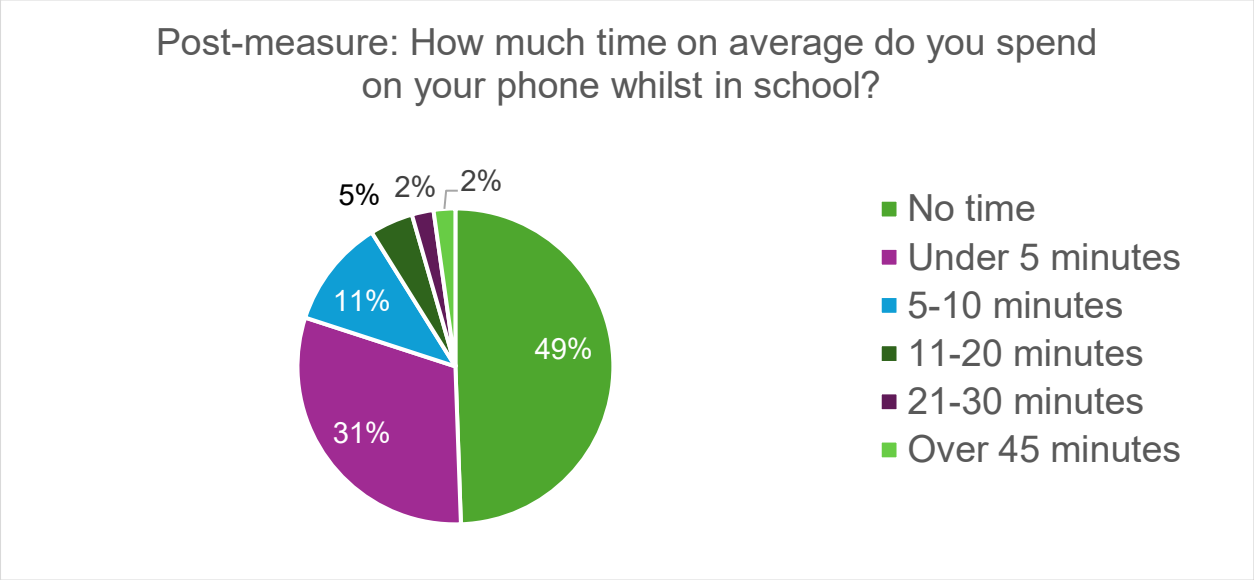
Pupil reported findings about average time spent on their smartphone whilst in school from the pre-measure survey.



On the post-measure survey, pupils were asked the same question as above but asking how much time you spend on your phone whilst in school 'since September' only. This was to ask them to reflect on the period where smartphones had been prohibited.

Figure 33.

Pupil reported findings about average time spent on their smartphone whilst in school from the post-measure survey.



Note. No respondents selected the '31-45 minutes' option.

It was found there was consistency in 96% reporting across both surveys that they spent under 21 minutes on their smartphone in school (see figure 32 and 33).

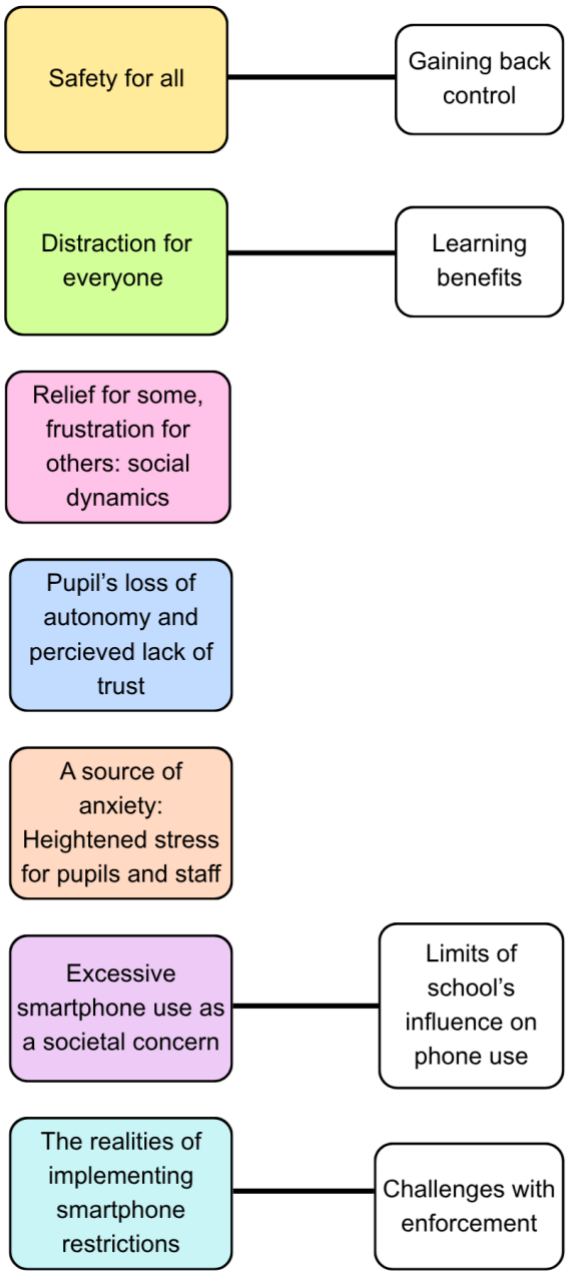
On the post-measure survey, an additional question was asked to gather pupil views around change to screen time. They were asked 'Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to screen time'. They were given the categorical options to select of either 'It has very much improved', 'It has improved a bit', 'No change', 'It has got worse' or 'Not sure'. It was found that most pupils selected "No Change" (*N* = 104, 58%), while around a fifth of pupils selected "It has improved a bit" (*N* = 46, 26%) (see Appendix U, figure 43).

4.3 Qualitative findings from the focus groups

This section looks at the qualitative findings from the pupil and staff focus groups analysed using RTA. This information was gathered was in response to questions from a topic structure and a poster that was shown to participants displaying the findings from the surveys. Transcripts were analysed together to create themes and subthemes to answer the RQs about their views in relation to smartphone use in school and the impacts of smartphone policy changes. Please see figure 34 for an overview of the themes and subthemes. Seven themes were created by the researcher with four subthemes to provide greater context to the overall theme. It is important to note there was crossover with aspects of safety coming up in different ways throughout the themes. In this section, quotations from participants will be used to illustrate pertinent points made by them and to offer evidence for the process of generating a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Figure 34.

An overview of the themes and subthemes.



4.3.1. Theme 1: Safety for all

This theme explores the most prominent rationales provided against smartphone use relating to safety, gaining a sense of control and touches on a lack of purpose to

phone use in school. These views came from both the school staff and pupils. It was suggested that smartphone use in schools can create an unsafe environment for both pupils and staff due to the capabilities of a smartphone such as taking pictures, videoing and recording others without their consent. Interestingly, both staff and pupils were preoccupied with risks to their safety. The use of smartphones in school makes teachers feel uncomfortable whilst doing their job, the following quotes illustrate this:

> *"You could be telling off a student and somebody else is filming it."* (James, teacher)

> *"I don't think teachers feel particularly safe when students have access to their phones and they're just taking them out across the school. And I think that's why schools, I guess, are taking action to stop it."* (Sam, teacher)

Pupils also spoke about these risks and related them to bullying or another pupil getting hurt, for example:

> *"If someone is getting bullied or there is a fight going on, people can record it and post it on social media and it can spread really badly, and then in person, the person who got bullied could get bullied even more, or like on social media and by other people."* (Ben, aged 14)

This quote also emphasises the lack of containment if an incident occurs, before smartphones it may just be observed by those present. However, with smartphones available to video, record and take photos, it is saved and can be shared to other platforms where complete strangers can view the content and become aware of an issue and those involved contributing to a lack of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. This quote also suggests that through this, a person can experience further shame and humiliation through abuse from others that were not initially involved.

In addition to this, teachers were concerned about safety risks with the exposure that could occur to the public if there was an incident in school and it was posted on social media/the internet:

> *"It will definitely be talked about within a phone through a WhatsApp chat or a group chat, or some form of chat, or there might even be an option to search, then which is worse, that it could that it could be posted live for the public to see. So, I think that's a risk."* (Sam, teacher)

The language used is also definitive which suggests that school staff are experiencing that issues occurring in school are talked about in group chats on messaging services where there could be lots of people receiving a message about it. There is also a suggestion that it is anxiety-inducing as an option to search is being interpreted as "worse" and a "risk". The risk this poses is unwanted exposure and potentially things being taken out of context, miscommunicated or misunderstood which could be damaging to an individual's or the school's reputation.

Furthermore, the concern to invasion of privacy was also echoed by teachers who expressed that having pupils communicating throughout the day over the smartphone was unwanted:

> *"They're communicating all the time over Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok. While we're working, we would like that level of privacy so that we can do the job the best that we can do it."* (Sam, teacher)

This also relates to the concern of information spreading rapidly to others that were not present during a meeting or lesson for example. There is a suggestion that this impacts upon teachers' ability to feel safe to do their job well.

4.3.1.1. Subtheme 1.1: Gaining back control. This subtheme is about how safety is linked to the school gaining back some control through the policy and being able to manage the behaviour of pupils and communication with parents better. It also captures the argument around the lack of purpose that smartphones have in school.

Pupils have noticed that teachers find it harder to control the behaviour around smartphone use as they cannot see what pupils might be doing or looking at:

> *"Because it's so unregulated, our normal behaviour teachers are able to control that, but when we are on our phones the teachers can't really do anything about what we are looking up or whatever."* (Poppy, aged 16)

One of the pupils also recognised that this could lead to academic dishonesty. In reference to smartphone use:

> *"Not in lessons, of course, because if we have an exam we can cheat."* (Luca, aged 12)

The tighter restrictions to smartphone use have made it easier to know when a pupil has broken the rules as it is more visible and clearly defined:

> *"Just by having the pouch implemented as a policy, it means that, we know as a school, when they know they shouldn't be on it, because it should be inside the pouch. If it's found outside the pouch, they have instantly done something wrong."* (Sam, teacher)

This has improved the ability for teachers to control pupil behaviour in school as it is much clearer when rules are broken as pupils should have put their smartphones into the pouches and therefore there are fewer grey areas, as explained:

> *"I think that's the main thing, to be fair, before the pouches the mobile phone policy was quite strict, it's now clearer as with the pouch as you are automatically doing something wrong if you are on your phone, whereas before they could argue that home is calling or I'm checking the time."* (Richard, teacher)

This shows that the smartphone restrictions have made it easier to challenge a pupil's behaviour around phone use and punish if rules are broken. This also provides a sense of safety because there are clearer rules to rely on.

Consequently, this had led to less rule breaking and met one of the aims of implementation:

> *"I honestly can't say I've ever encountered anyone breaking the rules since it's come in."* (James, teacher)

“One of the aims of the implementation was that they wouldn't break the rule which has improved.” (Sam, teacher)

Teachers have also noticed that it has led to less pupils wanting to go to the toilet to look at their smartphones which is disruptive:

“We have had issues with toilet use recently as a school over the last few years and we haven't really got that right, and I think there's a high number of (pupils) *wanting to go to the toilet because naturally they want to use their phones.”* *(*Sam, teacher)

“Or they might think ‘I really want to look at something’. ‘Can I go to the toilet?’ Like I think there has been a drop in kids asking me to go to the toilet since their phones are no longer available to them, because we all know if they are going to the toilet, they are sat there just chatting away or on the phone.” (James, teacher)

This is also an area that staff have gained back control as it sounds like they have known that pupils are not genuinely needing the toilet at times when asking to go but have difficulty challenging it as they do not know for sure if it genuine or not.

Another issue where teachers have felt out of control is with what is being communicated to parents during the school day, especially when incidents have happened in school and information may have been miscommunicated, for example:

“There was quite a serious incident wasn't there, when a parent turned up and was livid and quite threatening because their child had sent them a message that had implied that they were quite serious danger. And there wasn't a danger.” (James, teacher)

This further implies a risk to school staff’s safety if parents come into school angry and threatening because they believe their child is in being treated unfairly or in danger.

Teachers feel more in control when they can communicate with parents what has happened from their point of view and gives them time to investigate the situation as parents would arrive in reception before being able to deal with an issue, for example:

"You would normally have parents arrive in reception because students have communicated home that there's a reason why they've been removed from a lesson and there's an issue. Whereas now we can be the ones to share that with parents from our professional perspective." (Sam, teacher)

This suggests concerns about miscommunication and one-sided perspectives causing tension between parents and teachers and could make teachers feel less safe in interactions with parents when they do not know what has been said to them by the pupil.

There were also arguments made for not needing smartphones in school as it was suggested that school staff can deal with any issues that arise in school, therefore use of smartphones is not needed to solve problems:

"There's any issues you go to reception, and they can ring parents and they can hear from a trusted member of staff. So, I don't really think there's any place for them." (James, teacher)

There is also use of the word 'trusted' here which suggests that school staff are the ones who are trusted to take control of situations and deal with them effectively. This also implies that they want to be trusted to keep things safe.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged that pupils have access to computers during the school day if they need to access the internet or complete schoolwork/tasks:

"They have access to computers, anything that could be done on the phone, could be done on the computer/in IT so I don't think it's useful." (Richard, teacher)

"You could say that during lunch time you are allowed to use the computer rooms. So, you can maybe go to the computer rooms to do your homework and stuff and stop going on your phone." (Rohan, aged 16)

This argument is in line with that school staff can control what can be accessed on the school computers/devices therefore do not have to be concerned about pupil's accessing inappropriate/unrelated content in school.

It was suggested that there might be a purpose to phone use if the school was technological advanced, however it was acknowledged that the current school does not have the facilities to make use of this:

"*I think some specific schools might have the technology side of them; however, I don't think our current school really have the facility to facilitate it.*" (Sam, teacher)

This could also link to having controls in place to ensure pupils are using their phones safely, purposely and appropriately.

4.3.2. Theme 2: Distraction for everyone

This theme is about how the presence of smartphones can be distracting for both pupils and staff as they divert attention away from tasks. It is suggested that they are a preoccupation and disruptive to day-to-day school tasks:

"They also are a massive distraction, and I think that's not just for students, that's for staff as well." (Sam, teacher)

It was suggested by pupils that prior to the changes pupils would regularly go on their smartphones in class:

"People like in lessons just go on their phone." (Ryan, aged 14)

It was spoken about how smartphones can be distracting in the class if pupils are playing games, messaging or looking on social media:

"I think distraction and like you know they are trying to play in lesson or use applications in their lesson if they have got their phones." (James, teacher)

"I would say mainly it's quite a lot of distractions for the students because they can't really focus in lessons if they're going on their phone." (Rohan, aged 16)

These comments suggest pupils have divided attention and cannot focus fully in class when smartphones are available to use.

There was also a suggestion that at times pupils may watch videos or play music in class which could distract other pupils:

> *"If they have their volume up and stuff in lesson it will distract other students."* (Rohan, aged 16)

Outside of class it was spoken about how pupils may be very preoccupied with their smartphones that they do not hear the bell to go to class:

> *"Since we have a big school ground like lunchtimes and break times people can just go all the way to the back field and just use their phones and that's distracting. Maybe they won't hear the first bell."* (Luca, aged 12)

This suggests that pupils can become so engrossed in their phones that they lose track of time and what they should be doing which is a distraction to their school day.

4.3.2.1. Subtheme 2.1: Learning benefits. This subtheme considers a contrast to distraction and explores the benefits to the learning experience in school as expressed by pupils and staff. It was felt by teachers and pupils that tighter smartphone restrictions may have improved concentration in class despite the decrease in quantitative findings:

> *"*[Pupils] *Concentrate more."* (Richard, teacher)

> *"So, as it's in the pouch you might as well pay attention unless you'll just sit there in the class and just staring at nothing."* (Ben, aged 14)

> *"I think attention's gone up in class, when the phone is in the pouch you can't really get into it."* (Luca, aged 12)

These comments suggest that the pouches remove the temptation to check a smartphone or go on it in lesson when you should be paying attention to the lesson content.

A further point was made about not needing smartphones to check the time as there are analogue clocks around the school:

“So, let's say you don't know how to read the clock. Sometimes people do this (mimicking getting a phone out)*. But with the pouches they’ve actually learnt to read the clock.”* (Ben, aged 14)

This demonstrates that without the phones available some pupils are learning new skills such as reading the analogue clock and perhaps paying more attention to the environment around them.

4.3.3. Theme 3: Relief for some, frustration for others: Social dynamics

This theme looks at how phone use can have effects on social dynamics and how tensions can be felt when restrictions are put into place. It explores how smartphone use in school impacts upon socialising, peer relationships, social pressure and bullying. Pupils notice that tighter smartphone restrictions have led to an increase in face-to-face socialising during school:

“I’ve seen that well, people are starting to get more socially interacted and all that, so people are starting to get more friends. Whereas when people are on their phones, they are more secluded in a little area by themselves.” (Ben, aged 14)

This could mean that phones were causing some separation from others, however when they are not available to use this allows for more connection.

It had also been noticed that pupils want to join in more with activities at break and lunchtimes:

“They play more football and join in.” (Ryan, aged 14)

Whereas beforehand pupils recognised that smartphone use in school could lead to isolation and less social interactions:

“If you go on your phone to play games and you're not talking to other people; it could be a bit isolating.” (Poppy, aged 16)

“It might affect their social life because they might just be on their phone not talking to their friends.” (Rohan, aged 16)

These comments suggest that phone use at social times during the school day impacts upon the development of friendships and social skills.

There were suggestions from teachers that tighter smartphone restrictions would impact upon the social dynamics in school by creating a more inclusive environment as it would lead to younger pupils who do not yet have a smartphone not feeling excluded:

> "…*it takes the pressure off some of the younger students who maybe don't have phones yet and therefore, they don't feel so excluded if everyone has it."* (James, teacher)

It also eliminates social pressure for other pupils who would rather not be on their smartphone:

> *"But I think that there'll be some students that are probably quite relieved that they don't need to be on their phone."* (Sam, teacher)

These comments suggest that social norms around phone use and how pupils may be expected to on their phone at break and lunch times if everyone else around them is doing it. Therefore, feeling relieved that this expectation has been taken away.

However, the pupils had a slightly different take on inclusivity where there was a general feeling that it could lead to some pupils feeling excluded or forced to socialise with others:

> *"Maybe their only way of socialising is on their phones and if you've taken that away, it's not going to help them."* (Luca, aged 12)

> *"Well, I think that one of the reasons why those people were on their phones is because they want to be secluded, they want to be by themselves because someone might be introvert. They might like being by themselves."* (Ben, aged 14)

These quotes suggest that some pupils rely on their phones to socialise and feel comfortable during the social times of the school day, which could make the

school day more manageable for pupils who are introverted and/or have additional needs.

There was some acknowledgement from the teachers that less confident pupils might be impacted more by the policy change:

"Maybe less confident students because maybe they depend on it a bit more but now it's in the pouch maybe its forcing them to have those conversations with people around them." (Sam, teacher)

These comments indicate that perhaps shyer and introverted pupils are being 'forced' to participate in social interactions in school. Whereas before perhaps they did not want to or felt more comfortable doing so with smartphones available but now they need to in order to adjust to the demands of the school environment.

Pupils commented on the impact of smartphone restrictions on bullying inside and outside of school (which was not commented on by the teachers), with suggestion that social media is used to bully people:

"If you're not on your phone, of course you can't be cyberbullied. But then you can be after school, like, most of your time, especially if they spend like 6 hours on their phone afterwards." (Luca, aged 12)

This means that cyberbullying can still take place outside of school and that smartphone restrictions do not make a difference to this.

There is also the recognition that smartphone restrictions in school may lead to an increased in-person bullying or finding alternative ways to do it:

"People who bully people, are usually all on their phones and all that, but as they come off their phone, they've had more time to bully people." (Ben, aged 14)

In reference to no change in cyberbullying survey findings:

*"It would have been quite a low amount anyway and done privately so even with the phone pouches it's not affecting that many people. They'll still just find other ways around it." (*Poppy, aged 16)

This suggests some frustration amongst the pupils and that the increased in-person communication without smartphones has led to negative as well as positive social interactions in the school environment.

4.3.4. Theme 4: Pupil's loss of autonomy and perceived lack of trust.

This theme came solely from the pupils about a loss of independence, mistrust and a loss of what they see as purposeful smartphone use in school. Pupils spoke about the diffusion of responsibility and lack of trust:

> *"I guess you could say like responsibility, it's almost as if they don't trust us to not to go on our phone."* (Poppy, aged 16)

This could indicate that school staff gaining back control is causing a loss of control and autonomy for the pupils.

There was some discussion around feeling prepared for increased independence/adulthood and how having the smartphone taken away may hinder this:

> *"I mean it kind of prepares you for future life but then it kind of doesn't again, cause if you're working as a businessperson, then you're gonna probably need your phone as well as a laptop, computer."* (Luca, aged 12)

It appears that pupils are seeking opportunities to develop their own skills in regulating their smartphone use; however, the restrictions are not providing this opportunity.

Furthermore, there was frustration shared about loss of autonomy over tight restrictions on smartphone use:

> *"I don't entirely enjoy the idea of us, like the minute we walk into school we're not allowed to go on it. I think that it should at least be reduced from 9am to 4pm because I can see why they have the pouches, but I just don't see the reason why I'm not allowed to go on my phone before school hours."* (Kirsty, aged 13)

This indicates that pupils feel they cannot be trusted with their smartphones on the school premises even before or after the school day starts.

A lot of the pupils spoke about using their smartphone to help them with schoolwork, homework and studying for exams and were suggesting that it could be used outside of lesson time:

> *"I wouldn't see an issue if they were like strictly being used at lunch or something, so like to help with your own work. But I get not being allowed to use them during lessons."* (Poppy, aged 16)

> *"Yeah, probably study at lunch times before an exam."* (Rohan, aged 16)

Pupils also spoke about the loss of convenience of being able contact parents during school time to ask for practical requests such as lunch money or for advice on issues:

> "*There's a few times where I had to contact my mum, like I don't have enough money on my fund so I couldn't eat that day."* (Poppy, aged 16)

> *"Or maybe like you have like a stomach ache or something and you want to call your parents."* (Rohan, aged 16)

There was also a point about how some pupils find it easier to talk to their parents rather than teachers about issues:

> "*Or maybe when you're in trouble and you don't feel comfortable talking to teachers, you can call your parents and talk to them about it."* (Ben, aged 14)

4.3.5. Theme 5: A source of anxiety: Heightened stress for staff and pupils.

This theme looks at the anxiety of pupils and teacher's feelings about smartphone use in school and how pupils having smartphones available can be stressful for teachers. The pupils spoke about the phenomenon of nomophobia as well as emotional carry over from distress seen on the smartphone outside of school.

Some also spoke about feeling anxious because of not being able to check their smartphone and wanting to check it is still there even though it is in the pouch**:**

"Personally, yes, because well, sometimes, when I put the phone in the pouch, my parents might tell me something important that might happen and then I might want to check my phone and see if it actually happens, and I'm not able to go on my phone." (Ben, aged 14)

This suggests that having the phone in the pouch may cause pupils to feel apprehensive. Pupils who prefer to be by themselves and those who may be more reliant on their smartphones might experience a rise in anxiety now that smartphones are away in the pouch:

"I haven't witnessed it personally, but I understand why people would be, like, if they are relying on their phone all day outside of school and then they suddenly don't have that resource anymore, like, I understand why they would be anxious." (Poppy, aged 16)

The teachers also showed an awareness of how smartphones could induce anxiety in the pupils:

"I would imagine that probably makes them feel quite anxious as that's what they are doing all the time, looking at their phone scrolling." (Sam, teacher)

This indicates that some pupils find themselves struggling to know what to do or how to manage their emotions without smartphones available.

On the contrary, teachers did feel that they had not observed increased anxiety in pupils:

"I think we have students come to us to speak about if they need to call their parents, but I wouldn't say they're anxious. It's more of a request, which we follow up anyway when we do. So, I wouldn't say that we're seeing anxious students about not using phones, no." (Sam, teacher)

Some pupils recognised that even though smartphone use is restricted in school, it may not stop you feeling anxious or distressed about something seen on a smartphone outside of school hours:

“Let's say on the weekends, you've been looking at something, and it's made you anxious and you really want to check it again in class, but you can't.” (Luca, aged 12)

“If you see something before or after school that makes you anxious, you’re still going to be thinking about it during school whether you are seeing it or not.” (Poppy, aged 16)

This suggests that there is emotional carry over into the school day from content viewed on smartphones outside of school hours.

The teachers spoke about the risks to themselves with smartphones available, and this anxiety is also connected with the sense of a lack of safety mentioned in theme 1. This seemed to lead to a catastrophising thinking style (which is thinking of the worst-case scenario/outcome of a possible incident) (Stallard, 2019) which pertained to being recorded or filmed, for example:

“I mean, you've seen news that there have been stories about how there were two girls who had an argument with a teacher about trans rights… and then it was filmed and was all over the news, and you know, I'd hate for that to happen.” (James, teacher)

There was also reference to it being less cognitive load and stress for teachers to keep track of pupils’ phone use, for example:

“It was just an extra thing for you to be mindful of whereas now you don't really have to think about it.” (James, teacher)

There was also discussion around that pupils were no longer asking persistently to go on smartphones anymore to complete educational activities as the boundaries are clearer with the policy which reduces stress:

“Because of the policy it's so clear so is reducing stress on me.” (James, teacher)

4.3.6. Theme 6: Excessive smartphone use as a societal concern.

This theme encompasses that excessive smartphone use is a global and countrywide issue affecting people of all ages and backgrounds and was in response

to the discussion around screen time figures. It explores the wider societal problem of excessive smartphone use. The response to initial screen time figures was concern staff focus groups:

"It's a lot of screen time, quite worrying." (Richard, teacher)

"I mean it is shocking but it doesn't surprise me." (Sam, teacher)

"It's depressing though when you think about it." (James, teacher)

The impression from teachers was linked to strong emotions such as anxiety and depression which may link to some fears around adverse impacts of excessive screen time use.

Some pupils were shocked by the figures:

"It's pretty shocking to be honest, I mean six hours, think about it that's a quarter of your day. And most of your day you are sleeping or at school." (Luca, aged 12)

This indicates for pupils with a high screen time, it might be that they are spending all their free time or studying on their smartphone.

However, the pupils overall appeared less shocked and felt the figures were accurate explaining that excessive smartphone use is normalised amongst the pupils' generations:

"The school's population is either Gen Z or Gen Alpha, it's expected." (Kirsty, aged 13)

There was reflection around smartphone dependency being an issue for humankind:

"I think we're becoming overly reliant on mobile phones probably as a species." (James, teacher)

It was acknowledged that a lot of what we need to do in today's world is done through the smartphone:

"*Most of the stuff that you do is online. So, it's like online banking, videos, everything. Everything you want to do that used to be in person, is now online. So, I would probably say that's why it's so hard.*" (Ben, aged 14)

This comment indicates that it is difficult not to be reliant upon smartphones for a range of functions in modern society.

There was also discussion around excessive smartphone use being a countrywide issue:

"But that is probably a countrywide issue. It's not something that just happens in a certain area." (Sam, teacher)

This suggests that there is a universal aspect to excessive smartphone use and that it is not specific to certain areas of the country. Furthermore, the teachers discussed that they have observed that regardless of socioeconomic status (poorer versus wealthier areas) excessive smartphone use appears to be a problem amongst CYP.

There were suggestions that excessive smartphone time is an addiction as many CYP use their phones in an unproductive way:

"*They are so addicted to things like TikTok; they are so addicted to things they are using on their phone."* (Sam, teacher)

"It could be said that they are not spending their time well." (Rohan, aged 16)

Some pupils believe that it was this reason that phone pouches were introduced:

"I think they only gave us the phone pouch because people started overusing their phones in school." (Ryan, aged 14)

It is also worth noting that there are other reasons such as safety as to why the smartphone policy was changed, however this shows that pupils understanding might not encompass fully all the reasons why it was introduced which could impact upon their feelings and compliance with the policy.

Some alternative explanations were provided by the pupils for excessive screen time other than what might be assumed (such as social media or playing games etc.), for example:

> "*It could depend, because the student might be studying online."* (Rohan, aged 16)

> *"I use my phone for white noise when I sleep, so mine's probably well over 12 hours."* (Kirsty, aged 13)

There was recognition amongst the teachers that smartphone use is also a problem amongst the adult population:

> *"I think I'm aware as myself that my screen time is probably higher than it should really be, I mean, mine is something like four hours."* (James, teacher)

> *"I think if we look across country, even for adults there is an issue with the amount of time that people use their phones."* (Sam, teacher)

This indicates that excessive smartphone use is not just a problem amongst CYP and that adults too are also regularly spending extended amounts of time on their smartphones.

Furthermore, there was acknowledgment from teachers that the pupils know this too and therefore are perhaps less inclined to listen to adults when they are warning about excessive smartphone use:

> *"Us just saying you shouldn't, probably even contradicts what we do at times. So, I also think they probably know that."* (Sam, teacher)

Although, there was a feeling amongst teachers that CYP use their smartphones and screen time in a way that is different to adults:

> *"I think young people maybe almost have this addiction to phones the way that they use them isn't the way that adults would use them."* (Sam, teacher)

This could imply that school staff have observed that the content CYP's consume on smartphones is addictive and differs to what adults may consume on them.

4.3.6.1. Subtheme 6.1: Limits of school's influence on smartphone use. This subtheme looks at the responsibilities of school and that they cannot control smartphone use outside of school hours. Teachers felt that schools have a role not to normalise smartphone use and to educate pupils about excessive smartphone use in PHSE lessons:

"I think we have a duty of care to educate students." (Sam, teacher)

However, there was a tension felt that pupils may not listen to the advice provided by teachers in school and that parents have a key role in monitoring their child's phone use:

"I honestly think that we can say it, but it's really up to other influences in their life. I think generally teachers get a very short shift when it comes to this sort of thing. We're always being told you should teach this in school, you should educate your students around mobile phone use in school. Actually, we're not really the same influence in their lives…I think when I do PHSE with them, they are not going to go 'Oh, Mr. X who said this and they go off and do X'. I don't think they listen what-so-ever, I think it's up to parents to be their influence." (James, teacher)

This comment proposes that parents have a greater influence over CYP behaviour around the use of smartphones than school staff do.

Teachers and pupils observe that as soon as school is over, all the pupils are straight back on their smartphone:

"I see as the bell goes at four o'clock, they are on their phone all the way home. And then be on it all evening. So unfortunately, we can't control that." (Sam, teacher)

4.3.7. Theme 7: The realities of implementing smartphone restrictions

This theme explores some of the challenges of implementing smartphone policies in schools such as having support for the policy, enforcement and pupils finding ways around the policy.

The pupil focus group had observed that changing policies in school does not necessarily change the behaviour of pupils. Some pupils do not feel that taking smartphones away changes socialising for some pupils, for example:

"If I'm remembering correctly, I chose no change and that's mostly because I don't think that mobile phones are stopping us from making friends." (Kirsty, aged 13)

"If they were feeling isolated before then they were using their phone as a result of that. So, taking their phone away is not solving the reason why they are feeling isolated, they will just find other ways to be by themselves." (Poppy, aged 16)

These answers suggest that removing smartphones does not always have the effect of increasing socialising and decreasing isolation. It sounds like smartphones might not be necessarily the cause of some pupils isolating themselves but more of a behavioural feature of it.

Also, similar points were suggested for exercise in that behaviour is not going to change because smartphones are removed:

Discussing exercise: *"I feel like the people that were already doing that, might not have been on my phone anyway, so the ones that are still doing it now."* (Poppy, aged 16)

"*Because they are so used to being on our phone and being secluded and away from people that they haven't really had the energy or wanted to do exercise, and as the phone's been taken away. They still don't feel like doing it because they were so used to be on the phone and not doing it, so even without their phone, they still don't want to do it."* (Ben, aged 14)

There is an indication that those who are less physically active may be more likely to be on their smartphone and therefore do not have a desire to be with or without the smartphone available.

In addition, some pupils feel distraction and concentration in class has not changed much because of pupils finding new distractions:

"I think the reason the concentration has proven staying the same is because since they don't have their phone, they just found new and louder ways to entertain themselves." (Kirsty, aged 13)

This suggests that pupils might potentially become more disruptive in the classroom to others without the smartphone as they find ‘louder’ ways to entertain themselves.

Also, if pupils see that if others do not want to concentrate and behave in class, they will not, regardless of whether the smartphone is available or not:

> *“I would say the concentration might be the same because the students who went on their phone are probably the students who don't want to focus in that lesson.”* (Rohan, aged 16)

> *“Some teachers, they’ll say, oh, it's supposed to like, stop distractions in class, but distractions are still happening. Like I don't think it was the phones that was the problem. I think it was just the behaviour of the students.”* (Kirsty, aged 13)

This indicates that pupil’s general behaviour does not change regardless of smartphone restrictions.

There was a suggestion that habits outside of school do not change behaviour in school:

> “*If you’re not socialised, secluded by yourself on your phone and then your concentration is not going to change if you're just on your phone constantly.”* (Luca, aged 12)

This remark indicates that smartphone restrictions are not going drastically change in-built behaviours and habits of pupils that are present in and out of school.

4.3.7.1. Subtheme 7.1: Challenges with enforcement. This subtheme came from both the pupil and staff focus group observing challenges with implementing smartphone restrictions in school.

Support for the policy was spoken about as a key to it being successful. Teachers spoke about negative reactions from pupils to the policy:

> *“My form when they heard about this, they weren't happy about it. They weren't like, ‘Oh great’. They were actually like, you know, ‘That's outrageous and how are they doing this’. And ‘This isn’t fair.’”* (James, teacher)

This connects to the theme of loss of autonomy and perceived lack of trust that pupils felt frustrated by the policy.

Teachers feel that pupils are compliant with the policy but know they are frustrated by it:

"They grumble about it, but they ultimately do get on with it." (James, teacher)

Another teacher spoke about navigating a mixed response of support and concern from parents to start with and how this took some time to settle:

"I think generally parents were really supportive of it. I think some were worried that they may not be able to contact their child throughout the day. But I think generally now parents are quite accepting of it." (Sam, teacher)

This indicates that there seems to be some parental anxiety too, about not being able to contact their child during school hours and that this could mean less support for the policy.

Enforcement can be inconsistent across school staff; it also appears that there is not the same level of restriction for staff use of their smartphones in school. It was recognised by teachers and pupils that perhaps enforcement of the smartphone policy was not a priority for some teachers, because either they are newer to the profession, they are less strict or bored of checking everyday:

"I think maybe for the new members of staff it's difficult because they're balancing the act of teaching and getting that right and all these other little bits that come with it. And the priority for them is they want to be able to teach in the classroom and this is an additional responsibility." (Sam, teacher)

"The PE teachers don't really check so that's when people have the chance to not put their phone in the pouch." (Luca, aged 12)

"I've noticed that when quite a lot of the teachers are meant to be checking phone pouches in the morning, they don't really. The students are not being forced to put their phones away... Having to do it every morning. And checking 30 students must get quite tedious." (Poppy, aged 16)

Teachers acknowledged that lateness of pupils also posed a logistical challenge to enforcing the smartphone policy:

“You’re in the flow of teaching at that point so the first thing on your mind isn't to put a phone in a pouch.” (Sam, teacher)

“I'm more concerned about the fact that, you know, this kid's turned up 20 minutes late. Then I am about ‘right hand me your mobile phone’ as now we need to make the best use of the time we have got in the lesson.” (James, teacher)

These remarks show that there are multiple demands on teachers and it can be difficult to remember to adhere to the policy in circumstances when pupils are late. This links to the suggestion that newer teachers to the profession may be finding it harder to adhere the policy with all the other demands that come with teaching.

Staff and pupils were asked about staff smartphone use, and it appears that staff keep their smartphones on them during the school day and only use them for “purposeful” use such as contacting other members of staff if there is an incident or googling something quickly during a lesson. Staff are not required to lock away their phones:

“*I think the obvious policies is that they shouldn't be just using it in front students during a lesson.”* (Sam, teacher)

“*I feel like they mostly use it to contact other teachers just in case of something.” (*Rohan, aged 16)

It was also spoken about some of the ways that pupils have been trying to overcome the smartphone policy to still have access to a smartphone. Some pupils have methods for getting the pouch open:

“Some people have figured out a way around it, to put two pencils in there or to just pop it open.” (Ben, aged 14)

This has led some pupils to feel that the policy is ineffective:

“I think the idea was alright, but I think it was executed poorly because in the first day that it was implemented, people had already found ways to be able to get their phones out.” (Kirsty, aged 13)

It was suggested that most pupils are compliant with the policy and that only a small amount will try to get around it by bringing in a second phone etc.:

> *"*[Out of] *180 students you'll be talking about three to five. That will test boundaries that might come in late and might not hand their phone in or might attempt to bring a second phone in."* (Sam, teacher)

There appeared to be a need amongst the teachers to keep up with the ways pupils are evolving to get around the smartphone policy:

> *"I think it's about keeping updated with how they can get their phones out of pouches… we wouldn't want a majority to find a way around… we need to evolve with how they're evolving, essentially."* (Sam, teacher)

This is in line with an observation from the pupil focus group on how teachers are trying to keep on top of how they can prevent rules around smartphone use being broken:

> *"They were having to become stricter and stricter on the phone rules, but people were still finding ways around them, so this is like the last resort."* (Poppy, aged 16)

This sounds like the introduction of the tighter restrictions was a last resort that had to be done to control the use of smartphones in school.

4.4 How the qualitative data informed the quantitative data

The qualitative information provided explanations to the findings found in the quantitative pre- and post-policy change surveys. This was very beneficial to the study as the surveys did not collect qualitative information, therefore the findings required some interpretation to understand reasons for the findings and within the school's context. The qualitative information was collected from pupils and teachers in the focus groups when they were shown a poster of the findings and asked for their views.

The focus groups were able to provide valuable context to the responses on the surveys. For example, to explain why there were excessive screen time hours on the survey, the focus group shared that excessive smartphone use is normalised in society and the teachers said that this finding could be evident in the adults as well as the pupils. Teachers also shared that they felt that smartphone policies in school ultimately had little influence on screen time as much of it occurs outside of school and it is up to the parents to regulate use. Pupils expressed less surprise at the figures and explained that it was common in their generation, particularly as smartphones provide many useful functions.

The focus groups provided explanations for no change in factors between the pre- and post- measure surveys. Pupils explained that they did not think there were any changes in wellbeing because there could be emotional carry-over from viewing upsetting content outside of school. Pupils also explained feeling anxious because of not being able to check their smartphone. Also, the focus groups reflected on the realities of implementing smartphone restrictions and all the factors that contribute to no change. This included:

-Pupils' behaviour will not change regardless of smartphone policy

-That pupils find new ways to be distracted or entertain themselves in the classroom

-Tedious nature of having to enforce the policy daily leading to less checking

-Lateness of pupils

-Newer teachers perhaps finding it harder to enforce

-Having support from parents for the policy

-Compliance from pupils

-Pupils finding ways around the smartphone policy.

Additionally, teachers shared suspicions that pupils were reporting worse results on the post-measure survey with an agenda that they would still like to have access to their phone during school hours.

The focus groups provided some explanations for more puzzling findings on the post-measure survey, such as the increase in distractibility in class from smartphones after smartphones had been restricted. Pupils explained that they may not be able to focus if they were using their smartphone a lot outside of class and are used to using it. Furthermore, pupils suggested that they may be feeling restless or preoccupied about the absence of smartphones and this distracted their learning. Pupils also highlighted individual differences as some pupils reported improvements, whereas others did not, suggesting that impacts on concentration in class may vary more depending on the individual. When thinking about school belongingness and how this did not change between the pre- and post- measure survey, pupils suggested that they did not think that smartphones had an impact on friendships and that taking away smartphones may create forced socialising which is less inclusive as some pupils are introverted and prefer to be by themselves with their smartphone. This then highlighted how teacher perspectives and views can differ from pupil views as they felt changes to the smartphone policy increased socialising, would increase inclusivity for younger pupils who do not yet have a smartphone and relief for some pupils that they do not have to be on it as often anymore.

In addition, pupils shared that they thought there was no change to cyberbullying because this can still take place outside of school and carry over into school. Pupils who bully others also spent more time on their smartphone and now they cannot do that, there has been an observed increase in face-to-face bullying, which can link back to why there is a decrease found in closeness to peers.

Teachers were able to share their perspectives from their point of view on the availability of smartphones in school which was not captured in the pre- and post-survey. They explained that access to smartphones in the classroom is distracting for them as well as the pupils. They also spoke about feeling anxious about being recorded and having things posted online and that a smartphone-free school reduced stress and anxiety related to this. This contributed to themes of ‘Safety for all’ and ‘A source of anxiety: heightened stress for pupils and staff’.

The focus groups were also able to capture views about the smartphone policy that the surveys could not, such as pupils expressing a loss of autonomy and perceived lack of trust, feeling that smartphones should be used in school within reason. Teachers shared views about feeling that the smartphone policy helped them have clearer boundaries if rules are broken, better communication with parents and reduced pupils going to the toilets during lesson time.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Teachers and pupils felt that smartphones in schools impacted upon the safety, distractibility and social dynamics in the school community. They also acknowledged how they can be a source of anxiety and that excessive smartphone use is a societal concern. Over half of pupils across both surveys had four hours or more of smartphone screen time per day. Pupils also spoke about some of the realities of implementing smartphone restrictions in the sense that changes do not always equate to having the desired effects and both teachers and pupils spoke about the challenges with enforcement. Pupils felt that smartphone restrictions had contributed to them feeling a loss of autonomy and perceived lack of trust. Smartphone post-policy changes were self-reported by pupils to mostly not make a

difference to several factors investigated. Post-policy changes saw slight decreases in ratings of attention/concentration and social interactions in school, some of these findings were explained by the pupil focus group as pupils' behaviour not changing regardless of post-policy change and that they may find alternative ways to entertain themselves or isolate themselves. However, there was a decrease in rule breaking because of smartphone restrictions.

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

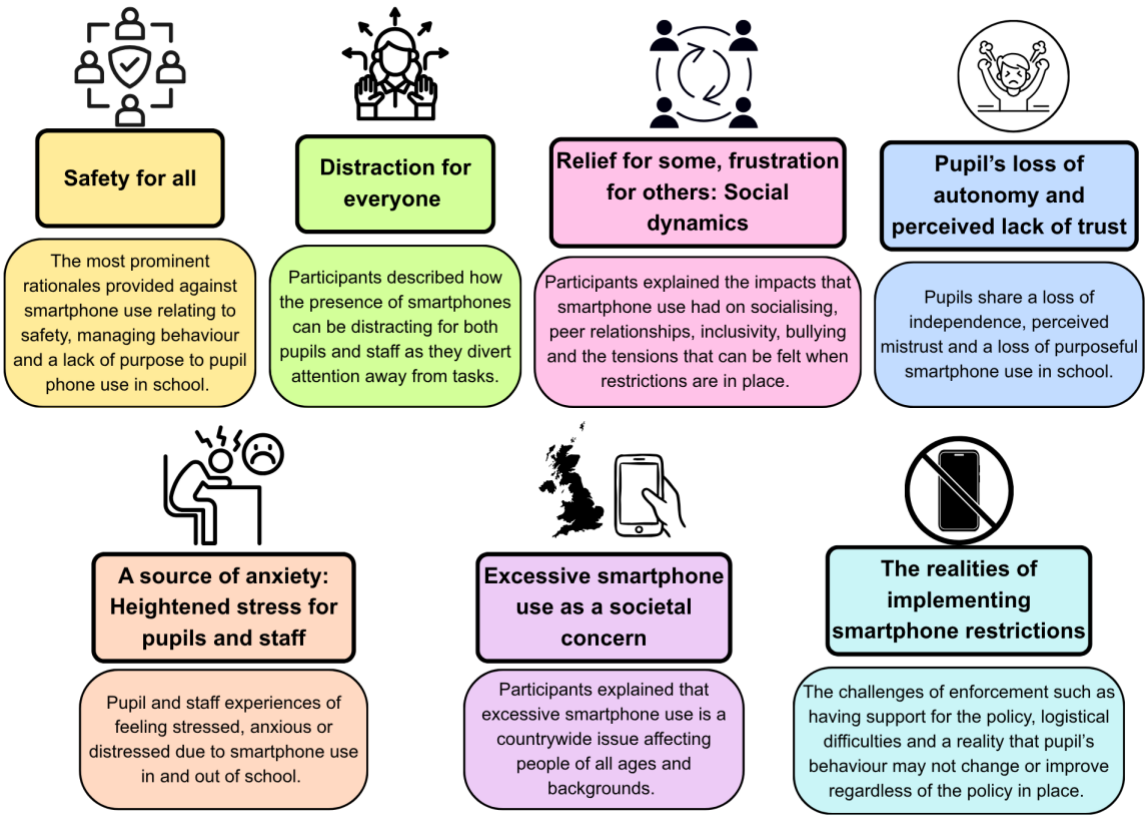
This study aimed to investigate pupil and staff perspectives on the impact of tighter restrictions on smartphone use in a secondary school. The research consisted of a pre-measure pupil survey completed before the smartphone policy change and a post-measure survey completed after the policy change. Focus groups with pupils and teachers were also conducted to provide more in-depth understanding of their views. This research explored attention, behaviour, mental health, physical activity, cyberbullying, social interactions and screen time, and gathered the views of pupils and school staff around smartphone use in school and to see if they believed that the policy change had made a difference. The policy change introduced lockable phone pouches, whereas before the school had a policy of keeping phones out of sight in schoolbags or pockets. This research found that pupils and teachers see excessive smartphone use as a societal issue and that it is normalised in the pupil generations and is also a problem amongst adults as well as CYP. Pupils and teachers described smartphone use in school as anxiety-provoking and remaining safe was threaded throughout the themes. Both pupils and teachers explained some of the realities of implementing smartphone policies in school and the impact it can have on social dynamics. It was found that introducing tighter smartphone restrictions in school did not change most factors explored and that teachers support a smartphone free school whereas pupils believe smartphones should be used in school for certain purposes such as studying.

This chapter will present the findings in relation to what pupils and teachers shared in the focus groups and understand the meaning behind the survey results

(see figure 35 for a summary of themes). The findings will also be discussed in relation to previous research synthesised in the literature review and in some instances linked to the current UK and global context. This chapter will also cover researcher's reflections on why some finding from the literature review were not found, evaluation of strengths and limitations, implications, directions for future research, dissemination and a conclusion.

Figure 35.

A summary of the themes.



5.2 Interpretation of findings in context

5.2.1. Bringing together findings in the context of the research questions:

RQ1- What difference do smartphone restrictions make?

RQ2- What are pupil and teacher views on the use of smartphones in school?

5.2.1.1. Excessive smartphone use as a societal concern. Uniquely, this study found that the teachers were recognising that smartphone dependency is a national issue for the adults as well as pupils and suggested that it is a countrywide problem. They also felt that socioeconomic status did not make a difference to levels of excessive smartphone use. This has not been mentioned in the research included in the literature review. There also was acknowledgment that school staff are limited in their influence on pupil's screen time outside of school and that this then becomes more of the parents' responsibility. This is consistent with findings that school staff believe smartphone use needs to be regulated for pupil's own good (Gath et al., 2024).

Across the surveys more than half of pupils spend four hours or more per day on their smartphone with 11% spending eight hours or more per day. This is a concerning finding as guidelines from opticians and the National Health Service (NHS) state that CYP between 5-17 years should not be having more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day (NHS, 2025; Earlam & Christopher, 2021). Generally, the pupils in the focus group were not surprised by the findings and suggested that it was to be expected within their generation. Pupils also recognised

that it is challenging not to spend extended amounts of time on the smartphone as so much is completed through a smartphone today such as banking.

This is aligned with findings from Spiratos & Ratansirpong (2023), that found generally adolescents spend 3-9 hours per day on their smartphone. Furthermore, in this study they found that a fifth of adolescents met the threshold for Problematic Smartphone Use (PSU) which is when a power imbalance occurs from the user controlling the device to the device controlling the user (measured by Smartphone Addiction Scale Short Version (SAS-SV) developed by Kwon et al., (2013)). Whilst this was not directly measured, the high amount of screen time amongst some pupils found could suggest that PSU is occurring. Previous research found no significant difference in PSU between a ban and non-ban group at school (King et al., 2024) suggesting that smartphone restrictions at school do not make a difference to overall screen time or PSU. However, restrictive policies do reduce smartphone use within school time (Orben et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the findings around the amount of screen time are in line with the addictive nature of smartphones reported in the teacher focus group, where they mentioned particular social media apps such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Previous studies have included teachers expressing concern with observing addiction-like behaviours around smartphone use with pupils (Aloteibi et al., 2024; Martin 2025). Moreover, these findings are aligned with a news story recently about a court case where Instagram and YouTube applications (which are regularly accessed on a smartphone) were ruled by a jury in Los Angeles as ‘addictive’ and deliberately engineered that way, meaning the technology company owners are negligent in their safeguarding of the CYP using them (Kleinman, 2026). However, it

is thought that this verdict might make UK parliament ministers more decisive about what social media platforms to ban for CYP (Kleinman, 2026).

There were no noticeable changes in screen time in school between pre- and post-policy change. This is in line with most pupils reporting no difference to their screen time post-policy change, however a fifth of pupils reported felt that the policy change had improved their screen time a bit. These echo some findings from Goodyear et al., (2025) that the impact of tighter restrictions in schools lowered screen time in schools but made no difference to screen time outside of school. Furthermore, an interesting and novel finding from this research was how the teacher's acknowledged that smartphone dependency was also a problem for them. This view was not apparent in the literature review. This finding can be linked to reports recently that have found that UK adults spend half an hour longer online every day in 2025 than they did in 2021 during the pandemic (Cress, 2025). This highlights a wider societal concern about excessive smartphone use for adults as well as CYP.

5.2.1.2. A source of anxiety: Heightened stress for pupils and staff. There was no noticeable change in pupils reporting feeling anxious because of something seen on a smartphone between pre- and post-survey. Uniquely, pupils shared in the focus group that restricting smartphones in school may not improve pupil wellbeing as they are still accessing them outside of school and may still feel upset from viewing 'distressing' content outside of school.

Although 8% more pupils reported 'Sometimes' feeling anxious because of not being able to check their smartphone and some pupils in the focus group discussed feeling anxious without access to their smartphone in school as they were

unable to check it. This has been found in previous studies where pupils report FOMO and nomophobia leading to feelings of anxiety (Wike 2020; Martin 2025; Aydin & Kus, 2023). There was also recognition from the pupil focus group that excessive smartphone use would probably lead to more anxiety without it, which is in line with findings from Spiratos and Ratasiripong (2023), that problematic smartphone use is associated with poorer mental health.

In addition to this, the pupil focus group mentioned feelings of nomophobia (anxiety because of not being able to check a phone) and indicated that their ability to concentrate may not change if pupils are still using their smartphone a lot outside of class. It is possible that pupils could be feeling restless or preoccupied about the absence of it which is distracting them from their learning as there was an increase in reported distraction with 23% of pupils reporting either ‘Always’, ‘Often’ and ‘Sometimes’ feeling distracted by a smartphone post-policy change compared to 8% pre-policy change. These findings are unique to this research as this has not been measured or found in previous research post-2020.

Most pupils (64%) suggested that they felt ‘no change’ to their wellbeing with smartphone restrictions. These findings are consistent with research that found no significant differences in wellbeing between adolescents attending schools with restrictive and permissive smartphone policies (Goodyear et al., 2025), and no significant effect for increased positive affect in adolescents with smartphone restrictions in school from Baggio et al., (2025) and Orben et al., (2025).

Teachers in the focus group were unanimous in supporting smartphone restrictions. This is in line with previous studies which have found that teachers are in favour of tighter restrictions of smartphone use in school (Gath et al., 2024; Aloteibi et al., 2024). Teachers spoke about how access to smartphones in the

classroom is also distracting for them as well as the pupils. Uniquely it was mentioned that teachers felt that having a smartphone-free school reduced stress and anxiety and that a clear smartphone policy reduced cognitive load. When the teachers spoke about the availability of smartphones in school, they appeared to catastrophise by thinking of the worst-case scenario around things getting recorded and posted online and then spreading to the news. In the current context, there has been recent UK news coverage around pupils recording or taking pictures of school staff to make deepfakes which are pictures, video clips or audio clips made with AI to look real and posting them to social media platforms such as TikTok (BBC News, 2026a). Even though deepfakes were not explicitly mentioned in this study, the teachers appeared to be very wary of pupils taking recordings, pictures and videos without their consent and sharing them/posting them online. In addition, recent research has found that stress and poor wellbeing of teachers is provided as one of the top reasons for them leaving the profession (DfE, 2025). Therefore, a policy that reduces stress on teachers and helps to retain a workforce is very likely to have support from educational staff and leaders.

5.2.1.3. Relief for some, frustration for others: Social dynamics. There was a slight decrease in the mean score of pupils reporting closeness to classmates/peers from pre- to post-policy change. Some pupils in the focus group suggested that this could be because they did not think smartphones had an impact on friendships and that taking away the smartphone may create forced socialising which is less inclusive as some pupils are introverted and prefer to be by themselves with their smartphone. On the other hand, the staff focus group thought that tighter smartphone restrictions would create a more inclusive environment for younger

pupils who do not yet have a smartphone. This highlights a contrast between pupil and staff views on smartphone restrictions in relation to inclusivity and school belongingness.

On the contrary, some pupils and teachers in the focus group reported observing more face-to-face socialising in school without availability of smartphones, which was found in previous research (Bar et al., 2025; Bottger & Zierer, 2024). Also, just over a fifth of pupils felt that their levels of physical activity had improved a bit post-policy change. Pupils commented in the focus group that they had noticed some of their peers becoming more involved in sports activities at break and lunch times. This is a similar amount as found in Kopecky et al., (2021) where 29% of pupils engaged in sports activities at break time after smartphones were restricted.

There were no noticeable differences in pupils reporting experiencing cyberbullying in school between pre- and post- policy change. Pupils felt that this was because cyberbullying still takes place outside of school and this can carry over into school. When looking further into which pupils were reporting experiencing cyberbullying, it appeared that there was a trend with pupils in younger year groups reporting experiencing it more than pupils in older year groups. It has been found that generally bullying peaks at the beginning of secondary school due to pupils wanting to establish dominance and peer status in new social groups (Pellegrini & Long, 2002) which could lead to more cyberbullying in these age groups.

Pupils in the focus group noticed that smartphone restrictions had led to an increase in face-to face bullying. This finding is aligned with previous research which found that a smartphone ban group had slightly higher levels of bullying overall (King et al., 2024) and that it was felt by pupils that in-person bullying persisted or had gotten worse due to boredom from pupils not having access to their smartphone (Bar

et al., 2025). This pupil observation around an increase in face-to-face bullying in school may have contributed to feeling a lack of closeness to peers. There have been concerns raised in previous research that smartphone use may lead to pupils having less empathy with others (Bar et al., 2025) and interestingly the pupils in the focus group mentioned that it was those that were more likely to spend time on their smartphone in school that then bullied others in person. This could link to previous research which has found that bullies aged 11-12 years have lower levels of affective empathy which refers to the ability to experience others' feelings as though they are your own (Stavrinides et al., 2010). Furthermore, most pupils reported no change to social interactions in school post-policy change. This was also found by King et al., (2024), that smartphone bans had no significant effect on improving school belonging amongst pupils.

5.2.1.4. The realities of implementing smartphone restrictions. Pupils described that pupil's find new ways to entertain/distract themselves in the classroom which may be more disruptive than, for example scrolling on a smartphone. This contrasts with previous research, where pupils recognised that more teaching time is taken up with policing smartphone use which is frustrating and disruptive for both teachers and pupils (Bar et al., 2025). However, pupils in this study suggested that pupil's behaviour will not change regardless of phone policy and that pupils will find new ways to be distracted or entertain themselves in the classroom.

There was a decrease in the number of days active for at least 30 minutes from 85% being active for 3 days or more pre-policy change to 70% post-policy change. However, this could have been influenced by a change in seasons between the pre- and post-policy measure. Similarly, there were only minor changes in

physical activity levels at break and lunch times with a slight decrease in levels of activity post-policy change. This is in line with the pupil focus group reporting that behaviour of pupils will not change regardless of smartphone restrictions and that pupils who prefer to be by themselves or not active on their smartphone, will continue to be by themselves or inactive at break and lunch times. Furthermore, this is consistent with most pupils reporting no change to levels of physical activity post-policy change.

Pupils mostly reported that they experienced no change to their concentration, behaviour, wellbeing, physical activity, screen time and social interactions after smartphone restrictions in school were introduced. This is in line with findings from King et al., (2024) who found limited to no evidence that smartphone restrictions had the expected positive effects on pupils when comparing findings from schools that had implemented bans and those who had not. Also, it is consistent with Goodyear et al., (2025) who looked at the impact of tighter restrictions of smartphones in the UK and found limited evidence that it improved adolescent outcomes or reduced overall smartphone and social media use.

However, teachers suspected that pupils could be reporting “worse results” on the post-measure survey with an agenda as they would like to have access to their smartphones in the classroom which could explain why some of the findings showed ‘no change’ or a decrease post-policy change.

Both pupils and teachers reflected on what it was like to experience implementing new smartphone restrictions in a secondary school. Teachers were concerned that newer teachers required more support and suggested that enforcing the smartphone policy was challenging when they are trying to get other aspects of teaching right. Pupils have observed that the tedious nature of having to enforce the

policy everyday results in some teachers not checking or enforcing. Teachers recognised that the lateness of the pupils also makes it difficult to enforce. Teachers spoke about the need to have support from parents for the policy to be successful. Previous research has also reported on the importance of this support for school staff in implementation (Morrin, 2022; Tricoli, 2023). These findings suggest that perhaps these are aspects that need to be considered when making changes to the smartphone policy.

Both teachers and pupils spoke about pupils finding ways to get around the smartphone policy with methods and ideas to still be able to use a smartphone in school. Teachers spoke about a need to evolve with pupils' methods for getting into a smartphone feeling that they need to keep up with the pupils' methods. Teachers acknowledged that compliance from pupils is required for a mobile phone policy to be successful (even if frustrated by it). These findings suggest that school staff need to explain clearly to pupils the purpose of introducing tighter smartphone restrictions and address the reasons behind why they may feel the need to have a smartphone out of the phone pouch with them in school.

5.2.1.5. Safety for all. Uniquely, there was a decrease with less pupils reporting they 'never' break the rules to check a smartphone in school from 68% pre-policy change to 49% reporting 'never' post-policy change. This is in line with a fifth of pupils reporting that their behaviour in school had improved a bit since the policy change. These findings link to pupil and teacher views around safety for all and gaining back control.

The decrease in rule-breaking helps to achieve the objective of smartphone restrictions explored under the subtheme of gaining back control. Teachers are

unable to control what pupils might be looking at on a smartphone in school or what is being communicated to parents throughout the school day. In this school, the new smartphone policy has made it a lot clearer if a pupil has broken the rules and reduced pupils requesting to go the toilets to check their smartphone. This is consistent with research which has recognised that smartphones create challenges in the classroom for teachers with having to manage behaviour (Botelho, 2023; McCrea, 2024; Morrin 2022). Additionally, it has also been found in a previous study that teachers did not like the loss of power from being undermined when pupils communicate with parents throughout the school day (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024). Considering the wider context, it might be especially important to educational leaders to introduce smartphone policies for this reason. Recent research in the UK has shown that perceived increases in pupil behaviour challenges is a key factor for teachers leaving the profession and there is a teacher shortage nationally (DfE, 2025b). In addition, a survey of UK school leaders found that 82% have experienced abuse (most commonly verbal and threatening behaviour) from parents over the last year (NAHT, 2025). Therefore, having more control over what is communicated with parents through smartphone restrictions may be a way of reducing this.

Furthermore, pupils and teachers both shared concerns about smartphones reducing safety in school due to the capabilities of them such as being able to take pictures, video or voice record others without their consent. It was then discussed how these can be shared more widely on the internet, through group chats and social media and the potential harm this causes. For example, pupils acknowledged that someone could be bullied based on what has been shared about them online. This is consistent with previous research that found pupils and school staff were concerned about privacy violations with photos, recordings and videos being taken of

them without their consent (Gath et al., 2024; Toth, 2022; Kopecky et al., 2021; Bar et al., 2025).

5.2.1.6. Distraction for everyone. There was a mixture of views upon whether smartphones are distracting. Most pupils felt that tighter restrictions made no change to their concentration in class. There also appears to be a slight decrease in attention/concentration in class post-policy change and an increase in distractibility due to smartphones, which could be due to still feeling preoccupied with the absence of a smartphone and/or pupils finding more disruptive ways to keep entertained.

However, a quarter of pupils reported on the post-measure survey that their concentration has improved a bit and some pupils in the focus group reported that their concentration had improved with tighter restrictions. This is in line with pupil and teacher views found that smartphones are distracting in the classroom because they divert attention away from tasks and that without access to them pupils concentrate more. Previous research has also found that pupils and teachers hold views that smartphones are distracting for learning and prevent focus in class (Wike, 2020; Bar et al., 2025; Gath et al., 2024; Aloteibi et al., 2024; McCrea 2024; Toth, 2022; Botelho, 2023; Martin, 2025). The mixed findings show that it is likely that there are individual differences in the ways CYP find smartphones distracting and how distracting they find them.

5.2.1.7. Pupil's loss of autonomy and perceived lack of trust. Pupils felt that smartphones should be used within reason, for purposes such as contacting parents and studying. This is in line with findings from previous research that pupils believe

smartphones should be allowed for certain purposes and at certain times of the day such as at break and lunch times (Gath et al., 2024; Bar et al., 2025).

Pupils in the focus group expressed frustration about a loss of independence, diffusion of responsibility and loss of the use of their smartphone for purposeful uses. They also felt that smartphone restrictions were not preparing them well for the future where they will have access to them in the workplace for example. This is in line with findings from previous research, that pupils feel smartphones are part of growing up and becoming an adult (Wike, 2020; Bar et al., 2025).

5.2.1.8. Applying key findings to the Resilience Framework. The Resilience Framework includes five key pillars to promote resilience (Hart et al, 2007). The findings of this research were interpreted within the resilience framework to show how the use of smartphones in school and society can impact upon the resilience of pupils and teachers (see figure 36).

The basics are about ensuring we have the necessities to meet our fundamental needs. When thinking about excessive smartphone use, a pupil in the study spoke about it being “so hard” not to use the smartphone excessively. The reason provided for this was that so many crucial and important tasks we need to do can be completed through applications on smartphones such as banking. A prominent aspect of the argument against the use of smartphones in school was the risk they pose to pupils and teachers’ safety due to the capabilities of smartphones to take photos, videos and recordings without others consent and share them widely through the internet, social media and group chats. Feeling safe is a basic need and one which is also crucial as part of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) for humans to feel secure and thrive.

Belonging is about how connected we feel to those around us and is about having good relationships. This study did not find that tighter smartphone restrictions promoted belonging as it was suggested that it could do in the Government Guidance (DfE, 2024). In fact, closeness to peers decreased and pupils felt that some pupils were being forced into socialising with others as a result, linking to the theme of 'Relief for some, frustration for others: Social dynamics'. However, there was observation from pupils that smartphone restrictions can increase face-to-face socialising for others and that they become more involved in sports activities. Teachers recognised that it could also increase inclusivity for younger pupils who do not yet have a smartphone and might be a relief to some pupils that they do not have to be on their smartphones at break and lunch times. Teachers spoke about wanting to have communication with parents when incidents occur in school to help explain what has happened from their professional perspective to foster more understanding and positive relationships. Teachers acknowledged that support from pupils and parents was important for a new smartphone policy to be successful which shows it is important to feel connected as part of a school community. Teachers also felt it was important that teachers themselves feel supported by each other to enforce the policy consistently with all the other demands that come with teaching. A sense of belonging is also a crucial psychological need as part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) which provides a foundation for boosting self-esteem and fulfilment.

Learning refers to having opportunities to build knowledge and develop skills. Pupils and teachers felt that it was important for pupils to learn how to regulate their smartphone use. Teachers felt that this was completed through the smartphone policy by not normalising use of smartphones and educating pupils. However, pupils felt that they needed to learn these skills themselves through having their

smartphones available to use within reason which could better prepare them for future work or further study where smartphones are not restricted. In school, smartphones were seen as a distraction for everyone as they divert attention away from tasks for both pupils and teachers and his may prevent learning from happening. The pupils did suggest that the use of smartphones can be helpful for studying and completing tasks such as revision for an exam or homework and providing this as a reason for why the thought smartphones should be allowed in school. Teachers also made a point of feeling the need to develop their knowledge and skills to keep up with the way that the pupils are "evolving". This comment was made in relation to pupils finding ways around the smartphone policy, but I wonder whether this also refers to a need to keep-up with pupils' technological abilities in a world that is constantly advancing technologically.

The next pillar is coping which refers to having the skills/resources to bounce back from setbacks and adversities. An increase in-person bullying is likely to impact upon the coping abilities of victims within school. Furthermore, some pupils who may have special educational needs (SEN) or additional needs or different personality types (e.g. those who are "introverted" as recognised by pupils), might be reliant on use of a smartphone to help manage or cope with the demands of the school day/environment. Pupils in this study suggested that taking a smartphone away is not going to help pupils who 'prefer to be by themselves', this could reduce their resilience. This could possibly lead to greater distress and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).

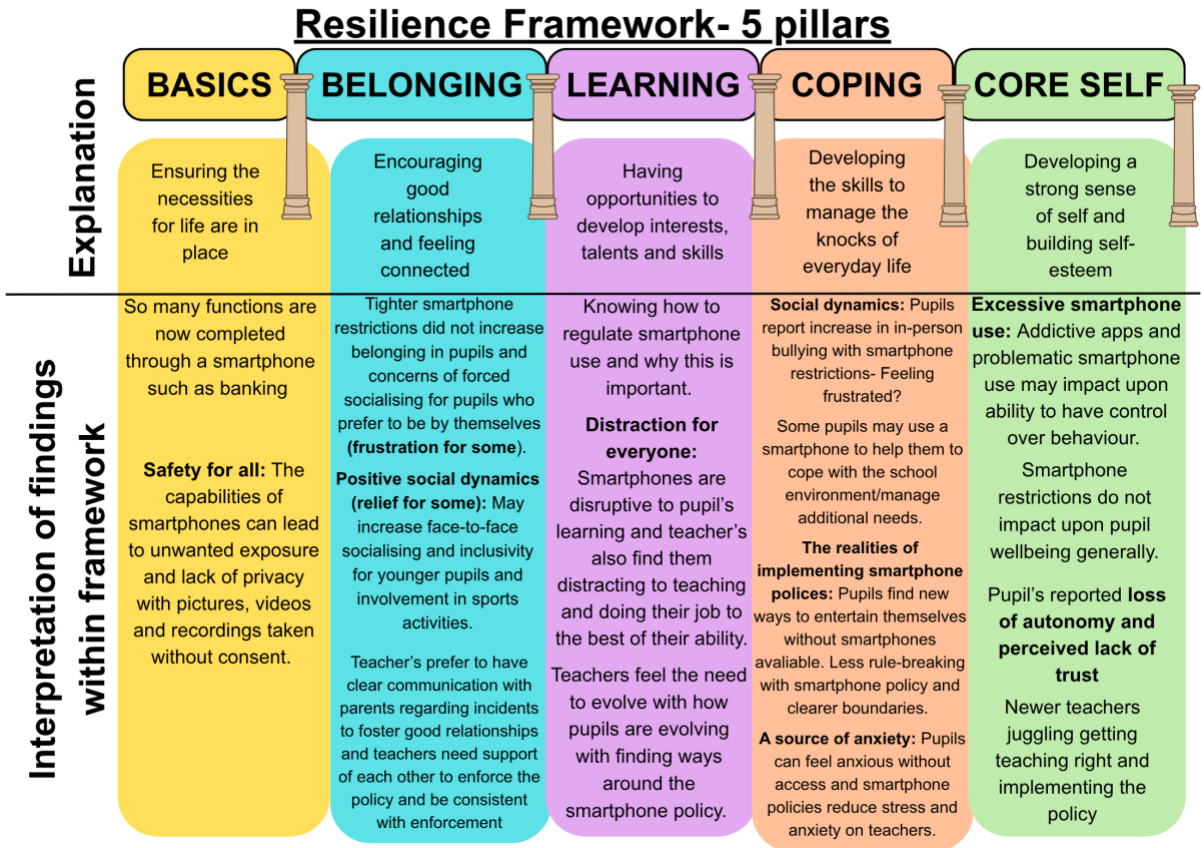
Pupils in this study also highlighted that their peers may find "newer and louder ways to entertain themselves" without smartphones available, suggesting that pupils are adapting and finding new ways to cope in the school environment.

Teachers referred to smartphones policies as “reducing stress” on them as they make the boundaries clearer and lead to less rule-breaking which could mean that having these policies in place promotes the resiliency of teachers. However, pupils suggested that they may feel anxious without access to their smartphone during the school day which may reduce their readiness for learning and resilience.

The core self refers to developing a strong sense of self and self-esteem. The addictive nature of smartphones and excessive use amongst CYP and adults may mean that they struggle to control their habits and behaviours surrounding smartphone use. This refers to PSU, where the smartphone and its applications begin controlling you rather than you controlling it. This can impact upon our thoughts and worldviews when algorithms show only certain content and provoke certain emotions (Regehr, 2025), which in turn can impact upon our behaviours and how we choose to live our lives. It was found in this study that smartphone restrictions in school did not impact upon pupil wellbeing generally suggesting that tighter restrictions may not increase positive feelings or decrease negative ones. Pupils reported feeling a lack of autonomy and trust from school staff which could impact upon their intrinsic motivation as their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are not being met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, for teachers who may be new to the profession and juggling the demands of getting all aspects of teaching correct may feel additional pressure with implementing the smartphone policy and hopelessness if they are unable to do the job well (which could also be an issue for teachers in general).

Figure 36.

Interpretation of the findings within the Resilience Framework five pillars (Hart et al, 2007).



5.3 Researcher reflection on why some findings from the literature review may not have been found in this study.

5.3.1 Covid-19 Pandemic

A big feature of previous research was that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the relationship between pupils and their smartphones in ways that schools are still addressing (Tricoli, 2023; McCrea, 2024; Botelho, 2023 & Thomas et al., 2024). The pandemic was not mentioned in the focus groups. This is likely due to this study

taking place five years on from the pandemic, therefore it is not so present in the thoughts of CYP or adults. Furthermore, any changes since the pandemic may now be normalised in society.

5.3.2 Pupil focus group

In previous research pupils described that smartphones reduced their motivation to learn, suggesting that they made them “not in the mood” for schoolwork (Bar et al., 2025). Pupils in the focus group reported using their smartphone in school for academic purposes such as studying, completing homework and did not suggest this. It is possible that the pupils selected for the focus group were more academically inclined, therefore less impacted by this.

Similarly, Pupils also reported using their smartphones to enhance their emotions and regulate difficult emotions such as reducing anxiety and escaping stress (Bar et al., 2025). Some pupils mentioned feeling anxious without their phone but did not mention any reliance on it for their mental health. This could be because the pupils selected to take part in the focus group are likely to have good mental health.

5.3.3 Teacher focus group

It is worth acknowledging that the teacher focus group was all males aged between 25-34 and how this may have influenced some of the findings and could explain why some of the previous literature findings are not found in this study.

Teacher's level of digital competence did not come up as a concern whereas it did in previous research (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; Tricoli 2023). The teacher focus group sample were predominately Generation Z and/or Millennial which are generations who are known for being more technologically dependent and adaptable as they have never known a life without access the internet and technology being readily available (BBC Bitesize, 2026). Whereas if the sample had consisted of Generation X or Baby Boomers this could have come up as more of a concern.

Teachers in previous research have expressed concerns about young people having access to content that is not intended for their age such as pornography (Lloret-Catala et al., 2024; McCrea 2024) and concerns about misinformation on the internet (Martin, 2025). However, this did not come up, and I wonder if there had been female teachers in the sample whether this would have come up as more of a discussion point. This is due to an increase in concerns about CYP being shown misinformation and harmful content through social media algorithms relating to misogynistic online influencers known as the 'manosphere' (Clarke & Rai, 2026). As a woman I feel very concerned about CYP having exposure to misogynistic views through social media on a smartphone and the negative impacts/consequences of this on women and society. A recent study found that also 76% of secondary school teachers are extremely concerned about the influence of online misogyny in their schools (Over, Bunce, Baggaley & Zendle, 2025).

In prior studies, teachers expressed worries about pupils not being able to think deeply about a topic and wanting instant answers to everything (McCrea, 2024). The teacher sample in the focus group was limited, and it could have been that the subjects that they taught might not demand greater reflection. Furthermore, teacher views on the adverse impacts on academic achievement were reported in

previous research (Botelho, 2023; Tricoli, 2023; Toth, 2022) but was not discussed in the focus group. However, quantitative evidence so far does not suggest that smartphone restrictions improve academic achievement (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023; Kessel et al., 2020; King et al., 2024; Bottger & Zierer, 2024; Campbell et al., 2024). Therefore, it is possible that it did not come up because the impact of smartphone use on academic achievement has not been observed.

Teachers did not comment in this study on cyberbullying as they had done in previous studies (Martin, 2025; Gath et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2024; Toth, 2022; McCrea, 2024) whereas this was an area of focus for pupils. It could be that cyberbullying is less of a prominent issue for the teachers as they are not directly impacted by it and do not necessarily observe its impacts such as feeling anxious or emotional distress.

5.4 Evaluation of study

5.4.1 Strengths

This study has investigated an under researched area in the UK on smartphone use in secondary school pupils and smartphone policies, as well as incorporating both pupil and teacher views. This was a mixed methods study with quantitative and qualitative data to provide in-depth meaning and explanation to the findings. The mixed methods conducted sequentially with surveys followed up focus groups offers a richer picture and a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon. This research was carried out sequentially in real time where a smartphone policy change took place. There was an adequate response rate to the surveys with over 100 pupil

responses collected on both surveys. Participants in the surveys had a mixture of ages, genders and ethnicities. The focus groups also had some representation of different ethnicities, and the pupil focus group had a mixture of ages and representation of both boys and girls. This research has been transparent about the methods and tools used for the pre- and post-measure survey (see appendices) and this allows for future replication. The surveys were originally designed by the researcher and research supervisor based on evidence and government guidance on areas of concern surrounding smartphone use in schools. The post-measure survey was also adapted to add in an additional question to explore pupil views as to whether they felt smartphone restrictions had made a difference as it was anticipated that the some of the sample completing the post-measure survey may not have completed the pre-measure survey.

Overall, it has provided some unique contributions to the literature on smartphone use in CYP, UK and smartphone restrictions in schools. It also offers practical implications for CYP, parents, educators, schools, EPs and policymakers.

5.4.2 Limitations

There was a difference is sample size between the pre- and post-measure surveys, as there was a larger sample for the post-measure survey. There were different pupils who completed the post-measure survey as well which meant that a repeated measures direct comparison analysis was unable to be completed. For this study there was no control group or school not implementing a smartphone restriction to compare the findings to.

Some of the items on the surveys were not clearly defined and could be open to interpretation, for example, ‘Do you think tighter restrictions has made any difference to your behaviour’. Behaviour could be interpreted in many ways other than just following the rules and expectations of the school, it can also relate to everyday habits. Therefore, it could be that some pupils answered this question in relation to different aspects due to not providing a definition of what ‘behaviour’ was being measured.

The reliance on pupil views for the survey data may have led to some inaccuracies as they may have had a bias to reporting ‘no change’ as they would like to have access to their smartphone during school time. It is possible that the timing of the surveys could have meant that there was not enough time for pupils to have noticed a change between pre- and post- policy change. School staff and pupils reported a good smartphone policy beforehand of never seen or used in school which might be a key reason why there was not much change observed between pre- and post-policy change.

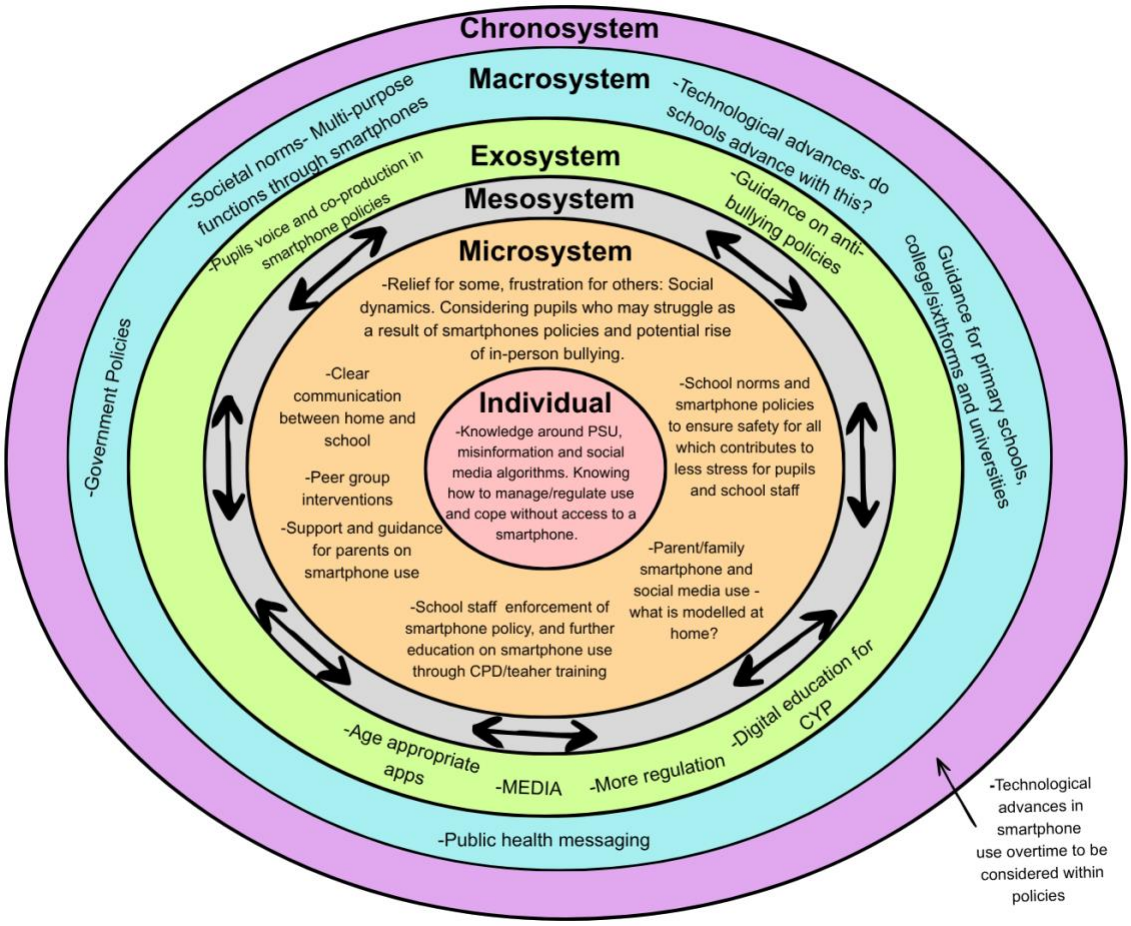
This research did not explore parent views in a survey or focus group which could have been beneficial to supporting with interpreting the quantitative findings further.

5.5 Implications

The implications of this research will be thought in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (see figure 37 for an overview) and for EPs and the wider-related professions in terms of thinking about the three levels that EPs work at (Fallon et al., 2010).

Figure 37.

An overview of implications applied within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.



5.5.1. Individual Level (Direct work)

This level relates to the development of the individual and is interconnected with interactions with and between others (microsystems and mesosystems). In EP assessment with CYP and consultation with parents, CYP and school staff, considering a young person's smartphone use and screen time as a point of exploration knowing that a large proportion of young people are consuming a lot of

screen time which may impact upon a young person's attention span, sleep, wellbeing, social skills and lead to a narrowing of interests/activities (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024). Therefore, the impact of smartphone use on a young person's development should be part of any formulation when considering resilience (as this could impact all five pillars of the resilience framework, Hart et al., 2007) and included in reports/suggestions for provision.

Support for the young person could include a mental health intervention, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This could be a crucial form of psychoeducation to offer support on how to manage smartphone use and why this is important, considering the influences of the microsystem and mesosystem such as smartphone use of family, friends and peers. This can be thought about in terms of the resilience framework considering the five pillars and the impact that excessive smartphone use or PSU might have on an individual's core self and wellbeing (Hart, Bilncow, Thomas, 2007). This is because content viewed on a smartphone may impact upon thoughts, feelings and worldview. Excessive smartphone use may also lead to behaviour inactivation where a person experiences low mood due to inactivity and a lack of variety to the activities they engage in creating a vicious cycle where it decreases motivation to do other activities (McCauley et al., 2016). Therefore, exploring screen time and excessive smartphone use may form an important part of the behaviour activation intervention.

5.5.2. Group Level (Targeted support)

This level relates to the microsystem and mesosystem considering the immediate environment and groups surrounding the individual such as family, school staff and peer group.

Peer group interventions for CYP who may struggle with excessive screen time or PSU use or those that struggle with feelings of anxiety because of smartphone use to help with feeling independent managing smartphone use in adulthood. These pupils could be identified through a questionnaire asking about smartphone use and screen time such as the SAS-SV developed by Kwon et al., (2013). They could have sessions developing strategies to help them regulate their smartphone use, this could be based on CBT principles such as challenging thoughts around what would happen if they were without their smartphone for a length of time.

In addition, all adolescents would most likely benefit from whole school input either through workshops or Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PHSE) lessons on how to regulate smartphone use and general digital education which can address topics such as how to use smartphones safely, issues of consent with taking pictures, videos and recordings, recognising misinformation online, cyberbullying and appropriate use of social media applications.

School staff or the EPS could provide advice for parents on smartphone use amongst CYP as suggested in this research they have a greater influence over aspects such as smartphone use/screen time (being part of the microsystem/mesosystem). A leaflet or flyer could be produced, or an online training/workshop could be developed to provide advice for parents. As part of this it will be important to discuss the role of modelling healthy behaviours around smartphone use, as CYP often observe, retain and imitate the behaviours of their parents (Bandura, 1977). As mentioned in this study by teachers, CYP know that often how adults use their smartphones contradict the advice they give CYP on how

to use them. Furthermore, as identified in this research support from parents is important to ensure successful implementation of the smartphone policy, therefore it is crucial that parents have a good understanding around the smartphone policy and why it is being introduced.

To develop school staff's awareness of smartphone use in CYP through training and continuing professional development (CPD) and support with implementing smartphone policies and changes if required which will influence the microsystem/mesosystem and the exosystem with school wide training. This will be especially important as technology is advancing all the time and therefore digital education will need to be constantly reviewed. Some of the visuals used for this thesis such as the resilience framework and smartphone timeline can be used as resources with educating others.

5.5.3 Systemic Level (Strategic)

The systemic level relates to the exosystem and macrosystem which relate to systems that impact but have an indirect influence through shaping a young person but may shape the culture and societal norms, values, policies and guidance in place which impact on how a young person may use a smartphone.

To promote and consider pupil voice in policies and consider possibly co-produce smartphone policies with pupils and consider a school's culture and context rather than blanket bans, that potentially might not make much of a difference. To have regular reviews of the smartphone policy and to consider advances in technology and whether further adjustments or changes need to be made.

This research raises the question around whether restrictions improve readiness for learning or if schools need to rethink how they integrate technology into teaching (or exclude it) as pupils report using their phone for studying and if so, teacher training needs to prepare teachers for knowing how to navigate technology/smartphone use within education/in the classroom.

To consider reviewing the anti-bullying policies in school as well when changes have been made to smartphone restrictions as pupils have observed that in-person bullying increases in school when smartphone use in school is restricted. This would be particularly important for younger year groups as this research have showed that they are more likely to experience cyberbullying, which could mean they are more likely to experience in-person bullying as well.

For public health messaging and education around screen time to be targeted at everyone (both CYP and adults). There was acknowledgement in this study of excessive smartphone use being a problem amongst the adults as well as the pupils and thinking about what can be done on a systemic level to support regulated use of smartphones throughout society. There are a lot of risks/concerns related to excessive smartphone use/screen time that I would argue are not widely known about, such as:

- Eye strain leading to vision problems and headaches (Devi & Singh, 2023).
- Musculoskeletal pain could lead to poor posture and ‘text neck’ causing neck, shoulder and back pain (Devi & Singh, 2023; Price, 2018).
- A sedentary lifestyle leading to health problems such as weight gain and cardiovascular issues (Zablotsky et al., 2025).

- Sleep difficulties as blue light from devices can make it harder to fall asleep and reduce quality of sleep (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024).
- Mental health impacts such as anxiety and depression (Zablotsky et al., 2025), as people spend extended time on smartphones/devices they are spending less time connecting in-person with others (Haidt, 2024) and engaging in variety of activities to support wellbeing. This would impact upon resilience.
- Executive functioning difficulties such as difficulty focusing on tasks, lower working memory and processing speed (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024)

However, at present, the public health messaging surrounding this is not frequently advertised or provided which could influence how both adults and CYP use their smartphones.

Furthermore, a point made by participants in this study that smartphones and their applications can have an ‘addictive’ nature to them and in the modern world we rely heavily on smartphones for a variety of functions, therefore we cannot fully remove or restrict their use all the time. They do also provide a lot of useful functions and entertainment. However, governments could put in age restrictions for certain applications and challenge technology companies to not make smartphones and their applications designed to be ‘addictive’ and potentially harmful with content shown to CYP and adults. This would be to protect the health and wellbeing of CYP long-term.

The government’s forthcoming ban on social media platforms for under-16s could have benefits to tackle the issue of excessive smartphone use outside of

school and CYP online safety but it is yet to be determined. However, once this comes into force it would be worth reviewing restrictive smartphone policies in school. This would be to see if they are still required or whether exceptions can be made rather than blanket bans. This is because pupils felt a loss of autonomy with restrictions and that they would like to be able to use their smartphones in school within reason. I feel keeping pupils and school staff safe in the school environment is the biggest priority. The capabilities of smartphones such as taking photos/recordings can undermine people's confidentiality, privacy and consent. Having smartphone restrictions/bans prevents this from occurring. However, it is important to listen to pupil voice and consider where adjustments could be made within reason. This would be to support them to regulate their own use, study and to prepare them for adulthood.

5.6. Directions for future research

EPs work across the age range to support children and young people aged 0-25 years therefore it would be worth exploring the same factors such as attention, physical activity, wellbeing etc. and smartphone use among primary aged pupils (under 11) and higher education students post-16. It would also be beneficial to explore pupils understanding around why smartphone policies have been introduced as pupils seemed to be a bit unsure as to why it had been implemented and frustrated as a result. Additionally, future research could gather pupil views and their understanding why the social media ban has been introduced, and what this may mean for them. Plus, Orben et al., (2025) did not find any reviews/research on the impact of time spent using AI chat applications on smartphones on adolescents' mental health and wellbeing. This could be particularly important to explore as there

are some growing concerns about AI use as it does not share human values, can be prone to societal biases and inaccuracies (McMahon, 2026; BBC News, 2026b).

A future direction could be exploring the unconscious aspects of smartphone use through a psychosocial study thinking about what they symbolise for CYP. It could explore defence mechanisms such as displacement (frustration directed towards something or someone else other than the actual source of frustration) (Freud, 1900). This is because in this study there was an observation from pupils that smartphone restrictions may increase in-person bullying which could be because pupils are feeling frustrated without access to their smartphones.

Future research could dive deeper into the screen time figures and consider what the screen time consists of, is it active (studying online, playing games) or passive (scrolling, watching short-form videos) screen time? It would also be interesting to explore what in general is being gained and lost through excessive screen time.

It could be investigated the impact of smartphone policies on certain more 'vulnerable' pupil populations such as those who are disabled, neurodivergent, looked after, young carers, have medical or mental health conditions. The would be to ensure smartphone policies are not excluding or discriminating certain groups.

To consider participatory research with pupils where they help to design the research study and develop the research questions to investigate with pupils based around their personal experiences with smartphone use. This could be completed by using the Lundy model of participation (Lundy, 2007) by providing pupils with a voice (facilitate a study where they are able to express their views), space (safe inclusive space for them to express their views), audience (their views are listened to) and influence (children's views are acted upon and taken seriously). This is because

there could be factors that they find important to their experience that have not been considered in this research.

To explore the parent views of smartphone use amongst secondary school pupils and smartphone policies in secondary schools. In addition, to have a longer follow-up period or explore the perceived impact of smartphone restrictions that have been in place for over a year, such as the phone pouches.

5.7 Dissemination strategy

I plan to share my final research findings with the school who took part in the study and with the local authority EPS through a presentation or poster. I will consider sharing the findings more widely to other related local authority services and schools through similar methods.

I plan to share my research findings through a poster at an end-of-year event at the Tavistock centre to other trainee EPs, EP colleagues and tutors to generate discussion, promote implications and ideas for future research.

I will consider ways I can disseminate my research more widely to the EP community, the psychology field of research and related professions through publishing my study into a journal or presenting the findings at events/conferences to promote awareness and inspire future research.

I will further disseminate by responding to a UK government consultation on growing up in an online world: a national consultation (DSIT, 2026), to more widely promote my findings and the implications to help with ideas and guidance on preparing CYP for a future in an age of rapid technological change.

5.8 Conclusion

This study set out to explore pupil and school staff views on smartphone use in schools and considered their views as to whether changes to a smartphone policy made a difference to attention/concentration in class, behaviour, wellbeing, physical activity, cyberbullying, screen time and school belongingness. This study also examined pupil reported data in relation to these factors pre- and post-policy change.

This research has highlighted that excessive smartphone use appears to be a societal and national problem that is experienced amongst the adults as well as the CYP. Findings from pupil surveys suggest that smartphone restrictions make no change to a range of factors and that it may slightly decrease closeness to classmates/peers and attention/concentration in class. This shows that tighter restrictions on smartphone in schools do not go far enough in preventing concerns held by adults/policy makers. It would suggest that there needs to be more societal wide changes on the macrosystem as school staff cannot control what happens outside of school, therefore it is up to parents/carers or pupils themselves to regulate their smartphone use. Therefore, there needs to be more public health knowledge and strategies provided by the government and services. It will be important to continue to review smartphone restrictions moving forward as the cost effectiveness and time spent on enforcing them in school may not have the intended benefits.

Remaining safe in school was a prominent feature of this research. Teachers felt that smartphones should not be used in school and felt strongly that smartphones compromise security, behaviour and learning in school. Whereas pupils also acknowledged these issues, they felt that smartphones should be used in school within reason for certain purposes such as contacting parents or studying. In general, it seemed that smartphone restrictions led to some relief for some with

improving wellbeing for teachers and social connections for some pupils. However, it has also led to frustration for others such as suggestion from pupils of more anxious feelings because of not having accessed to a smartphone and a loss of pupils' autonomy and perceived lack of trust. In addition, this research reveals some of the realities of implementing smartphone restrictions in schools. These factors will be particularly important to consider due to mainstream secondary schools needing to be more inclusive for a range of pupil needs as stated in the recent White Paper (DfE, 2026a).

This research has several implications for all the levels that EPs work at and for school staff, policy makers, health and social care professionals as well as for parents and pupils. It has generated ideas for future research to explore which would enable more detailed understandings from pupils' perspectives. These will all be important to consider as the use of smartphones in schools and amongst CYP is an ever-changing and evolving topic as technological advances are occurring all the time.

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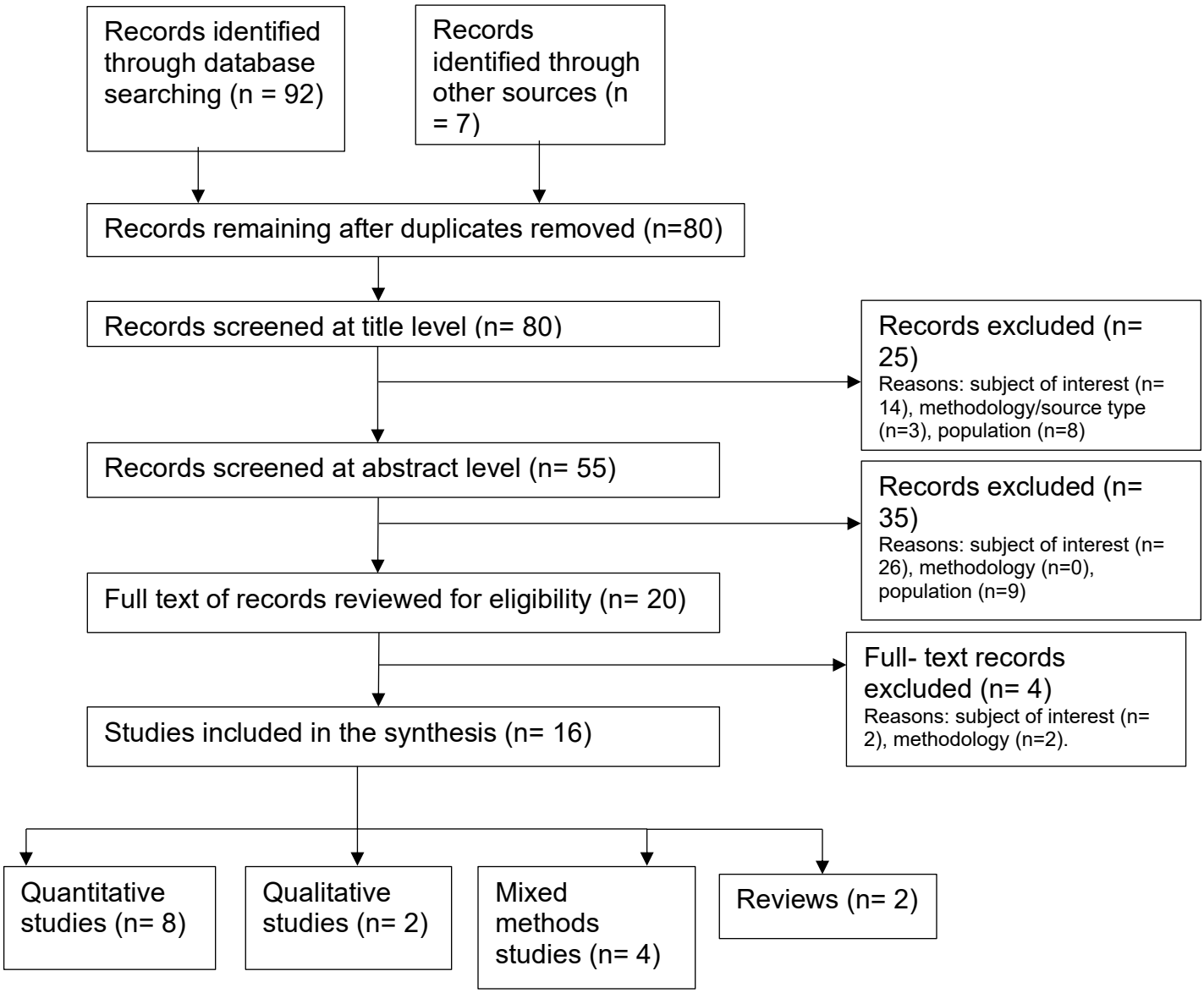
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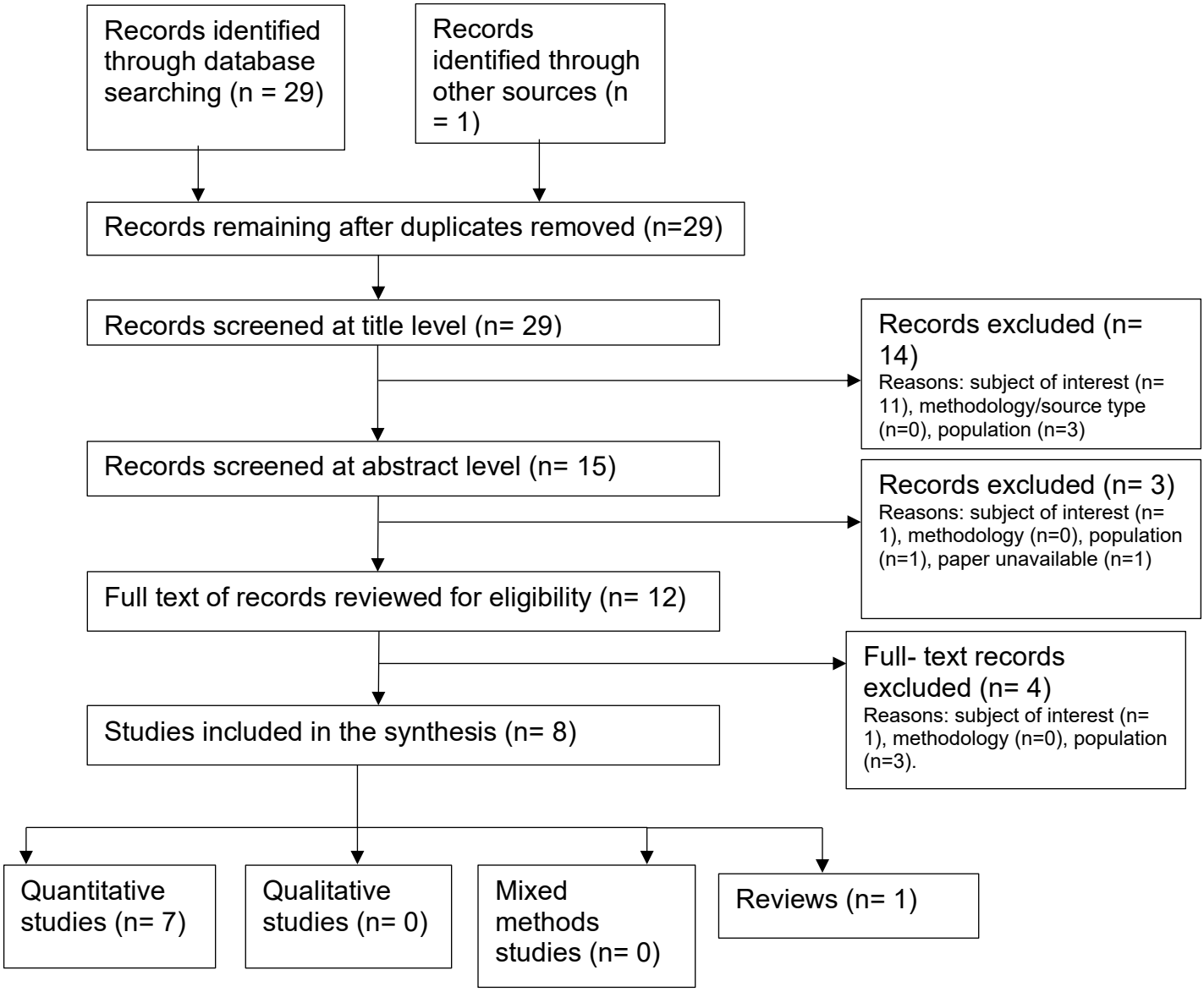
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Appendices

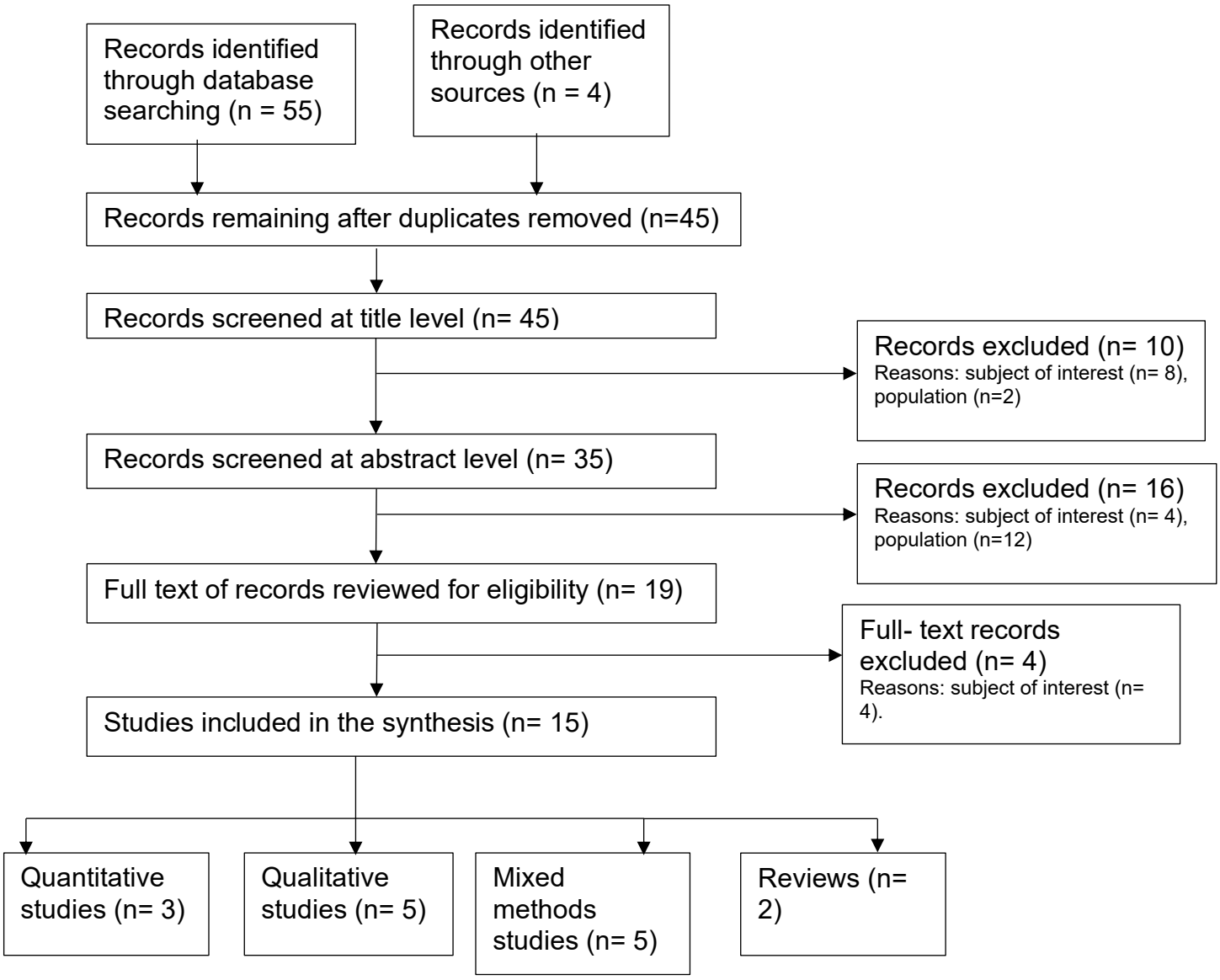
Appendix A. Literature review strategy PRISMA flow chart for LRQ1: What evidence is driving tighter restrictions around pupil mobile phone use in secondary schools?



Appendix B. Literature review strategy PRISMA flow chart for the revised search of LRQ1: What evidence is driving tighter restrictions around pupil mobile phone use in secondary schools?



Appendix C. Literature review strategy PRISMA flow chart for research question 2: How do secondary school pupils and school staff feel about mobile phone use in school?



Appendix D. Full text research papers assessed for inclusion eligibility.

Number	Article title	Author (Year)	Source	Rationale
1	Smartphones at school: A mixed-methods analysis of educators' and students' perspectives on mobile phone use at school.	Gath et al., (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
2	To ban or not to ban? A rapid review on the impact of smartphone bans in schools on social well-being and academic performance.	Bottger & Zierer (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
3	Dismantling digital inequalities: Urban high school students' perspectives of smartphones use in education.	Street (2024)	Database search	Exclude: Topic- looking at the use and attitude towards smartphone technology for in-school and remote learning by urban high schools to reduce digital inequalities.
4	Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review.	Campbell et al., (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
5	Influence of smartphone location on academic and cognitive performance in secondary school students.	McKay (2024)	Database search	Exclude: Topic and population. Most of the sample are college age and the research questions are off topic to the literature review research questions. It is looking at the impact of the differences in presence and

				proximity of smartphones in school.
6	Teachers' perceptions of cell phone use in the secondary classroom: Benefits and barriers.	McCrea (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
7	High school teachers' experiences with student smartphone addiction.	Botelho (2023)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
8	A mixed methods study on the student perspective of having individual access to smartphones at school.	Wike (2023)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
9	Ohio principals with students in grades 6 through 12 and their perceptions and procedures on student cell phone use within their schools.	Toth (2022)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
10	Participatory action research: Managing smartphones in the secondary classroom.	Simon (2022)	Database search	Exclude: Topic- more about providing a set of resources to help maximise the benefits and minimise the detriments of student smartphone usage in the classroom.
11	Teachers' Perspectives toward Smartphone Usage by Students and Resulting Classroom Policies.	Aloteibi et al., (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
12	Problematic Smartphone Use among High School Students.	Spiratos & Ratanasiripong (2023)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
13	Cell Phones, Student Rights, and School Safety: Finding the Right Balance.	Smale et al., (2021)	Database search	Exclude: Methodology- lack of clear research questions or reviewing the research in a systematic way.
14	Teacher's view of the educational relationship between teenagers and smartphones in Spain.	Lloret-Catala et al., (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria

15	Educator perceptions of the social and emotional impact of student cell phone use in middle school environments: A mixed-methods study.	Martin (2025)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
16	Teacher perceptions of cell phone use during the instructional school day.	Tricoli (2023)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
17	Teacher perceptions of appropriate norms for smartphone use during class.	Morrin (2022)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
18	Smartphones as digital instructional interface devices: The teacher's perspective.	Manyeredzi &Mpofu (2022)	Database search	Exclude: Topic and population. This paper specifically looks at teacher views on smartphones for Digital Instructional Interface Devices for science. It is also unclear whether the teachers who participated in this study taught secondary school students or higher education.
19	Perceptions of the influence of cell phones and social media usage on students' academic performance.	Tran (2022)	Database search	Exclude: Topic- there is a specific focus on stakeholder views on academic performances and current school policies and practices and the use of mobile phones within the classroom which is off topic to literature review questions.
20	Teacher perceptions of cell phone utilization in the classroom.	Sarlo (2021)	Database search	Exclude: Topic- more about comparing different teachers perspectives on the integration of technology in the classroom as an

				instructional aid so off topic from literature research questions.
21	Ch-Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes: Preservice Teachers' Perceptions on Mobile Phones--2015-2022.	Thomas et al., (2024)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
22	Student perspectives on banning mobile phones in South Australian secondary schools: A large-scale qualitative analysis.	Bar et al., (2025)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
23	Secondary school smartphone policies in England: a descriptive analysis of how schools rationalize, design, and implement restrictive and permissive phone policies.	Randhawa et al., (2024)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
24	Psychological consequences of school mobile phone bans: Emulated trial of a natural experiment in South Australia	Baggio et al., (2025)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
25	School phone policies and their association with mental wellbeing, phone use, and social media use (SMART Schools): a cross-sectional observational study	Goodyear et al., (2025)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
26	“Phones off while school’s on”: Evaluating problematic phone use and the social, wellbeing, and academic effects of banning phones in schools	King et al., (2024)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
27	Behaviour of Children and Adolescents and the Use of Mobile Phones in Primary Schools in the Czech Republic	Kopecky et al., (2021)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria
28	The impact of banning mobile phones in Swedish secondary schools	Kessel et al., (2020)	Snowballing	Meets inclusion criteria

29	Feasibility study of methods and data to understand the impact of smartphones and social media on children and young people.	Orben et al., (2025)	Manual Search	Meets inclusion criteria
30	Smartphone use during school hours by US youth in the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study.	Nagata et al., (2026)	Database Search	Meets inclusion criteria
31	Mobile phone addiction and suicidal behaviors in adolescents: School-based cross-sectional study in Zhejiang Province, China.	Wu et al., (2022)	Database Search	Meets Inclusion criteria
32	Nomophobia and smartphone addiction amidst COVID-19 home confinement: The parallel mediating role of digital gaming and social media tools usage across secondary school students.	Aydin & Kus., (2023)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
33	The mobile phone addiction and depression among high school students: The roles of cyberbullying victimization, perpetration, and gender.	Wu et al., (2022)	Database search	Meets inclusion criteria
34	Effects of smartphone overdependence and the quality of friendship on depression among high school students.	Sung-Min & Byoung-Jin (2022)	Database Search	Exclude: Participants are older adolescents, not secondary school age.
35	Associations between problematic smartphone use and behavioural difficulties, quality of life, and school performance among children and adolescents.	Kliesener et al., (2022)	Database Search	Meets inclusion criteria
36	The effect of problematic smartphone use on school engagement and disengagement among middle school	Li et al., (2023)	Database Search	Meets inclusion criteria

	students: The mediating role of academic procrastination and sleep quality			
37	Effects of smartphone addiction on cognitive function and physical activity in middle-school children: A cross-sectional study.	Al-Amri et al., (2023)	Database Search	Meets Inclusion criteria
38	Longitudinal association between smartphone ownership and depression among schoolchildren under COVID-19 pandemic.	Adachi et al., (2022)	Database Search	Exclude: Participants are primary school aged, not secondary school aged.
39	Investigation of the relationship between nomophobia and high school entrance exam (LGS) scores in terms of sociodemographic variables.	Yildiz & Baltaci (2022)	Database Search	Exclude: does not specify age of participants and the focus on sociodemographic variables in terms of exploring nomophobia and high school entrance scores is not directly relevant.
40	Investigation of smartphone addiction of middle school and high school students.	Erkol et al., (2025)	Database Search	Exclude: it does not specify age of the participants- it could be older participants.

Appendix E. Overview of research papers included in the literature review.

Author (Year): Title	Country	Focus (aims)	Participants	Methods (sampling/recruitment, research design & method	Data analysis	Main findings	Limitations
Al-Amri et al., (2023)	Saudi Arabia	To investigate whether smartphone addiction affects cognitive function (working memory and selective attention) and physical activity levels in children.	196 children aged 12-14	Participants were recruited from 8 public and private schools and were selected randomly. A quantitative cross-sectional design. Data was collected via a mix of in-person questionnaires and computer- based cognitive testing.	A mixture of inferential tests which mapped onto each research question.	No difference between children addicted to smartphones and non-addicted in terms of working memory. No significant differences in reaction time between the groups, but the addicted children were significantly more accurate than the non-addicted children. Addicted children had much lower physical activity levels whereas non-addicted children had mostly moderate to high activity levels. Researchers suggest that higher-attention accuracy in addicted children might be due to practice effects as heavy smartphone use may build sensorimotor/attentional skills transferable to computer-based tasks.	No control for confounders like sleep or gender which may impact upon factors being investigated.
Aloteibi et al., (2024)	United States of America	To understand what teachers' perceptions of the social, psychological and academic effects	248 Teachers	Purposive and convenience sampling from six schools. Quantitative non-experimental	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics	Teachers tend to perceive negative social, psychological and learning effects of students' smartphone usage. Those who have stronger beliefs about adverse effects	Lack of qualitative information to add richness to the findings as study reported it used the

		of smartphone use on high school students. To see if there are any differences in teachers' overall perceptions of these effects based on the smartphone policy they have implemented.		design and online survey.	(one-way ANOVA)	tend to set stricter classroom policies.	fastest and easiest method.
Aydin & Kus (2023)	Turkey	To look at whether social media usage and digital gaming behaviour are mediators in the relationship between nomophobia and smartphone addiction among secondary school students during Covid-19 confinement.	427 students	Purposive sampling from one secondary school. This was a quantitative cross-sectional design. Data was collected through a self-report survey.	Primarily multiple linear regressions	Nomophobia was positively associated with smartphone addiction. Nomophobia was positively associated with social media usage but not digital gaming behaviour. Social media usage was positively associated with smartphone addiction but not digital gaming behaviour. Nomophobia predicts smartphone addiction both directly and indirectly through social media use. Social media use appears to be a key mechanism linking nomophobia to smartphone addiction.	The sample came from a single elite school in Turkey which impacts generalisability to other schools and areas.
Baggio et al., (2025)	Australia	To see whether the implementation of a mobile phone ban reduced psychological distress in	1062 adolescents. *Part of a larger project involving evaluation of the 2023 South*	Sample already gathered from King et al., (2024). Quantitative. Secondary analysis on a survey from a previous study (King	Descriptive statistics and linear regressions	A phone ban at school was associated with reduced psychological distress and negative affect in adolescents. No significant difference was found for positive affect.	Researchers were unable to control for pre-existing differences in adolescent well-being between schools.

		adolescents. To investigate the effects of the ban on positive and negative affect in relation to adolescents' mood separately.	*Australian school phone ban.*	et al., 2024)- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.			Researchers lacked information on important contextual factors such as parental mental health which could predict outcomes. Data on ethnicity and educational needs also not collected.
Bar et al., (2025)	Australia	Study has three aims: To understand students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of phone use in schools. To investigate students 'views on the effectiveness of phone bans in schools. To identify student-supported approaches or suggestions to manage phones and similar devices in schools.	1549 students across five secondary schools. *Part of a larger project involving evaluation of the 2023 South Australian school phone ban.*	Sample already gathered from King et al., (2024). Qualitative analysis of open-ended survey. Quasi-experimental-before and after.	Thematic analysis	Five categories with 16 themes identified. In the undesired effects of bans, students reported: feeling less independent and trustworthy, losing access to digital learning tools, difficulties in regulating emotional distress without phones. The students reported benefits in areas of face-to-face social interaction, personal health and safety and classroom engagement.	The nature of self-report qualitative data produces statements where it may be hard to determine causality e.g. the effect of the phone ban on mental health is unclear. Themes may be biased by more vocal minority views and lack representativeness of a 'silent majority'. The study employed a survey which restricted the ability for students to elaborate on or clarify their responses.
Botelho (2023)	United States of America	To explore how teachers describe their experiences with student smartphone addiction looking	16 participants and 46 respondents	Purposively selected. Qualitative-use of semi-structured interviews and a qualitative questionnaire	Thematic analysis	The findings were found to suggest that smartphones in the classroom have created new changes and challenges in the high school teaching environment. Smartphone	Some respondents gave brief answers or skipped over addressing some questions on the questionnaire. Bias

		at impacts on mood, behaviours, focus, motivation, learning of students and how teachers manage the problem within the classroom environment.				addiction impairs adolescents socially, emotionally and academically.	of using purposive sampling to select the interview participants.
Böttger & Zierer (2024)	Germany	This paper aimed to examine the effects of smartphone bans in schools on academic performance and social wellbeing.	This paper was a systematic review that analysed data from five different studies.	A PRISMA framework was used to search PsychINFO and Google Scholar databases.	Meta-analysis	The main finding was the banning smartphones has a small but significant effect. The effect is more prominent in social wellbeing than in academic performance. Overall, this research found no significant influence of a smartphone ban on academic performance which contradicts numerous studies which indicate that smartphone use has a negative impact on academic performance.	This research only had five studies which limits the generalisability of the results. Differences in types of smartphone bans make it hard to compare and studies only measured the short-term impacts of bans. Not all studies controlled for confounding variables such as socio-economic status.
Campbell et al., (2024)	Australia	This paper aimed to investigate whether mobile phone use in schools impacts on academic outcomes, mental health/wellbeing and cyberbullying.	This paper was a scoping review with a systematic approach that analysed data from 22 different studies.	A PRISMA framework was used to search PsychINFO, Web of Science, ProQuest databases, A+ Education databases.	Narrative Synthesis	This paper found no conclusive evidence that ‘one-size fits all’ mobile phone bans in schools resulted in improved academic outcomes, mental health and wellbeing and reduced cyberbullying.	This paper acknowledges a limitation that over half of the identified studies were unpublished papers and lack the rigour of the peer-review process.
Gath et al., (2024)	New Zealand	To look at educators and students	217 educators from 89 schools and	Stratified random sampling used. Mixed methods,	Thematic analysis and	The findings indicated that both educators and students were in favour of regulating students’	Researchers reveal that the limitations of the research are

		perspectives on mobile phone in schools, specifically looking at whether they are in favour of regulations.	332 students from 43 schools.	cross sectional survey design. Quantitative element is multi choice questions ranked using a Likert scale and qualitative element is open-ended responses.	descriptive statistics.	phone use at the school level, but they were less in favour of a blanket ban approach. Most participants felt that students should not be allowed to use mobile phones during class time, with a rationale, centred around student learning and safety as they were viewed as a distraction. Concerns about inappropriate use, cyberbullying and social media issues were raised.	the use of online surveys, which do not allow for further follow-up or to prompt deeper into responses. Potentially bias towards those with stronger views who would like to participate in a survey. Sample contained more males than females which may impact the findings.
Goodyear et al., (2025)	United Kingdom	To evaluate the impact of mobile phone policies in school by comparing mental health and wellbeing, sleep, physical activity and education outcomes in adolescents that experience phone restriction throughout the school day.	1,227 adolescents aged 12-15 years from 30 secondary schools.	Stratified sampling to improve comparability between school groups (restrictive vs. permissive). Quantitative. Mixed data collection methods involving self-report surveys, accelerometer data and teacher reports.	Descriptive statistics and Inferential statistics- looking at associations, use of linear and logistical regression models.	There is no evidence that restrictive school policies are associated with overall phone and social media use or improved mental wellbeing in adolescents. The findings do not support the use of tighter restrictions on. Mobile phone use in schools suggesting that polices require further development.	Researchers recognise that a limitation is that the study design is cross sectional which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about causality. They highlight that there is a risk of selection bias and unmeasured confounding variables in study such as school characteristics.
Kessel et al., (2020)	Sweden	This study aimed to replicate findings from Beland and Murphy (2016) that found mobile	1,086 schools responded to the survey and may in total represent 16,724 school	Quasi-experimental study. Quantitative. Looked at 21 years' worth of data (1997-2017).	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Difference-	This study examined the impact of mobile phone bans in Swedish secondary schools and found no effect on academic performance. The researchers specifically wanted to compare	Researchers report that survey was simplified to achieve a high response rate and therefore lost detailed

		phone bans improved academic performance in British schools. The main research question is: Do mobile phone bans in schools improve student academic performance?	year observations across 20 years (1997-2017).		in-differences with fixed effects involving regressions and t-tests.	their findings to another study conducted in the UK (Beland & Murphy, 2016) to see if they found positive effects from mobile phone bans, but this research found contrasting results.	information about compliance and enforcement of bans and characteristics of bans. Generalisability concerns, researchers report that Sweden is a country that implements use of a lot of technology and ICT whereas other countries who do not may find differences.
King et al., (2024)	Australia	To investigate mobile phone bans effects on students' problematic phone use, academic engagement, school belonging and bullying.	1,282 students at baseline and 1,256 students at follow-up. Students are in grades 7-12 from five public secondary schools.	Quasi-experimental design. Quantitative, survey data.	Inferential statistics- Linear regression models.	Problematic phone use was reported by 2.6% of the sample. The researchers found linear mixed models indicated that there was no significant difference between the ban and non-ban group in terms of problematic phone use, academic engagement and school belonging.	Researchers acknowledged several limitations: - Short follow-up period (1 month). They used self-report measures only. It included a small number of schools in a non-randomised design. No objective academic or behavioural data.
Kliesener et al., (2022)	Germany	To investigate PSU, how common it is, what predicts it and how it relates to children's wellbeing and	564 children and adolescents aged 10-18.	The data came from the LIFE Child Study, a cohort study based in Germany investigating healthy child development. This study is a quantitative cross-	Linear and logistic regression	-Only 2.3% showed PSU which is lower than rates reported in other countries. Higher PSU symptoms were linked to older age, being female, more than 2 hours of daily use, and intensive use for social networking, gaming and	Hard to establish causality and self-report measures were used throughout.

		school performance.		sectional study. Data was collected via self-report surveys.		video watching (but not texting or information seeking). PSU (rather than usage time) were the strongest predictor of poorer outcomes, more behavioural difficulties, lower quality of life, and worse school performance. Researchers found that it is the addictive pattern of use- not screen time per se that drives negative outcomes.	
Kopecky et al., (2021)	Czech Republic	The aim of this research was to understand attitudes towards mobile phone use by children and adolescents looking at specifically the school environment and everyday life. This study has three research questions.	27,177 participants aged 7-17 years	Comparative cross-sectional study. Quantitative.	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics- Chi square tests comparing responses between schools allowing and not allowing mobile phones during break time.	The findings show that young people mostly use mobile phones to look at social networks, YouTube and gaming. Young people who had them allowed at school preferred to use them, instead of practicing sports or social activities. On the other hand, in schools where mobile phones were restricted, young people felt bored without activities to do.	Researchers suggested that a limitation of the study were that it was not possible to find more independent variables which would have provided more statistical input. This study lacks causality as it does not look at causal relationships or control for other factors.
Li et al., (2023)	China	To examine how problematic smartphone use (PSU) affects school engagement and disengagement high school students.	Study 1 had 289 adolescents aged 11-18 years. Study 2 had 432 students aged 11-19 years.	The sample was recruited using a convenience/school-based sampling approach rather than random sampling. Study 1 was a quantitative longitudinal study	Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. As well as cross-lagged path analysis	PSU at time 1 significantly predicted lower school engagement and higher school disengagement at time 2, however school engagement/disengagement did not predict PSU at time 2. This finding supports the idea that PSU drives the decline in	Data from a single school in China so it may not be as generalisable to other populations outside of the region.

				which was conducted in two waves. Study 2 was quantitative cross-sectional. Self-report surveys.	and mediation modelling.	engagement rather than the reverse. PSU positively affects disengagement and does so in part by increasing procrastination and worsening sleep quality.	
Lloret-Catala et al., (2024)	Spain	To understand teachers' perspectives on the educational relationship between teenagers and smartphones looking specifically at regulations, educational use, students' digital literacy, teachers' digital competence, demands for good use and future insights.	72 teacher participants	Purposive sampling of schools. Qualitative research design, exploratory study that aims to deepen theoretical aspects to generate new ideas and hypotheses using grounded theory. 10 focus groups.	Thematic analysis	The findings were that six key themes were identified based on what teachers think about the educational relationship between mobile phones and adolescents. These were: regulations on use in the school environment, students digital literacy, teachers' digital competence, teachers' demands for good use, and insights for the future. Researchers conclude that teachers feel that mobile enhanced learning might be a "pipe dream" unless adolescents are better educated in digital literacy and the current educational policies are reviewed.	This research primarily looks at one point of view from teachers and does not consider those views of stakeholders/principals (who make the decisions about mobile phone use in schools), pupils and parents. Multiple views would add richness to the claims made.
Martin (2025)	United States of America	To investigate how student mobile phone use in the school environment impacts the social and emotional wellbeing of students.	16 participants including teachers, counsellors, administrators, principals and school resource officers.	Mixed-methods design had a quantitative card sorting activity (ranking 25 statements) with qualitative interpretation of open-ended follow-up responses.	Descriptive interpretation and inferential statistics-Q-factor analysis and Pearson correlation.	The findings suggested roughly half of teachers flet strongly about restricting mobile phone use in schools and the other half believed that mobile phones should be banned in schools. There were common themes regarding concerns around mobile phone use in the school environment. These were problematic internet use, social and emotional learning	A limited number of participants may mean that findings are not generalisable to other contexts.

						considerations, peer relationships, stress, anxiety and social perfectionism.	
McCrea (2024)	United States of America	To look at teachers' perceptions on the use of mobile phones in the classroom and how policies regarding smartphone use should be developed.	46 teachers responded to the survey, 10 teachers interviewed	Mixed methods design, there is a quantitative survey used and qualitative semi-structured individual interviews.	Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.	Teachers reported in the survey feeling concerned about bullying, cheating and class distractions Further investigation through the interviews revealed concerns about distraction, a lack of deeper thinking and inappropriate content.	The researcher acknowledges limitations related to a smaller sample size and lack of newer and younger teachers included within the sample who may have held different views. Another limitation might have been the time that had passed between the COVID-19 pandemic and the questions being asked with potential memory issues.
Morrin (2022)	United States of America	To explore teacher perceptions of classroom norms for smartphone use, looking at the values they hold about smartphone use specifically.	8 high school teachers	Qualitative research using Semi-structured open-ended interviews.	Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA).	Teachers shared their experiences with their students and their own mobile phone use during class revealing some discrepancies in beliefs about student versus teacher mobile phone use. As well as themes around usefulness of smartphones, picking their battles when enforcing policies and the need for support from school leaders, colleagues and parents.	Researcher acknowledges limitations related to conducting interviews over the online platform zoom such as loss of non-verbal cues. A smaller sample size worked for the research design and analysis however may not be generalisable to other contexts and populations.

Nagata et al., (2026)	United States of America	To measure smartphone usage during school hours using passive sensing data from devices rather than self-report data. Furthermore, it examined whether sociodemographic characteristics and problematic screen use were associated with the amount of school-day smartphone use.	640 adolescents	A quantitative cross-sectional design drawing on secondary data.	Multivariable linear regression	-Adolescents spent an average of 1.16 hours (about 70 minutes) on their smartphones during school hours. -Social media apps accounted for the largest share of that time followed by video apps and gaming apps. -Older adolescents (16 and over), black students and those from lower-income households showed significantly higher school-day smartphone and social media use- differences of roughly 12-10 minutes more per day. -Higher scores on problematic social media use and problematic mobile phone use scales were both linked to more school-day smartphone and social media time.	Data was only for Android-only users (so results might not generalise to iOS users).
Orben et al., (2025)	United Kingdom	To explore how research of the causal relationships between digital technology use and population-level child and adolescent developmental outcomes can be improved.	This report used a systematic approach featuring PRISMA flow charts to search for research papers. It looked at: an Umbrella review of the relationship between time spent on social media,	A PRISMA frameworks was used to search MEDLINE, CDSR and PROSPERO databases as well as Google Scholar.	Narrative synthesis	Adolescents who spent more time on social media reported poorer mental health. There were no experimental studies on healthy adolescents that looked at reducing time spent on social media to see if it affected adolescent mental health or wellbeing. Therefore, researchers were unable to determine whether there is a causal impact of time spent on social media on population-level mental health and wellbeing. High quality experimental studies that test whether reducing adolescent social	Only one review out of seven was found to be of high quality. The quality of primary studies included in the review was also of low quality. Lack of experimental studies make causality hard to determine.

			smartphones and AI Chat applications and adolescent mental health and wellbeing which yielded 7 results. A Narrative synthesis of the relationship between content viewed on social media and social media/smartphone bans on adolescent mental health and wellbeing which yielded 9 results.			media use improves mental health would improve our understanding of whether there is a negative causal relationship. When looking at the effectiveness of school smartphone policies, evidence was more consistent for restrictive school phone policies positively influencing in-school behaviours (e.g. reducing screen time in school and bullying, or increasing physical activity), yet it was less robust and more context-dependent for mental health and wellbeing outcomes that are likely determine by both in- and out-of-school factors. Researchers did not find any reviews on the impact of time spent using AI chat applications or smartphones on adolescents' mental health and wellbeing.	
Rawdhawa et al., (2024)	United Kingdom	This study aimed to look at what the content of restrictive and permissive school smartphone policies are and how restrictive and permissive school smartphone policies are implemented.	Data was collected from pupils (n= 1198), teachers (n= 53) and senior leadership teams in schools (n=30) for analysis.	This study drew upon the initial sampling frame for the SMART schools' study which consisted of 1345 secondary schools across England. A stratified sampling approach was used based on propensity scores which were developed using the categorisation of	Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse school policy documents and descriptive statistics, and Mann-Whitney-U tests were	The findings showed that mist schools restrict how adolescents use their smartphones with very few schools permitting smartphones to be used any time during the school day. Smartphones were positioned as benefitting safety, learning and communication. Schools aimed to implement restrictive policies to safeguard pupils and reduce disruption to learning and minimise risks to academic attainment. Decisions	This study did not include parents' views and researchers felt that the analysis from the surveys lacked depth and could have been defined better to have looked at relationships between factors explored.

				restrictive or permissive school policies. A mixed methods approach was used.	used to analyse survey data.	were made on smartphone policies without consulting with pupils. Pupils in restrictive policy schools were less likely to agree that pupils I. their school supported and followed smartphone rules compared to permissive schools.	
Spiratos & Ratanasiripong (2023)	United States of America	To examine associations among problematic smartphone use, depression, stress, self-esteem and grit and academic performance among high school students.	319 high school students aged 14-18 years	Quantitative cross-sectional (online) survey design.	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analysis (ANOVAs and multiple regression analysis).	The findings showed that there were significant correlations between problematic smartphone use, depression, stress, self-esteem, grit and academic performance. It was found that stress, self-esteem and grit were significant predictors of problematic smartphone use.	This study was a case study of one school which may affect representativeness and generalisability to other contexts. The timing of this study is unique as it occurred around Covid-19 pandemic when students were returning to school which may impact upon replicability and representativeness too.
Thomas et al., (2024)	United States of America	To investigate preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the use of mobile phones in the classroom to see if there had been any changes in their perceptions since 2015.	Total of 545 preservice teachers across all three studies 2015- 245 participants 2018- 157 participants 2022- 142 participants	Convenience sampling. Quantitative survey research, in a longitudinal cross-sectional design. The study compared findings from three studies conducted in 2015, 2018 and 2022.	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (one-way ANOVA).	Findings indicated that preservice teachers support for mobile phone use in schools has fluctuated over the past two decades with a dramatically decline in 2022. The concerns have remained the same but an increase in the concern around mobile phones distracting students and teachers in the classroom was observed.	Researchers acknowledge that this study had a convenience sample which would limit the generalisation of the findings and create potential for sampling bias (those with stronger views participating. Also, a larger

							number of females in the sample.
Toth (2022)	United States of America	To investigate middle and high school student principals' perceptions of student mobile phone use within their schools.	212 responses from principals and assistant principals.	Mixed methods. A survey which included closed and open questions.	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics using a range of tests such as one-way ANOVA, multiple linear regression and Pearson correlation. Thematic analysis	The principals felt that mobile phone use affected academic achievement and led to breaking the rules in schools. The principals recognised some useful benefits of use of mobile phones in schools such as developing 21st century skills and access to information. However, they were also concerned about mobile phones being addictive, distracting and leading to cheating and harassment.	A limitation of this research is that principals with stronger views on mobile phone use may have been more likely to have completed the survey leading to some bias. There was also an uneven representation of school typologies with some schools having very small sample sizes which could impact upon generalisability of the findings.
Tricoli (2023)	United States of America	To understand teacher and administrator perceptions of mobile phone use during the school day.	14 participants, 12 interviews, 2 focus groups: 4 teachers per focus group	Purposive sampling. Qualitative- using individual interviews, focus groups and document analysis of the school's mobile phone policy.	Thematic analysis	The research identified four main themes: these were disconnection within the school setting, technology in higher education plays a role in the perception of mobile phone use, how the Covid19 pandemic impacted the views of mobile phones and the need for professional learning.	Researcher mentions limitations such as sample size, that the study was conducted over a short period of time, and that the sample was purposely selected based on location which may effect generalisability.
Wike (2020)	United States of America	To explore how adolescents in an independent school perceive having individual access to	450 upper school students in grades 9-12 completed the survey. 4	Convenience and purposeful sampling. Sequential mixed methods design. A quantitative element: Web-based survey	Descriptive statistics to understand general patterns and	Adolescents feel that they can regulate phone use without the intervention of adults and that current phone policies are fair. It was found that phones can cause students anxiety, stress,	The sampling of four students for interview had some limitations as the views were not as polarised as

		smartphones at school.	students completed semi-structured interviews.	and a qualitative, semi-structured interview.	thematic analysis for qualitative.	distraction, however they also offer an opportunity to connect with friends, take brain breaks and look up information at times of curiosity, stay in touch with parents.	expected as they all recognised, they could function without their mobile phones.
Wu et al., (2022)	China	To investigate how mobile phone addiction relates to depression in high school pupils and whether cyberbullying, victimisation and perpetration explain that link.	1,297 high school pupils.	A cluster sampling method was used to recruit pupils from two schools. A quantitative cross-sectional design. Survey data was collected.	Correlational analysis to test a sequential mediation model.	Mobile phone addiction was directly linked to higher depression. Students who were addicted to their mobile phones were more likely to be cyberbullied which in turn increased depression. Victims of cyberbullying were more likely to go on to perpetrate it themselves and this was more likely to occur in boys. Girls showed higher depression and phone addiction overall.	Hard to establish causality- is it that mobile phone addiction leads to higher depression or vice versa.
Yu et al., (2025)	China	To investigate the association between mobile phone addiction and suicidal behaviours and to explore the potential mediating roles of sleep quality, depression and anxiety.	26,394 adolescents (aged 10-19), using multistage cluster sampling across 376 schools.	Multistage cluster sampling with three stages with a random selection. A quantitative cross-sectional design and self-report surveys were used to measure factors explored.	This study used several quantitative statistical techniques applied in stages which included descriptive statistics, multinominal logistic regression, multivariate linear regression and	-Adolescents with mobile phone addiction had higher odds of suicidal ideation and attempts compared to those without, even after adjusting for confounding variables. -Researchers concluded that mobile phone addiction was associated with suicidal behaviours in adolescents with sleep duration, depression and anxiety partially mediating this association.	Hard to establish causality- is that mobile phone addiction leads to more suicidal behaviours or more suicidal behaviours leading to greater mobile phone addiction.

	mediation analysis.

Appendix F. Critical appraisal of research papers included in the literature review.

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Research

Question	Bar et al., (2025)	Botelho (2023)	Lloret-Catala et al., (2024)	Morrin (2022)	Tricoli (2023)
Q1: Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes- there are three clearly stated aims.	To an extent- there are four clearly stated research questions and purpose clearly stated.	Yes- there is a clear aim stated in the methodology section	Yes- aims are stated throughout the paper	Yes- the purpose and aims are stated throughout the paper.
Q2: Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes- it is looking at open-ended responses from a survey.	Yes- the researcher is interested in how the teachers describe their experiences	Yes- the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the beliefs and attitudes of teachers	Yes- it is looking to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of mobile phone use in the classroom.	Yes- it is looking capture school staff's perceptions of mobile phone use to understand their perspectives on policies.
Q3: Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes- it is looking to understand students' views of the benefits and drawbacks of smartphone use.	Yes- qualitative descriptive design is appropriate.	Yes- an exploratory approach is taken with focus groups to generate new ideas and hypotheses	Yes- the qualitative approach works well with the aim and research question.	Yes- the qualitative approach seems appropriate to address the aims of the research
Q4: Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Yes- the sample came from five public secondary schools which were purposively selected as they	Yes- purposive sampling was required as the study specifically needed teachers with direct experience of	Yes- purposive sampling to get a diverse range of teachers from different schools (e.g. rural vs. urban, public vs.	Yes- convenience sampling looking for teachers with experiences of smartphones in the classroom.	Yes- purposive sampling was used to target educators with direct experience of mobile phone policies

	were implementing phone bans.	observing students using smartphones.	private, different mobile phone policies)		
Q5: Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes- there were 8 open-ended questions across two surveys (pre- and post). First survey contained four questions about feelings related to phone use in school generally in relation to benefits, drawbacks, potential regulations and feedback. The follow-up questionnaire looked at positive aspects of the ban, downsides of it and potential strategies and feedback.	Yes- qualitative open-ended questions on a survey and semi-structured interviews to gain descriptive information about experiences.	Yes- ten focus groups took place with teachers	Yes- semi-structured interviews were appropriate for exploring teacher experiences.	Yes- interviews and focus groups addressed research questions.
Q6: Has the relationship between researcher and participants been	Not sure- this has not been explicitly stated; there are details about the gender and profession of the	Yes- the researcher acknowledges potential for bias (due to having a similar background to the participants	No- this has not been explicitly stated in the methodology	Yes- the researcher mentions that they recruited vis social media to ensure no preexisting working relationships	Yes- there is a section amount the researcher's role where it considers their background

adequately considered?	researchers but no comment about how it links to relationship with participants.	and experience of student smartphone addiction) and have a reflexivity protocol to monitor this.		existed with participants and checked their own subjectivity before conducting the interviews. The researcher also followed up with participants to ensure that no researcher bias influenced the findings.	and potential for bias.
Q7: Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Yes, this study gained ethical approval from a university, and students and parents provided consent.	Yes- researcher states they have followed all ethical guidelines from school districts and approval gained. The researcher explicitly states several ethical considerations	Not explicitly stated- there is one sentence about the research being designed in accordance with the ethical criteria of the institution sponsoring the study but no further details	Yes- obtained approval before recruitment, consent gained with right to withdraw and confidentiality considerations.	Yes- obtained approval, used consent forms and followed relevant ethical procedures.
Q8: Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes- clear themes extracted through the thematic analysis and it is explained with example evidence the responses that	Yes- clear themes extracted through the thematic analysis and the researcher details how each phase is followed.	Yes- clear themes extracted through a thematic analysis by a team of researchers and procedure is spoken about.	Yes- clear themes identified and the researcher followed-up with participants to check accuracy of findings.	Yes- clear themes identified through as thematic analysis and) and data came from multiple sources such as interviews

	drove that theme arising.				and focus groups to triangulate findings.
Q9: Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes- clear diagram of the themes that emerged and discussion of the findings linking them to previous research and ideas.	Yes- clearly stated themes which answer research questions.	Yes- in the results and conclusion although there is no clear 'key findings' section.	Yes- clearly stated in results and discussed further.	Yes- clearly stated in results and discussed further.
Q10: How valuable is the research?	Valuable- looking at student's views on mobile phone use and policy in schools and social dimensions of phone ban which had not been previously explored. Discussion of implications for school policies and decision makers.	Valuable- the researcher has contributed to literature on teacher experiences of smartphone addictions. They offer future directions for further research. Implications for the education setting discussed such as psychoeducation.	Valuable- research focused on addressing gaps in the literature by gathering teacher views a purposively gathered a diverse range of experiences. There are practical implications that the findings can inform educational practice, particularly teacher training.	Valuable- addresses a gap around teacher perspectives on smartphone policies. There are clear implications for school leaders to engage in discussions with teachers to develop norms around smartphone use and provide pupils with another device such as a Chromebook to help with learning. Suggestion that administrators communicate with parents at the start of the new year.	Valuable- The findings offer actionable recommendations for schools such as involving teachers in policy development. It also captures a unique moment in time considering the Covid-19 context. It also looked at both teachers and administrators' perspectives.

Evaluation tool for quantitative research studies (Long, Godfrey, Randall, Brettle & Grant, 2002).

N.B Questions only answered that are appropriate to the research study and have not already been answered in Appendix E.

First table

Review Area (RA) and Key Questions (KQs)	**Aloteibi et al., (2024)**	**Baggio et al., (2025)**	**Kopecky et al., (2021)**	**Kessel et al., (2020)**
RA1: STUDY OVERVIEW	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.
RA2 STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS KQs: *The study:* What type of study is this? What was the intervention? What was the comparison intervention? Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention? What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review? *Setting:* Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out? *Sample:* What was the source population? What were the inclusion	Quantitative nonexperimental design and data collected through an online survey. The study is addressing gaps in the literature and has some theoretical frameworks is it based upon. Purposive and convenience sampling was used to identify participants from six schools in three school districts in Southern California, USA, over 200 teachers took part in the study. No explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria stated, however researchers do mention that they removed incomplete survey	Quantitative, it is a secondary analysis of King et al., (2024) of a natural experiment and cross-sectional design. This study is looking to build a limited evidence base on the psychological effects of mobile phone bans. The sample was over 1000 adolescents in Australia. The study did not have a strict inclusion or exclusion criteria apart from an adolescent attending school and excluded if missing data from survey. Sample size	Comparative cross-sectional quantitative survey study. This study is looking at schools CYP behaviours attitudes to mobile phones in school, comparing schools that allow and prohibit mobile phones at school. Sample was over 27,000 7–17-year-olds. The researchers did not explicitly state their inclusion and exclusion criteria. A random sampling method was selected. The sample size was sufficient for the	A quantitative quasi-experimental study using observational data from the same school's overtime (1997-2017) with natural variation in policy implementation. This study analyses changes over time between schools with and without bans, looking at potential changes in test scores,

criteria? What were the exclusion criteria? How was the sample selected? If more than one group of subjects, how many groups were there and how many people were in each group? How were subjects allocated to the groups? What was the size of the study sample, and of any separate groups? Is the achieved sample size sufficient for the study aims and to warrant conclusions drawn? Is information provided on loss to follow up? Is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study? What are the key sample characteristics, in relation to the topic area being reviewed?	data and were interested in teachers only. The sample size was adequate for the aims and conclusions drawn but it should be noted that the findings are correlational and from one area in one country only.	is generally efficient for aims and conclusions drawn.	study's aims and conclusions drawn.	grades and failure rates. This study had 1086 schools respond to the survey and looked at 16,724 school year observations across a 21-year period specifically looking at Swedish grade 9 schools. The study has an inclusion criterion for secondary schools, the time period the school was operating and national outcome data available. Excluded were small schools, missing outcome data and non-response to the survey. This study had a census/population approach to the sampling,

				contacting all suitable Swedish secondary schools. This study had a sufficient sample size for its aims and conclusion.
RA3: ETHICS *Ethics:* Was the Ethical Committee approval obtained? Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study? Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?	Yes, ethical approval was granted by a university review board. Participants gave informed consent before completing the online survey. The survey is anonymous to protect participants identity. Participation was voluntary and minimal risk.	Yes, ethical approval was obtained from a university, and the South Australian Department of Education also approved the study. Participants gave informed consent, and Parents were informed and gave the option to opt out. Mostly ethical issues do appear to have been adequately addressed, however psychological distress is a sensitive topic, and it is unclear whether support services information were offered upon completion of the questionnaire.	Yes, ethical committee approval was obtained from a university for this study. Participant and parental consent was gained. Missing data about consent forms/information sheets and safeguarding/distress protocols as sensitive topics were asked about. Data collected was anonymous and confidential.	No mention of Ethical committee approval obtained. Gaining informed consent is not explicitly mentioned and this could be because the students were indirect participants and that school administrators and principals were providing consent by completing the surveys. Issues related to ethics do not appear to be explicitly mentioned but this may also be

				because the risks are low as data is anonymised and was not dealing with sensitive data.
RA4: GROUP COMPARABILITY AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT *Comparable Group:* If there was more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In what respects were they comparable and in what were they not? How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage?). Was this control adequate to justify the author's conclusions? Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they? Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings? *Outcome Measurement:* What were the outcome	The study did not control for confounding variables in its analysis in factors such as teaching experience and gender. These factors do not appear to have been considered in the interpretation of the findings. The survey instruments used for this study were the primary and secondary smartphone policies in classroom which asked teachers to categorise the policy in their school into A, B, C or D. Secondly, the Scale of teachers' beliefs concerning mobile devices was used and developed from a previous study (Coskun and Cumaoglu, 2013). The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .91 showing good internal consistency and reliability. The measures are looking at	The researchers mention that they identified relevant confounding factors that predicted school ban implementation and psychological consequences. Researchers had a table where they presented covariates taking them into account. Psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale and mood was assessed using a mood scale the programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. The measures have been used in previous studies and were used on a large	No mention of confounding variables being controlled for. This does not appear to have been considered when discussing the findings. There was a single anonymous online questionnaire distributed via Google forms to CYP of a wide age range. The questionnaire indicated good internal consistency, however there is no full questionnaire available in the appendix to review the layout and development of questions.	This study used fixed effects models to control for national trends and school specific confounding variables. The researchers considered limitations of their study into their interpretation. The study looked at Average Grade Points, Average National Test Score in Mathematics and Percentage Failing National Mathematics Test which were all appropriate. Measures may be sensitive to grade

criteria? What outcome measures were used? Are the measures appropriate given the outcome criteria? What other (e.g. process, cost) measures are used? Are the measures well-validated? Are the measures of known responsive to change? Whose perspective do the outcome measures address (professional, service, user, carer)? Is there a sufficient breath of perspective? Are the outcome criteria useful/appropriate within routine practice? Are the outcome measures useful/appropriate within routine practice? Time Scale of Measurement: What was the length of follow-up, and at what time points was outcome measurement made? Is this period of follow-up sufficient to see the desired effects?	teacher views which appears to be collected quantitatively in a sufficient way asking for their opinion.	sample size of pupils in this study.		inflation and changes in grading practices although all three measures allow for triangulation of data. The perspective of the surveys are the educational administrators and are missing the perspectives of students, parents and other school staff.
RA5: POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS To what setting are the study findings generalisable? To what	Findings are generalisable to high school teachers; however, the context of the study needs to be considered in terms of	The study findings are generalisable to adolescents from 12-17 years in high smartphone ownership contexts. They	There is a large sample size with a wide age range (7-17 years) however it needs to be considered that most	These findings are generalisable to Sweden secondary schools and

population are the study's findings generalisable? Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study? What are the implications for policy? What are the implications for service practice?	culture, country and education system. The conclusions are justified for that sample; however, it should be considered that it is based upon the beliefs of teachers only. Recommendation for teachers to encourage and promote high face-to-face student engagement, group work and student engagement. For teachers to use cognitive load theory elements to regulate their classroom learning environments by implementing smartphone practices and policies. Researchers feel that it is imperative that school administrators develop effective and equitable school and classroom policies that control smartphone interference in students' learning but not to ban students from bringing smartphones into school entirely (as this could create inequities in schools that serve students from lower	are generalisable to Australian schools. The conclusion is justified as this study is statistically rigorous with a large sample and uses appropriate language of 'may have' rather than making definitive claims. This study has implications for considering smartphone policy restrictions to support psychological wellbeing of adolescents. The research suggests implementation of interventions that target mobile phone use and mental health.	respondents came from three regions in the Czech Republic with limited information about socio-economic status which needs to be considered when generalising. The conclusion is justified given the large sample and clear quantitative survey results. The study suggests implications for policy and regulating the use of mobile phones is desirable with other policies in place to encourage activities and social interactions in school.	similar contexts (countries with similar school systems). The population generalisable to is adolescents aged 15-16 years. The conclusions relate to findings and policy with important caveats. Researchers make clear an implication for Swedish policymakers that national mobile phone bans should not be expected to improve academic test performance in schools, and that this can be applied to other countries that operate in high-ICT contexts.

	income neighbourhoods). Researchers suggest that schools should be required to revisit their smartphone policy semi-annually because of changing trends in technology and students' smartphone usage.			
RA6: OTHER COMMENTS What were the total number of references used in the study? Are there any other noteworthy features of the study?	About 50 references, this study was originally conducted as part of one of the researcher's thesis. This study applied two theoretical frameworks to provide explanations for how smartphones might affect learning and how beliefs influence policy decisions: these were cognitive load theory and theory of planned behaviour.	27 references used for this study, which was a secondary analysis of another study (King et al., 2024).	There were 34 references used for this study.	There were around 32 references used for this study. This study was explicitly designed to replicate Beland & Murphy (2016) in a different context.

Second table

Review Area (RA) and Key Questions (KQs)	**Goodyear et al., (2025)**	**Spiratos & Ratanasiripong (2023)**	**King et al., (2024)**	**Thomas et al., (2024)**
RA1: STUDY OVERVIEW	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.
RA2 STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS	This was a cross-sectional observational study investigating smartphone restriction	This was a quantitative, cross sectional survey study. This research looked at phone use in	This is a quasi-experimental design with a longitudinal repeated measures	This is a longitudinal comparative survey study. This study looked at trainee

KQs: *The study:* What type of study is this? What was the intervention? What was the comparison intervention? Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention? What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review? *Setting:* Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out? *Sample:* What was the source population? What were the inclusion criteria? What were the exclusion criteria? How was the sample selected? If more than one group of subjects, how many groups were there and how many people were in each group? How were subjects allocated to the groups? What was the size of the study sample, and of any separate groups? Is the achieved sample size sufficient for the study aims and to warrant conclusions drawn? Is information provided on loss to follow up? Is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study? What are the	policies in English secondary schools. The population was secondary school pupils from schools with restrictive and permissive phone policies. It excluded special schools, pupil referral units, independent schools, schools without an accessible smartphone policy and schools with different phone policies for different year groups in mainstream education. Schools were recruited within a 100-mile radius of Birmingham. This study using a stratified sampling approach to compare restrictive and permissive schools. There were 30 schools with 1227 participants recruited. The sample size was large therefore was sufficient for the study aims and conclusions drawn.	high school pupils looking at the impacts on a range of factors such as mental health and academic performance. The population was 14–18-year-old high school pupils. The researchers do not explicitly state the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Voluntary convenience sampling was used in this study. The sample had over 300 participants to draw sufficient conclusions from.	design. This study compared ban and non-ban schools as well as before and after implementing tighter restrictions in school on smartphone use. This research was also looking at real world policy change to see if it made a difference to PSU, academic engagement, school belonging and bullying. This study looked at high school students from grades 7-12. This study included schools that were implementing bans or had already implementing bans, there were no other inclusion criteria, but the research team did request that the Department of Education support the identification of schools from similar metropolitan regions with comparable student enrolments and	teacher views on mobile phone use in the classroom which this study also looked to investigate in school staff. This research had a total of 544 trainee teachers across three time points (245 in 2015, 157 in 2018, 142 in 2022). This study does not explicitly state an inclusion and exclusion criteria. The sample size was big enough to warrant the conclusions drawn from the study.

key sample characteristics, in relation to the topic area being reviewed?			socioeconomic zones. This study did not explicitly state an exclusion criteria. This study used convenience sampling. This study has a large sample size of over 1000 students completing measures pre- and post- policy changes which was sufficient for conclusions drawn.	
RA3: ETHICS *Ethics:* Was the Ethical Committee approval obtained? Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study? Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?	This study gained ethical approval from a university research ethics committee. Informed consent was gained through opt-out parental consent and informed consent from pupils and teachers. There could be more detail about the ethical procedures, however, it appears that basic ethical requirements were met.	This study gained approval from the University IRB Board. Parent and student consent forms were completed. There is no information about steps taken to minimise harm, safeguard and debrief participants.	This study gained University Ethical approval, followed by DECD approval. Students gave informed consent and parents were informed and provided with opt out consent. There is no information about steps taken to minimise harm, safeguard and debrief participants.	This study does not mention whether it has received ethical approval. It does not mention gaining informed consent from the participants. Therefore, ethical issues have not been adequately addressed.
RA4: GROUP COMPARABILITY AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT	This study used a propensity score select schools with permissive and restrictive schools	This study does not mention controlling for confounding variables. This study used the	This research took into account socioeconomic status, psychological distress and life	This study did not appear to control for confounding variables. Therefore, they were

Comparable Group: If there was more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In what respects were they comparable and in what were they not? How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage?). Was this control adequate to justify the author's conclusions? Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they? Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings? *Outcome Measurement:* What were the outcome criteria? What outcome measures were used? Are the measures appropriate given the outcome criteria? What other (e.g. process, cost) measures are used? Are the measures well-validated? Are the measures of known responsive to change? Whose perspective do the outcome measures address (professional,	(and had more restrictive schools than permissive schools taking part). The propensity score considered school characteristics such as urban vs. rural to consider confounding variables. It is acknowledged that the school characteristics may impact on the outcomes. Researchers acknowledge that there is a risk of selection bias and unmeasured confounding in this study. The outcome measures were the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale completed twice (primary outcome). Self-report questionnaires were used to measure secondary outcomes, these were GAD-7 for anxiety, PHQ-9 for depression, Problematic Social	Smartphone Addiction Scale Short Version, Epidemiologic studies Depression scale, perceived stress scale, Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and Grit Scale Short Version, which are all validated measures and appropriate for the study's aims. This research just looks at the perspectives of adolescents.	satisfaction as moderators rather than confounding variables. The researchers took these factors into account when discussing their findings and acknowledged their limitations. This study did not have a control group. The researchers provide a link to access all the outcome measures that they used; the measures appear to be appropriate and well-validated. They have been used in previous studies. This study just focuses on the perspective of students.	not taken into account in the researchers' interpretations. This study used the Mobile Phone Use in the Classroom Survey which is an appropriate and validated measure which was used in a previous study. This study just looks at the perspectives of trainee teachers and does not consider pupils or other members of schools staff.

service, user, carer)? Is there a sufficient breath of perspective? Are the outcome criteria useful/appropriate within routine practice? Are the outcome measures useful/appropriate within routine practice? Time Scale of Measurement: What was the length of follow-up, and at what time points was outcome measurement made? Is this period of follow-up sufficient to see the desired effects?	Media Use scale. GENEActiv accelerometer watch was worn for 7 days to measure sleep and physical activity. Educational outcomes were measured by teacher-reports on academic attainment and Pupil behaviour questionnaire. These are valid measures with multiple perspectives measured (pupil and teacher). These measures detect change.			
<u>RA5: POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS</u> To what setting are the study findings generalisable? To what population are the study's findings generalisable? Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study? What are the implications for policy? What are the implications for service practice?	Study is applicable across UK secondary schools and for secondary school pupils. The conclusion is justified given the conduct of the study. Implications of this research are that it does not provide evidence to support the use of school policies that prohibit the use of phones during the	This study is applicable to older adolescents, 14 and up, so those that are in Year 9, 10 and 11. Findings from this research took place in the United States of America, therefore are applicable to that popular with a similar education system. The conclusion of the study includes all factors analysed, however it discusses removal of	These findings are generalisable to adolescents in grades 7-12 in Australia. The conclusion summarises outcomes to factors explored and gives directions for future research. This study does not explicitly state its implications, however does state in the conclusion that there is a continual need to	This study is generalisable to trainee teachers in the United States of America. The conclusion is justified and highlights that the attitudes of trainee teachers follow the national trend in attitudes towards mobile phone use in school. This study explicitly states that it

	school day in their current form. School policies should be developed holistically with adolescents. To consider how to help social media use in adolescents and prevent behaviours that cause poor mental health.	smartphones from the classroom to prevent PSU, although acknowledges that this takes place mostly outside of the classroom. It would have been more beneficial to think about how PSU could be tackled outside of the classroom. Implications of this study include PSU prevention programmes, building school communities that support reduced smartphone usage, provide alternative devices in the classroom such as chromebooks, educate stakeholders on the harms of PSU and establish mental health supports on high school campuses that create a culture of grit and connectedness.	critically evaluate the effects of human-computer interactions in learning institutions, particularly involving children and adolescents to understand optimal conditions that support wellbeing and learning.	has implications for educational stakeholders regarding the use of mobile phones in the classroom as the majority do not support their use. Researchers suggest that teacher preparation programs should instruct their students on strategies for managing mobile phones in their classrooms, including strategies related to disruptions, cheating, cyberbullying, mental health issues and mobile phone addiction.
RA6: OTHER COMMENTS What were the total number of references used in the study? Are there any other noteworthy features of the study?	35 references were used. This study is part of the SMART schools study.	44 references were used.	37 references were used for this study. Was part of wider research on the South Australian smartphone ban.	67 references were used for this study.

Third Table

Review Area (RA) and Key Questions (KQs)	**Nagata et al., (2025)**	**Yu et al., (2025)**	**Aydin & Kus., (2023)**	**Wu et al, (2022)**
RA1: STUDY OVERVIEW	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.
RA2 STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS KQs: *The study:* What type of study is this? What was the intervention? What was the comparison intervention? Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention? What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review? *Setting:* Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out? *Sample:* What was the source population? What were the inclusion criteria? What were the exclusion criteria? How was the sample selected? If more than one group of subjects, how many groups were there and how many people were in each group? How were subjects allocated to	This study is a quantitative cross-sectional design drawing on secondary data. This study looked at smartphone usage during school hours using passive sensing data from devices and also investigated whether sociodemographic characteristics and PSU were associated with the amount of school-day smartphone use. Sample were 640 adolescents. No inclusion or exclusion criteria mentioned. However, the sample was constrained to participants with 2 or more weekdays of data during school-day hours	This study is a quantitative cross-sectional design. This study investigated the association between mobile phone addiction and suicidal behaviours exploring the mediating roles of sleep quality, depression and anxiety amongst high school students. The source population is 26,394 adolescents aged 10-19 years. There is no explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned, however researchers mention that students with serious health conditions or illnesses, including intellectual disability or language disorder were excluded from the survey. The researchers used multistage cluster	This study is a quantitative cross-sectional design. This study looked at nomophobia and smartphone addiction among secondary school students during Covid-19 confinement. The sample was secondary school pupils selected from one secondary school via purposive sampling. No inclusion or exclusion criteria was mentioned. This study has a large sample of 427 students which was sufficient.	This study is a quantitative cross-sectional design. This study investigated how mobile phone addiction relates to depression in high school pupils (and whether cyberbullying and victimisation and perpetration explain that link. The source population were 1, 297 high school pupils. This study did not explicitly state an inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, they do state that questionnaires with the same answers or obvious answering patterns and more than 15% or more

the groups? What was the size of the study sample, and of any separate groups? Is the achieved sample size sufficient for the study aims and to warrant conclusions drawn? Is information provided on loss to follow up? Is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study? What are the key sample characteristics, in relation to the topic area being reviewed?	from select weeks between September 2022 to May 2024 excluding federal and school holidays. The data for the sample was collected from Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study. The sample size for this study is large enough/sufficient for conclusions drawn.	sampling with three stages in a random selection. The sample size was very large therefore sufficient for any conclusions drawn.		unanswered questions in any scale were excluded. A cluster sampling method was used meaning that researchers tested pupils within certain classes rather than randomly across the school population.
RA3: ETHICS *Ethics:* Was the Ethical Committee approval obtained? Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study? Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?	This paper mentions an Institutional review board approval which was obtained from the University of California. Written informed consent and assent were gained from guardians and children. No additional information about ethical procedures mentioned.	This study was approved by the ethics committee of Zhejiang Provincial Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. Parental consent was gained and written consent was gained from the pupils. Researchers have included a section with ethical considerations where anonymity, confidentiality and minimising harm is mentioned.	Ethical approval was gained from a university ethics committee. Informed consent was provided online before completing surveys which measures in place to protect participants privacy. No mention of debrief or right to withdraw.	Ethical approval was gained from a university ethics committee. Informed consent was provided by the class teacher and the students themselves. No mention of debrief or right to withdraw.
RA4: GROUP COMPARABILITY	This paper does not explicitly mention confounding variables,	Demographic variables (e.g. school types, gender, age, ethnicity, and	The research paper does not report controlling for a	This research does not explicitly name controlling for any

AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT *Comparable Group:* If there was more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In what respects were they comparable and in what were they not? How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage?). Was this control adequate to justify the author's conclusions? Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they? Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings? *Outcome Measurement:* What were the outcome criteria? What outcome measures were used? Are the measures appropriate given the outcome criteria? What other (e.g. process, cost) measures are used? Are the measures well-validated? Are the measures of known responsive to change?	but the regression models adjusted for multiple sociodemographic variables which were age, sex, race, ethnicity, household income and parental education. Some disparities in school smartphone use are mentioned in relation to race and household incomes. Researchers state that reasons for disparities were not assessed here but could include differences in school environments. The study used several outcome measures, all captured through the ABCD-EARS passive sensing app and two self-report questionnaires: -School-day smartphone use (total time in hours/minutes)	parental education levels), lifestyle factors (smoking and drinking) and physical indicators (weight and height) were collected to control for confounding variables. Researchers considered these characteristics within their findings. Outcome measures used were: Suicidal behaviours are measured by 3 items adapted from the Global School-Based Student Health Survey, asking about the past 12 months: -Suicide ideation- 'Have you seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months?' -Suicide plans- 'Have you made a specific plan to commit suicide in the last 12 months?' -Suicide attempts- 'Have you attempted suicide in the last 12 months?' Mediating variables used the following outcome measures:	confounding variable in the mediation model. The study used two validated, standardised outcome measures which were the Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short Version (SAS-SV) and the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q). The mediator variables were not standardised scales and were measured by asking open-ended questions. The social Media Tools Usage was measured by counting the number of social media platforms used. Digital Gaming Behaviour was measured by looking at the number of digital games played. The measures look at CYP perspectives and do not consider parent/carer or school staff views.	confounding variables, therefore statistical associations should be interpreted with caution as there could be plausible third variables. This study used three appropriate and well validated self-report outcome measures, these were: -Smartphone addiction Scale (Su et al., 2014) -European Cyberbullying Intervention Project questionnaire (Zhu et al., 2021). -Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Randloff, 1977). This study focused on CYP perspective and did not consider parent/carer perspective or school staff.

Whose perspective do the outcome measures address (professional, service, user, carer)? Is there a sufficient breath of perspective? Are the outcome criteria useful/appropriate within routine practice? Are the outcome measures useful/appropriate within routine practice? Time Scale of Measurement: What was the length of follow-up, and at what time points was outcome measurement made? Is this period of follow-up sufficient to see the desired effects?	-School-day social media app use (minutes) -24-hour smartphone use -24-hour social media app use -Smartphone app category use during the school day -Problematic social media use measured by the Social Media Addiction Questionnaire (SMAQ) -Problematic mobile phone use measured by Mobile Phone Involvement Questionnaire (MPIQ). Both outcome measures are well validated and used in previous studies.	Sleep duration- participants self-reported average hours/minutes of sleep per day over the past 30 days. Depression- Patient Health Questionnaire 9-Item Scale (GAD-7) Anxiety- anxiety disorder 7-Item Scale (GAD-7). Mobile phone addiction (MPA) was measured using the Mobile Phone Addiction Index (MPAI). The measures are generally well-validated and used in previous research. This research focuses on CYP perspective and does not collect parent/carer or school staff views.		
<u>RA5: POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS</u> To what setting are the study findings generalisable? To what population are the study's findings generalisable? Is the conclusion justified	The study's findings could be generalised to adolescents aged 13-18 years. Data was only for Android only users so might not generalise across to iOS users. Researchers suggest	The study's findings have generalisability to age range 10-19 years and mixed school types. However, it is worth taking into consideration the geographic/cultural specificity as the data was	The sample is from one elite school in Turkey. Therefore, may not be generalisable to other school settings/types. The conclusions drawn were sufficient. Researchers suggest	When generalising the findings of this study the geographic and cultural aspects of the sample should be taken into consideration as the sample came from

given the conduct of the study? What are the implications for policy? What are the implications for service practice?	that because school smartphone regulations are rapidly changing, periodic analyses in the future are necessary to understand evolving relationships to these policies, smartphone use and impact on long-term academic outcomes.	collected from one province in China. The conclusions are justified but it is hard to establish causality- is it that mobile phone addiction leads to more suicidal behaviours or vice versa. Researchers suggest schools should incorporate screening for problematic mobile phone use into mental health screenings, with a focus on high-risk subgroups. Also considering developing mental health guidelines for smartphone use among adolescents.	that this study provides insightful implications for school boards and researchers in the development of effective interventions. Researchers mention some practical implications for society as it sheds light on the psychological and sociological effects of social media and digital gaming on the psychosocial well-being and mental health of adolescents.	only two schools in one city in China. The conclusions are justified however, the fact that it is hard to establish causality (is it that mobile phone use leads to higher depression or vice versa?) should be considered with any conclusions drawn. The implications from this study were: -To target school-based interventions to students with high mobile phone addiction levels as an "at-risk" group for cyberbullying victimisation and depression. To consider counselling support for victims to address depression before the perpetrator pathway develops.
RA6: OTHER COMMENTS What were the total number of references used in the study? Are there any other	Data came from the ABCD study. No reference list available as the findings as the	80 references used.	Roughly 89 references used.	Roughly 89 references used.

noteworthy features of the study?	paper is a research letter.

Fourth Table

Review Area (RA) and Key Questions (KQs)	**Kliesener et al., (2022)**	**Li et al., (2023)**	**Al-Amri et al., (2023)**
RA1: STUDY OVERVIEW	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.	Please see Appendix E table for an overview of the study.
RA2 STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS KQs: *The study:* What type of study is this? What was the intervention? What was the comparison intervention? Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention? What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review? *Setting:* Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out? *Sample:* What was the source population? What were the inclusion criteria? What were the exclusion criteria? How was the sample selected? If more than one group of subjects,	A quantitative cross-sectional study. This study looked at how problematic smartphone use related to CYP's wellbeing and school performance. The sample were 564 children and adolescents aged 10-18 years. Adolescents who do not own a smartphone were excluded from the study. No further information is included about the inclusion or exclusion criteria. The sample came from the LIFE child study, a cohort study based in Germany investigating healthy child development. The sample size was sufficient for the conclusions drawn.	This study had two studies. Both studies collected quantitative data. Study 1 was a longitudinal study which was conducted in two waves. Study 2 was a cross-sectional study. This research looked at how PSU affects school engagement and disengagement. The population across both samples were CYP aged 11-19 years. The paper mentioned that data from participants who did not meet the criteria of having a smartphone were deleted. There is no other mention of an inclusion/exclusion criteria. The sample sizes for this study were sufficient, the sample for study 1 consisted of 289 CYP and for study 2 there were 432. The sample was recruited using a convenience/school-based	A quantitative cross-sectional study. This study looked at whether smartphone addiction is associated with differences in cognitive function and physical activity among children in Saudi Arabia. It states that 196 children met the criteria for inclusion but does not explicitly state the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The sample was randomly recruited from 8 schools. The achieved sample was 100 addicted and 96 non-addicted which was sufficient, however authors acknowledge that there was no control for confounders like sleep or gender which may impact upon several factors investigated.

how many groups were there and how many people were in each group? How were subjects allocated to the groups? What was the size of the study sample, and of any separate groups? Is the achieved sample size sufficient for the study aims and to warrant conclusions drawn? Is information provided on loss to follow up? Is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study? What are the key sample characteristics, in relation to the topic area being reviewed?		sampling approach rather than random sampling.	
RA3: ETHICS *Ethics:* Was the Ethical Committee approval obtained? Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study? Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?	Ethical approval was obtained from a university. Informed consent was provided by parents. No mention of right to withdraw or debriefing.	Ethical approval was obtained from a university. Informed consent was gained from school principals, class teachers, individual participants and parents of the students. No mention of right to withdraw or debriefing.	Ethical approval was gained from a university. Each participant signs a written informed consent form prior to participating in the study. To an extent, no debriefing or right to withdraw mentioned.
RA4: GROUP COMPARABILITY AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT *Comparable Group:* If there was more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In	Age, gender and socio-economic status were treated as the main confounding variables and considered in the regression models. Problematic smartphone use (PSU) was measured using the Smartphone Addiction Proneness Scale (SAPS). Behavioural strengths and difficulties were	Age and gender were considered as confounding variables and were interpreted when considering their relation to PSU and school engagement. The outcome measures that were used were: The Multidimensional School Engagement Scale which	An equal number of students from each grade was recruited to control for confounding factors. Yes, they acknowledge limitations. The Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short Version (SAS-SV) was used. Working memory was measured by a

what respects were they comparable and in what were they not? How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage?). Was this control adequate to justify the author's conclusions? Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they? Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings? *Outcome Measurement:* What were the outcome criteria? What outcome measures were used? Are the measures appropriate given the outcome criteria? What other (e.g. process, cost) measures are used? Are the measures well-validated? Are the measures of known responsive to change? Whose perspective do the outcome measures address (professional, service, user, carer)? Is there a sufficient breath of perspective? Are the outcome criteria useful/appropriate within	measured with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Quality of life (QoL) was measured with self-report KIDSCREEN-27. The outcome measured were appropriate and validated as they had been used in previous studies. School performance was measured by self-reported grades in 4 subjects which were German (language of instruction), Mathematics, Physical Education and first foreign language. The measures looked primarily at the perspective of children and adolescents and did not include parent/carer or school staff views.	was used to measure school engagement and disengagement. PSU was measured using the Problematic Smartphone Use Scale. Academic procrastination was measured using Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS). Sleep Quality was measured using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI). These measures are all well-validated and had been used in previous research. This study looked at the perspective of CYP and did not include parent/carer or school staff views.	Memory automaticity task. Selective attention was measured by a Flanker task. Physical activity was measured using the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Older Children (PAQ-C). All measures appeared to be appropriate to the study's aims. The measures were well-validated and used in previous studies and address young person's perspective. This study does not consider parent/carer or school staff perspectives.

routine practice? Are the outcome measures useful/appropriate within routine practice? Time Scale of Measurement: What was the length of follow-up, and at what time points was outcome measurement made? Is this period of follow-up sufficient to see the desired effects?			
RA5: POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS To what setting are the study findings generalisable? To what population are the study's findings generalisable? Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study? What are the implications for policy? What are the implications for service practice?	Findings may not generalise well beyond Germany or similar Western European contexts. Implications researchers suggest are early education from first use, school-based education programmes, parent/training/support, targeting use patterns not just the time spent on a smartphone and recognising early symptoms of PSU.	Data was from a single school in China; therefore, it might not be generalisable to other school types, and other populations outside of the region. Implications of this research are around how parents and school staff can manage PSU by preventing use affecting sleep time and harming school engagement. To improve students' time management skills to reduce academic procrastination as an additional intervention.	The sample had a narrow age band as participants were 12-24 years and were all Saudi nationals which does not reflect the ethnic/cultural diversity likely present in other national contexts (e.g. the UK). Conclusions drawn are sufficient. Researchers suggest that more longitudinal designs are required, that a wider age range is needed to capture how effects may differ across developmental stages and to look at other cognitive domains beyond working memory and attention. They also suggest looking at patterns of use rather than just smartphone addiction.
RA6: OTHER COMMENTS What were the total number of references used in the study? Are there any other	66 references used.	59 references used.	Roughly 52 references used.

noteworthy features of the study?							

Mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT) Version 2018.
Note. Questions were only answered that applied to the research studies being critically appraised.

Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria	Wike (2020)	Gath et al., (2024)	Martin (2025)	McCrea (2024)	Toth (2022)	Rawdhawa et al., (2024)
Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	Yes- there are three clearly stated research questions.	Yes- there are three clearly stated research questions.	Yes- there are three clearly stated research questions.	Yes- there are four clearly stated research questions.	Yes- there are five clearly stated research questions.	Yes- there are two clearly stated research questions.
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Yes- there appears to be alignment and the researcher comments that they reviewed the survey multiple times to check that question creation aligned with the research goal.	Yes- the research questions are well addressed by the data collected.	Yes- the research questions are well addressed by the data collected.	Yes- the collected data help to answer the research questions around teacher views on smartphone use and policies.	Yes- the research questions are well addressed by the data collected.	Yes- the research questions are well addressed by the data collected.
1. Qualitative	1.1 Is the qualitative approach appropriate to	Yes- interview questions are well-structured and address the	Yes- the survey asked for student and	Yes- the researcher asked open-ended	Yes- The researcher interviewed a sample of	Yes- researchers used a survey which	Yes- Qualitative content analysis

answer the research question?	three research questions.	educator thoughts on the use of mobile phones in schools	questions at the end of a card ranking activity to provide extra richness to the data.	teachers to provide more interpretation to the quantitative findings.	asked open-ended questions on principal's beliefs on smartphone use in schools.	looked at smartphone policies to answer the first research question.
1.2 Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	Yes- the interviews follow the survey to allow for more richness and a deeper understanding of the topic and research questions.	Yes- they provide valuable insights for policy development	Yes- they provide insights into the perspectives of school staff regarding phone use and emotional wellbeing of students.	Yes- they allow for the research to ask the teachers directly and openly about the research questions explored.	Yes- the survey allowed the researcher to gather beliefs from over 200 principals.	Yes- the qualitative content analysis was used to answer the research question of what the content is of permissive and restrictive smartphone policies.
1.3 Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes- researcher provides includes individual participant profiles and contextualises their responses and helps readers to	Yes- the findings are analysed using a thematic analysis.	Yes- there are quotations used from participants that are descriptively interpreted.	Yes- the findings are analysed using a thematic analysis.	Yes- the findings are analysed using a thematic analysis.	Yes- the findings were analysed from school policy documents to provide details on implementatio n features.

		understand their point of view. A thematic analysis is carried out identifying two main themes.					
	1.4 Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes- there direct quotes from students which inform the themes.	Yes- there are direct quotes from participants to inform the themes.	This study would have benefited from a more systematic coding process in collecting data.	Yes- there are direct quotes from participants to inform the themes.	Yes- there are direct quotes from participants to inform the themes.	Yes- some interpretations have come from the data produced by the content analysis.
	1.5 Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	Yes- generally there is coherence, however there are some limitations to consider such as four students chosen for interview not having as 'extreme views' as anticipated.	Yes- there generally is coherence.	To an extent- this study would have benefitted from a thematic analysis.	Yes- there generally is coherence.	Yes- there generally is coherence.	Yes- there generally is coherence.
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to	Yes- there is a large sample of adolescents.	Yes- A large sample of students and educators.	Yes- this study used purposeful convenience	Yes- this study used purposeful convenience	Yes- a large number of principals completed	Yes- the sampling was stratified using propensity

address the research questions?			sampling and acknowledged its limitations.	sampling and acknowledged its limitations.	the survey through a convenience sampling procedure.	scores and part of a wider SMART schools research project.
4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	To an extent- gender population is balanced and good sample from different grades but with the sample being from a private school, it could be unrepresentative of those from public schools and of lower socio-economic status.	To an extent- the educator sample was mostly teachers who were aged above 30 years. There were students across the age range.	The sample size is small, therefore may not be representative of many target populations.	The sample size is smaller (less than 60), therefore may not be representation of all of the target population.	Yes- large sample size specifically looking at principal's beliefs.	Yes- includes perspectives from secondary school pupils, teachers and school leaders.
4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	Yes- use of some validated measures and questions appropriate to research questions	Yes- the measurements are transparent about questions asked and appear to be appropriate.	Yes- the Q sort measurement appears to be appropriate to research questions explored and offers a unique element.	Yes- the survey was a validated measure from a previous study	Yes- the survey was adapted from a survey instrument used in previous research.	Yes- surveys were developed in a concept driven way and were informed by policy enactment

						theory focusing on key areas.
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	Somewhat- some students did not complete the survey fully before submitting.	Somewhat- the open-ended questions may increase the risk of nonresponse bias.	Somewhat- two of the participants completed the Q-sort but did not answer the follow up questions	Not for the survey used but the researcher does not report the number of teachers invited to participate in the study.	Somewhat- it is likely that principals with strong views about smartphone use in schools (positive or negative) completed the survey as there were many approached that did not respond.	Yes- there is variation across participant groups but response rate is high
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes- descriptive statistics used	Yes- descriptive statistics used	Yes- the statistical tests used appeared to be appropriate	Yes- descriptive statistics used	Yes- Pearson correlations used to look at relationships to answer the research questions and descriptive statistics	Yes- appropriate statistical analysis methods used.

5. Mixed methods	5.1 Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Yes- the researcher explains that they considered purely qual or quan but felt that mixed methods would address the research questions most adequately by providing more explanation to the findings	Yes- researchers are looking to gain a complete picture of educator and student perspectives which aligns with the research questions.	Yes- the researcher mentions using both qualitative and quantitative data to provide further meaning and richness to the data.	Yes- the researcher mentions that mixed methods was used to gain a more thorough understandin g of teacher's perceptions and concerns.	This research uses mixed methods although does not explicitly state that it is a mixed methods design, therefore not providing a rationale.	This paper does not explicitly state the rationale for selecting mixed methods research.
	5.2 Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	Yes- they do integrate the quantitative and qualitative information to answer the research question.	Yes- they do integrate the quantitative and qualitative information to answer the research question.	There is some integration of the quantitative and qualitative information to answer the research question.	Yes- they do integrate the quantitative and qualitative information to answer the research question.	No- the quantitative elements map onto the research questions but the qualitative element does not map so clearly onto the research questions.	Yes- findings from both quantitative and qualitative data are integrated to answer the research questions.
	5.3 Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative	Yes- they do integrate the quantitative and qualitative information to	Yes- there is some clear meta-inference but	There could be more integration of the qualitative and	There could be more integration of the qualitative and	Yes- there is some integration in the discussion.	Yes- there are interpretative links drawn between the qualitative and

results adequately addressed?	explain the results.	there could be more	quantitative findings.	quantitative findings.		quantitative results in the discussion.
5.4 Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	Yes- there are some acknowledged divergences.	To an extent- there is dissonance mentioned in the sense that students are not in favour of complete bans but welcome regulations to support safety and learning.	Unable to recognise any addressed divergences or inconsistencies between qualitative and quantitative data.	The researcher identifies some discrepancies in the data.	Unable to recognise any addressed divergences or inconsistencies between qualitative and quantitative data.	Unable to recognise any addressed divergences or inconsistencies between qualitative and quantitative data.
5.5 Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Yes- both components complement each other and are considered good quality.	Yes- both components complement each other and are considered good quality.	Both components complement each other, but quality would be improved if the qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis.	Yes- both components complement each other and are considered good quality.	No- they are independent analyses rather than integrated to answer each research question.	Yes- both components complement each other and are considered good quality.

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Systematic Review Checklist

Question	Böttger & Zierer (2024)	Campbell et al., (2024)	Orben et al., (2025)
Q1: Did the review address a clearly focused question?	Yes- The review has a research question and two hypotheses it is testing.	Yes- The review has a clearly focused research question.	Yes- the review has a section of research question setting and prioritisation.
Q2: Did the authors look for the right type of papers?	Yes- The researchers have shared search terms where they consider a range of words for the same meaning and search what they are aiming to find out more about.	Yes- the researchers have a clear inclusion and exclusion criteria and share the search terms used for the same meaning and search what they are aiming to find out more about.	Yes- the researchers searched databases to find relevant papers and followed a PRISMA elimination process.
Q3: Do you think all the important, relevant studies were included?	Can't tell- The researchers only searched PsychINFO and Google Scholar which may have meant they missed studies on another database and thesis research.	Can't tell- The researchers search a lot of databases and include theses and studies yet to be published but do not mention searching Google Scholar.	Yes- although for the umbrella review researchers deliberately restricted inclusion to systematic reviews and meta-analyses only (excluding editorials, commentaries, primary studies and non-peer reviewed work such as theses.
Q4: Did the review's authors do enough to assess the quality of the included studies?	Can't tell- Researchers consider the risk of bias in the assessments conducted, however do not explicitly critically appraise the identified studies for review.	Can't tell- Researchers consider strengths and limitations of studies identified.	Yes- researchers comment that only one review out of seven was found to be of high quality. The quality of primary studies included in the review was also of low quality. Lack of experimental studies make causality hard to determine.

Q5: If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?	Yes- The researchers combined the results to produce an overall structural model which visually shows confidence intervals and effect sizes.	Can't tell- The researchers complete a narrative synthesis comparing findings as this is a scoping review with a systematic approach.	Yes- the researchers conducted a narrative synthesis rather than running a meta-analysis of meta-analyses because of the high degree of heterogeneity among studies included.
Q6: What was the overall results of the review?	The main finding was the banning smartphones has a small but significant effect. The effect is more prominent in social wellbeing than in academic performance. Overall, this research found no significant influence of a smartphone ban on academic performance which contradicts numerous studies which indicate that smartphone use has a negative impact on academic performance.	This paper found no conclusive evidence that 'one-size fits all' mobile phone bans in schools resulted in improved academic outcomes, mental health and wellbeing and reduced cyberbullying.	The main finding was that adolescents who spent more time on social media reported poorer mental health. They also found that restrictive school phone policies positively influenced in school behaviours (e.g. reducing screen time in school and bullying, or increasing physical activity), yet ut was less robust and more contextually dependent for mental health and wellbeing outcomes that are likely determined by both in- and out- of school factors.
Q7: How precise are the results?	The results appear to be precise, the researchers show a table of their meta-analysis with p values and confidence intervals for each factor measured.	The researchers synthesise the findings from studies well, however completing a meta-analysis could more robust/rigorous.	The results appear precise for general social media/mental health correlational literature. The researchers synthesise the findings using a narrative synthesis in part and provide a justification for not completing a meta-analysis.

Q8: Can the results be applied to the local population?	Can't tell: The ages of participants and contexts of studies would need to be taken into account when applying the findings to the local population.	Can't tell: The ages of participants and contexts of studies would need to be taken into account when applying the findings to the local population.	Yes- this review is commissioned by DSIT to explore the impacts of social media/smartphone use in relation to CYP. Consideration should be given to whether results from studies can be applied/generalised to the UK population based on samples used.
Q9: Were all important outcomes considered?	Yes- The outcomes are in line with the research question and hypotheses being investigated.	Yes- The outcomes are in line with the research questions being investigated.	To an extent- it is worth noting that the umbrella review restricted its investigation to mental health and wellbeing only and did not look at academic performance, bullying and behavioural outcomes, physical health and sleep.
Q10: Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?	Can't tell- this does not appear to be addressed by the researchers but provides useful evidence on the effectiveness of smartphone bans.	Can't tell- this does not appear to be addressed by the researchers but provides useful evidence on the effectiveness of smartphone bans.	Can't tell- this does not appear to be addressed by the researchers but provides useful evidence on the effectiveness of smartphone bans and impact of social media/smartphone use on CYP.

Appendix G. The pre-measure survey with consent form (at the beginning) and debrief (at the end).

Mobile phone research

Completing this questionnaire means you will be helping us find out more about the impact of introducing tighter restrictions on the use of mobile phones in your school. The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, and you will be asked questions about your attention/concentration, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying.

All your opinions and answers are completely confidential and anonymous - we do not ask for your name, and your responses will not be shared with parents or teachers. This is because we would really appreciate your honest answers to the questions.

This questionnaire is quick and easy to do, just put your initial reaction to the question. You can stop at any time, and do not have to give a reason. Just put your hand up and someone will come over to you to help.

This is not a test – there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, so just put whatever you think.

Do you have any questions? Are you happy to complete this questionnaire? If you would like any more information, then please put up your hand and someone will come to help you.

Additional information about the research

This study has been checked and approved by experts to make sure it follows important rules about fairness and safety. The project is part of a university degree, and the findings will be shared in a report. The researchers are Keely Pridden (Trainee Educational Psychologist, Email: kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk), and Dr. Sarah Sivers (Email: ssivers@tavi-port.nhs.uk) who teaches at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. The information collected during this research will be kept safe and used properly, following the trust's privacy rules (Privacy policy - Tavistock and Portman).

* Indicates required question

I have read the information and consent to completing the questionnaire. *

[] Yes
[] No

Background information

What is your year group?*

[] Year 7
[] Year 8
[] Year 9

[] Year 10

What is your age? *

[] 11
[] 12
[] 13
[] 14
[] 15
[] 16

What is your gender?*

[] Male
[] Female
[] Non-binary
[] Transgender
[] Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity? *

[] White British
[] White Irish
[] White Polish
[] Any other White background
[] Black British
[] Black African
[] Black Caribbean
[] Any other Black background
[] Asian British
[] Bangladeshi
[] Indian
[] Pakistani
[] Chinese
[] Any other Asian background
[] Mixed White & Black African
[] Mixed White & Black Caribbean
[] Mixed White & Black British
[] Mixed White & Asian heritage
[] Mixed Black & Asian heritage
[] Any other Mixed background
[] Any other ethnic group
[] Prefer not to say

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your attention and concentration in your classes on average? *



	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	Very good

2. How regularly have you felt distracted in the classroom as the result of a mobile phone device? *



[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

3. How often do you break the school rules or expectations to check a mobile phone device? *

[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

4. Have you felt anxious in school because of something you have seen on your mobile phone? *

[] Yes

[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

5. Have you felt anxious in school because of not being able to check your mobile phone? *

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

6. How many days per week do you engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity (running around, playing sports, walking etc.)?*

[] 0 days
[] 1-2 days
[] 3-4 days
[] 5-7 days

7. How often are you physically active (running around, playing sports, walking etc.) at break and lunch times?*



[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

8. What is the average amount of screen time (time spent) daily on your mobile phone device? *



[] Under 1 hour
[] 1-2 hours
[] 2-3 hours
[] 3-4 hours
[] 4-5 hours
[] 5-6 hours
[] 6-7 hours
[] 8 hours or more

9. How much time on average do you spend on your phone whilst in school?*



[] No time
[] Under 5 minutes
[] 5-10 minutes
[] 11-20 minutes
[] 21-30 minutes
[] 31-45 minutes
[] Over 45 minutes

10. Have you experienced receiving negative comments or interactions on social media whilst on your mobile phone device in school? *

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

11. Have you experienced receiving unkind messages from classmates on your mobile phone device whilst in school?*

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

12. On a scale of 1-5, how close do you feel to your classmates/peers in school? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all close	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	Very close

By completing this questionnaire, you are providing consent for the research team to use your responses, once you have clicked the submit button for the questionnaire you will be unable to withdraw any responses provided. If you have been affected by anything asked in this questionnaire you can talk to a trusted adult or access support through these organisations: Young minds for mental health- https://www.youngminds.org.uk and cyberbullying https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/bullying/.Childline (0800 1111) is also available for you to speak with someone about anything that you may be finding difficult. Their website is https://www.childline.org.uk

Are you happy to proceed? If so, please click submit.

Appendix H. The post-measure survey with the consent form (at the beginning) and debrief (at the end).

Mobile phone research autumn term questionnaire

Completing this questionnaire means you will be helping your school and the researchers find out more about the impact of introducing tighter restrictions on the use of mobile phones in your school. **For this questionnaire we are specifically looking at mobile phone use from the start of September 2025.** The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, and you will be asked questions about your attention/concentration, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying.

All your opinions and answers are completely confidential and anonymous - we do not ask for your name, and your responses will not be shared with parents or teachers. This is because we would really appreciate your honest answers to the questions.

This questionnaire is quick and easy to do, just put your initial reaction to the question. You can stop at any time, and do not have to give a reason. Just put your hand up and someone will come over to you to help.

This is not a test – there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, so just put whatever you think.

Do you have any questions? Are you happy to complete this questionnaire? If you would like any more information, then please put up your hand and someone will come to help you.

Additional information about the research

This study has been checked and approved by experts to make sure it follows important rules about fairness and safety. The project is part of a university degree, and the findings will be shared in a report about mobile phone use in school. The researchers are Keely Pridden (Trainee Educational Psychologist, Email: kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk), and Dr. Sarah Sivers (Email: ssivers@tavi-port.nhs.uk) who teaches at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. The information collected during this research will be kept safe and used properly, following the trust's privacy rules (Privacy policy - Tavistock and Portman).

* Indicates required question

I have read the information and consent to completing this questionnaire. *

[] Yes
[] No

Background information

What is your year group?*

[] Year 8
[] Year 9
[] Year 10
[] Year 11

What is your age?*

[] 12
[] 13
[] 14
[] 15
[] 16

What is your gender? *

[] Female
[] Male
[] Non-binary
[] Transgender
[] Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity? *

[] White British
[] White Irish
[] White Polish
[] Any other White background
[] Black British
[] Black African
[] Black Caribbean
[] Any other Black background
[] Asian British
[] Bangladeshi
[] Indian
[] Pakistani
[] Chinese
[] Any other Asian Background
[] Mixed White & Black African
[] Mixed White & Black Caribbean
[] Mixed White & Black British
[] Mixed White & Asian heritage
[] Mixed Black & Asian heritage
[] Any other Mixed background
[] Any other ethnic group
[] Prefer not to say

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Since September, on a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your attention and concentration in your classes on average? *



	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Poor	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	Very Good

2. Since September, how regularly have you felt distracted in the classroom as a result of a mobile phone device? *



[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

3. Since September, how often do you break the school rules or expectations to check a mobile phone device?*



[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

4. Since September, have you felt anxious in school because of something you have seen on your mobile phone? *

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

5. Since September, have you felt anxious in school because of **not** being able to check your mobile phone? *

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

6. Since September, how many days per week do you engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity (running around, playing sports, walking etc.)?*



[] 0 days
[] 1-2 days
[] 3-4 days
[] 5-7 days

7. Since September, how often are you physically active (running around, playing sports, walking etc.) at break and lunch times? *



[] Never
[] Rarely
[] Sometimes
[] Often
[] Always

8. Since September, what is the average amount of screen time (time spent) daily on your mobile phone device? *



[] Under 1 hour
[] 1-2 hours
[] 2-3 hours
[] 3-4 hours
[] 4-5 hours
[] 5-6 hours
[] 6-7 hours
[] 8 hours or more

9. Since September, how much time on average do you spend on your phone whilst in school? *



[] No time
[] Under 5 minutes
[] 5-10 minutes
[] 11-20 minutes
[] 21-30 minutes
[] 31-45 minutes
[] Over 45 minutes

10. Since September, have you experienced receiving negative comments or interactions on social media whilst on your mobile phone device in school? *

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

11. Since September, have you experienced receiving unkind messages from your classmates on your mobile phone device whilst in school?*

[] Yes
[] Sometimes
[] No
[] Do not wish to answer

12. Since September, on a scale of 1-5, how close do you feel to your classmates/peers in school? *



	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all close	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	Very close

13. Do you think since tighter mobile phone restrictions have been introduced that there has been any change to...*

	It has very much improved	It has improved a bit	No Change	It has got worse	Not Sure
1. Your Concentration	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
2. Your behaviour	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
3. Your wellbeing	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
4. Your level of physical activity	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
5. Screen time	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
6. Social interactions in school	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

By completing this questionnaire, you are providing consent for the research team to use your responses, once you have clicked the submit button for the questionnaire you will be unable to withdraw any responses provided. If you have been affected by anything asked in this questionnaire you can talk to a trusted adult or access support through these organisations: Young minds for mental health- https://www.youngminds.org.uk and cyberbullying https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/bullying/.Childline (0800 1111) is also available for you to speak with someone about anything that you may be finding difficult. Their website is https://www.childline.org.uk

Are you happy to proceed? If so, please click submit.

Appendix I. Guidance provided for teachers regarding the survey completion.

Mobile phone research- Information for teachers

The questionnaire pupils are being asked to complete is part of a research project looking at the impact of tighter restrictions on mobile phones in secondary school. The questionnaire explores a range of factors such as concentration/attention, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. Pupils will be asked to complete both a pre-measure questionnaire in the summer term and a post-measure questionnaire in the autumn term. This questionnaire is the pre-measure.

The questionnaire takes approximately about 5-10 minutes to complete and is on google forms. The form starts with a consent form which the pupils should click 'yes' as a response if they are willing to complete the questionnaire. Pupils are then asked to fill in details such as their age, gender and ethnicity (the questionnaire is anonymous, so they are not asked for their name).

The questionnaire involves pupils answering questions on the range of factors with multiple choice options to select. The questions will not ask pupils to elaborate further on their experiences. All responses on this questionnaire are confidential, so pupils are encouraged to provide honest answers. Pupils can decide not to answer questions and can be allowed to withdraw from completing the survey at any time if they do not wish to continue.

It is important to stress that pupils' individual responses are not the focus, but rather the focus is on the thoughts and opinions of the pupils as a whole. Once the research is completed SCHOOL will be provided with a summary of the research findings.

As some of the questions relate to wellbeing and cyberbullying, the following organisations can be recommended to pupils if they are affected by issues raised:

- Young minds for mental health- https://www.youngminds.org.uk and cyberbullying https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/bullying/.
- Childline (0800 1111) is also available for young people to speak with someone about anything that they may be finding difficult. Their website is https://www.childline.org.uk

Further information about the research project

This research project is being conducted by Keely Pridden, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. It has been reviewed and approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research you can contact myself, my email address is kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Appendix J. Pupil focus group topic guide structure.

Pupil focus group plan

First section (what this is about, consent and ground rules)- (5-10 minutes):

- **Welcome everyone, introduce myself and what this focus group is about-** repeat some of what is in the information sheet they will be given.

- **Give out the information sheet/consent forms and give them time to complete.**

- Collect back in the consent forms and check they have consented

- **Ensure I have started the recording!**

- Structure of the discussion- I will ask general questions about mobile phone use in schools followed by sharing a poster with the main findings from the survey and will ask for your views.

Ground rules

- I would be grateful for everyone's contributions so please give **everyone an opportunity to speak**, as I would like to gather the views of everyone, I might ask you directly if you have not had an opportunity to speak. However, passing on questions is also okay.
- Please be **respectful** of other people's views and it is okay to have a difference of opinion (in fact it is interesting!).
- This focus group is **confidential;** I will not share individual responses with others outside of this focus group so please be **honest.** I also ask that members of the group respect confidentiality by not sharing what is said here outside of the group.
- The only time I would share responses is if I was worried about you or someone else (from a **safeguarding perspective**) based on what is said in the group.

General questions (10-20 minutes):

1. What do you think about the use of mobile phones in school?
   (depending on what is said)

1a. Do you feel there are benefits to being able to use a mobile phone in school?
1b. What do you think are the drawbacks to being able to use a mobile phone in school?

2. What is your understanding of the mobile phone policy that has put in place?

2a. What do you think of the policy that has been put in place?
2b. Do you think mobile phone restrictions has made a difference?

2b. follow-up- Do you think there has been anything added? Do you think there has been anything taken away?

Present poster and gather views (10-20 minutes):

- **At first glance is there anything that stands out to you on this poster?** See what they would like to discuss.

- How often to you break the rules and expectations of the school rules to check a mobile phone device went from roughly 50% saying "never" to 2/3 saying "never", meaning there has been less rule breaking since the change

- **Is this something you have noticed?**

- More students are reporting feeling anxious in school (or sometimes anxious) as a result of not being able to check their mobile phone device as this has increased from roughly 50% in the summer term to 64% in the autumn term.

- **Is this something you have noticed?**

- More than half of the students have a screen time of 4 hours or more per day, and a roughly a quarter have a screen time of 6 hours or more. Only a fifth of students have a screen time of under 2 hours (which is recommended by NHS and Opticians).

- **What do you think about this finding?**

- No change on a lot of factors between pre-measure and post-measure (*cyberbullying, wellbeing etc.)*.

- **Why do you think this could be?**

<u>Exploring pupil views on the change:</u>

- Why do you think it is mostly no change across these factors?
- *Draw attention to improvements in concentration, physical activity, screen time etc.*- Have you noticed any improvements in these things?
- Why do you think some students have put that it has got worse? *(Drawing particular attention to screen time, social interactions in school, wellbeing and concentration)*.

Ending questions

-Any final reflections? Ideas for next steps?

Remind them that they can talk to a trusted adult if impacted by the discussion today.

Thank you!!

Appendix K. School staff focus group topic structure

Staff Focus group plan

First section (what this is about, consent and ground rules)- (5-10 minutes):

- **Welcome everyone, introduce myself and what this focus group is about-** repeat some of what is in the information sheet they will be given.

- **Give out the information sheet/consent forms and give them time to complete.**

- Collect back in the consent forms and check they have consented

- **Ensure I have started the recording!**

- Structure of the discussion- I will ask general questions about mobile phone use in schools followed by sharing a poster with the main findings from the survey and will ask for your views.

Ground rules

- I would be grateful for everyone's contributions so please give **everyone an opportunity to speak**, as I would like to gather the views of everyone, I might ask you directly if you have not had an opportunity to speak. However, passing on questions is also okay.
- Please be **respectful** of other people's views and it is okay to have a difference of opinion (in fact it is interesting!).
- This focus group is **confidential;** I will not share individual responses with others outside of this focus group so please be **honest.** I also ask that members of the group respect confidentiality by not sharing what is said here outside of the group.
- The only time I would share responses is if I was worried about you or someone else (from a **safeguarding perspective**) based on what is said in the group.

General questions (10-20 minutes):

3. What do you think about the use of mobile phones in school?
   (depending on what is said)

1a. Do you feel there are benefits to pupils having a mobile phone on them in school?
1b. What do you think are the drawbacks to pupils having a mobile phone on them in school?

4. What is your understanding of the mobile phone policy that has put in place?

2a. What do you think of the policy that has been put in place?
2b. Do you think mobile phone restrictions has made a difference?

2b. follow-up- Do you think there has been anything added? Do you think there has been anything taken away?

2c. What are the rules around mobile use for staff in school?

Present poster and gather views (10-20 minutes):

- **At first glance is there anything that stands out to you on this poster?** See what they would like to discuss.

- How often to you break the rules and expectations of the school rules to check a mobile phone device went from roughly 50% saying “never” to 2/3 saying “never”, meaning there has been less rule breaking since the change

- **Is this something you have noticed?**

- More students are reporting feeling anxious in school (or sometimes anxious) as a result of not being able to check their mobile phone device as this has increased from roughly 50% in the summer term to 64% in the autumn term.

- **Is this something you have noticed?**

- More than half of the students have a screen time of 4 hours or more per day, and a roughly a quarter have a screen time of 6 hours or more. Only a fifth of students have a screen time of under 2 hours (which is recommended by NHS and Opticians).

- **What do you think about this finding?**

- No change on a lot of factors between pre-measure and post-measure (*cyberbullying, wellbeing etc.*).

- **Why do you think this could be?**

<u>Exploring pupil views on the change-</u>

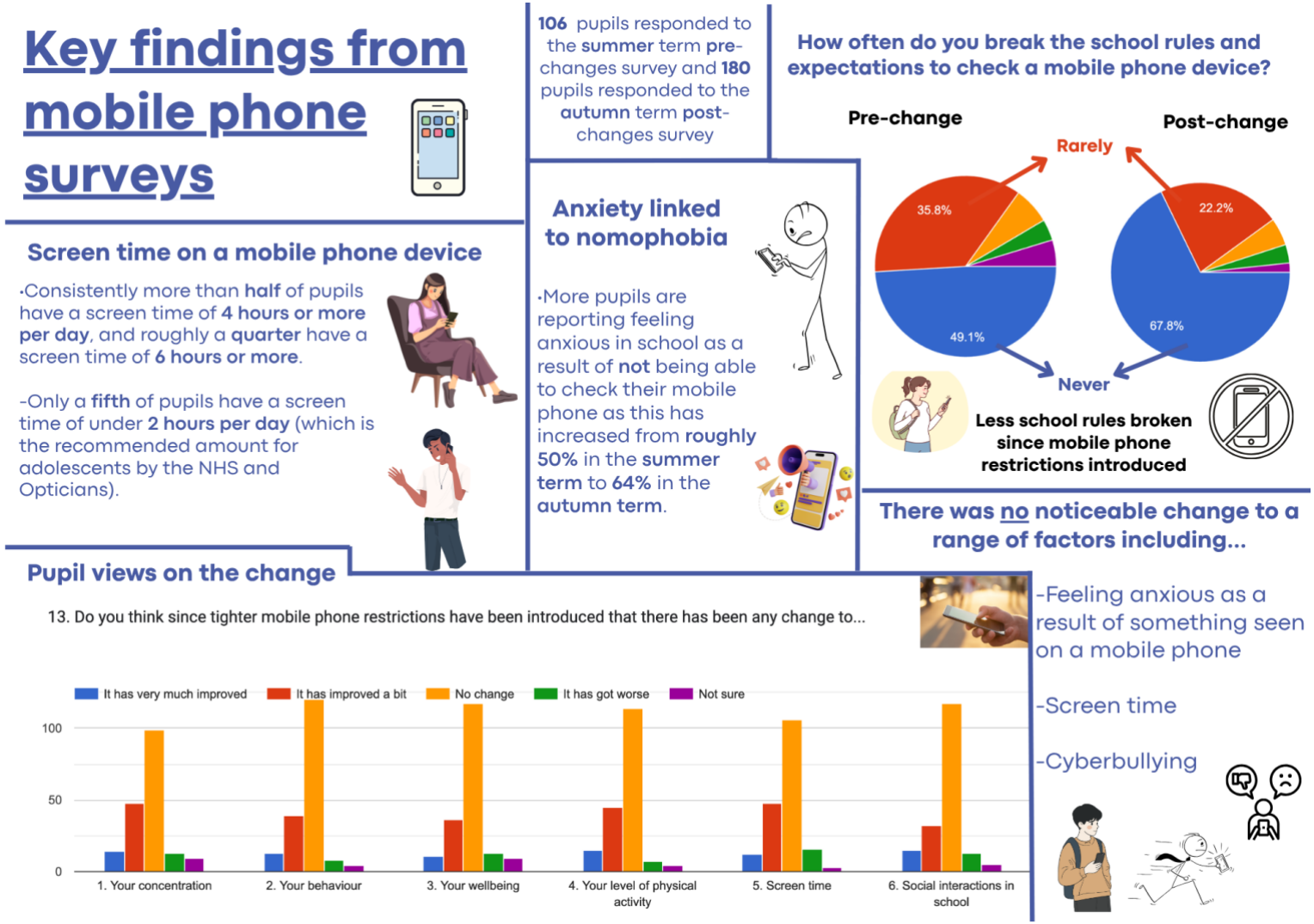
- Why do you think it is mostly no change across these factors?
- *Draw attention to improvements in concentration, physical activity, screen time etc.*- Have you noticed any improvements in these things?
- Why do you think some students have put that it has got worse? *(Drawing particular attention to screen time, social interactions in school, wellbeing and concentration).*

Ending questions

-Any final reflections? Ideas for next steps?

Thank you!!

Appendix L. The poster shown to both the pupil and school staff focus group.



Appendix M. The recruitment poster for the study that was shared with schools.

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Are you looking to introduce tighter restrictions on mobile phone use in your secondary school from September 2025?



Would you like to take part in a study looking at the impact after introducing tighter restrictions on mobile phone use?



Research overview

My name is Keely Pridden and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I am carrying out a research project exploring whether having tighter restrictions on mobile phone use in secondary school impacts upon a range of factors such as concentration/attention, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. I would greatly appreciate the participation of your school in this valuable research project.



What does it involve?

All pupils will complete an electronic survey in summer and autumn term of 2025 taking approximately 5-10 minutes each time. The questionnaire involves pupils answering questions on the range of factors with multiple choice options to select. The questions will not ask pupils to elaborate further on their experiences. This is a quick and easy questionnaire to complete which can take part in a tutor time or at the start or end of a lesson.

After completion of the questionnaire, a small number of pupils will take part in a focus group reflecting on the findings. In addition, a small number of school staff will also take part in focus group to discuss the findings. This will generate more meaning-making to the findings, and it hoped that the findings will be interesting and valuable to your school.

Contact details

If you are interested in taking part, please contact the researcher, Keely Pridden via email, kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk to discuss further.
Thank you in advance for your consideration.



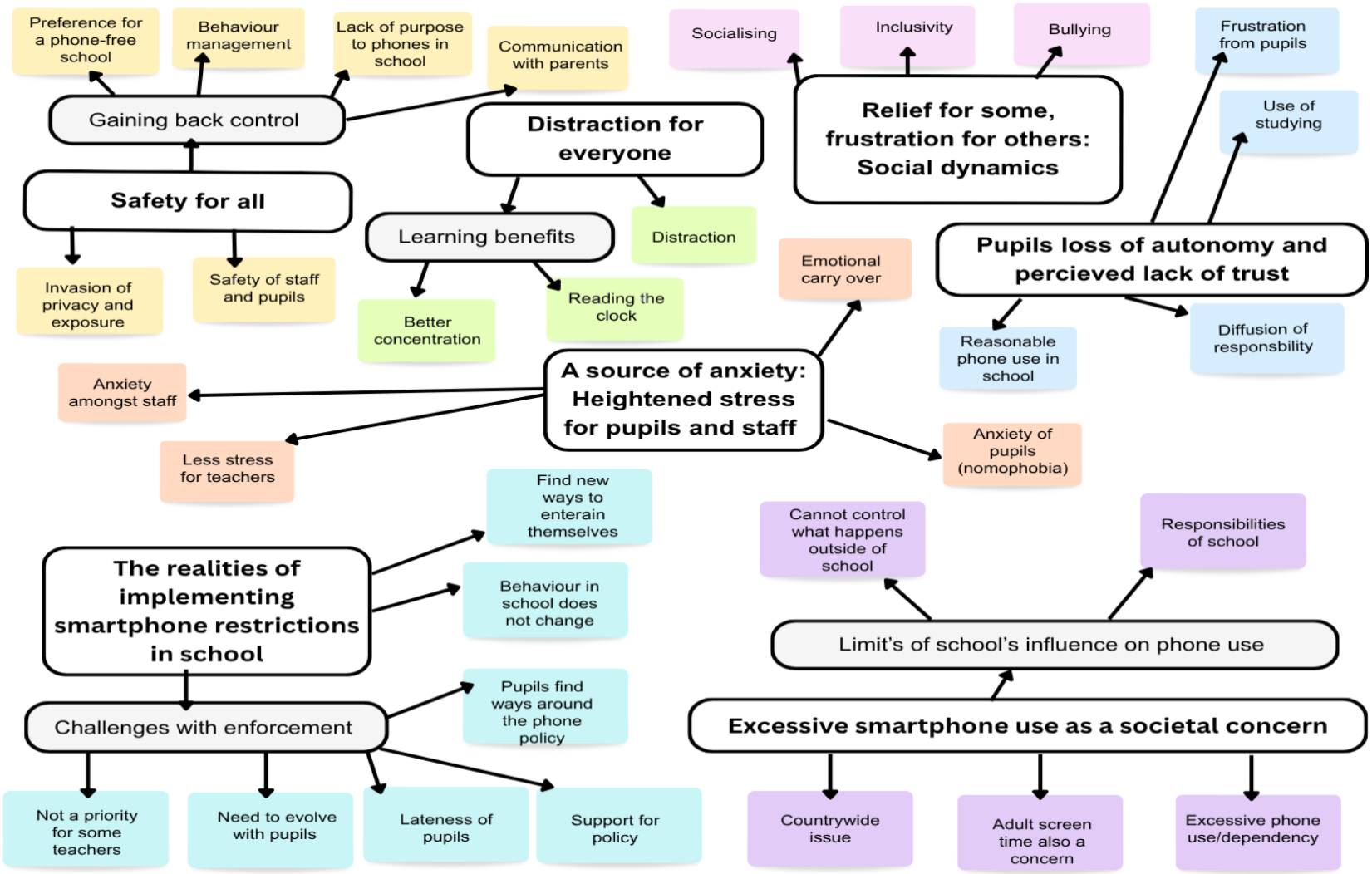


This study has been reviewed and approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix N. Examples of coded data.

Code	Quotation from the data
Adult screen time also a concern	*"I mean, I think I'm aware as myself that my screen time is probably higher than it should really be, I mean, mine is something like four hours".*
Communication with parents	"*Or maybe when you're in trouble and you don't feel comfortable talking to teachers, you can call your parents and talk to them about it".*
Diffusion of responsibility	*"I guess you could say like responsibility, it's almost as if they don't trust us to not to go on our phone".*
Behaviour management	*"I think there has been a drop in kids asking me to go to the toilet since their phones are no longer available to them, because we all know if they are going to the toilet, they are sat there just chatting away or on the phone".*

Appendix O. Overview of codes with themes and subthemes.



Appendix P. Ethical approval letter from The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Keely Pridden

By Email

01 April 2025

Dear Keely,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'An exploration of secondary school staff and pupil views on the impact of tighter mobile phone restrictions in school.'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including modifications to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC for review.

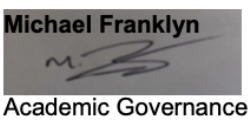
Failure to obtain prior approval for such changes may result in academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Academic Governance and Quality Officer
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix Q. Parental information letter and opt out consent form for surveys.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Keely Pridden and I am a Trainee educational psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I am carrying out a research project exploring whether having tighter restrictions on smartphone use in secondary school impacts upon a range of factors such as concentration/attention, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. Your child will be asked to complete a pre and post measure questionnaire during their school time. I would greatly appreciate the participation of your child in this valuable research project.

Principal has kindly given me permission to carry out this research with pupils in the school. All pupils in your child's class will be asked on a consent form if they would like to take part in the study. If they are happy to take part, then they will complete an electronic survey in summer and autumn term of 2025 taking approximately 5-10 minutes each time. The questionnaire involves pupils answering questions on the range of factors with multiple choice options to select. The questions will not ask pupils to elaborate further on their experiences.

All responses will be anonymous, with your child's information will be used for research purposes only. Your child's responses will only be seen by my supervisor and myself and will not be shown to teachers or parents/guardians. It is important to stress that your child's individual responses are not the focus, but rather the focus is on the thoughts and opinions of the pupils as a whole. Once the research is completed SCHOOL will be provided with a summary of the research findings.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee. I have had a recent Criminal Records Bureau check (DBS), a copy will be left with SCHOOL. Pupils invited to take part in the study can decide not to answer any question and will be allowed to withdraw from the session at any time if they do not wish to continue. If your child decides not to participate, this will

not affect their education. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research you can contact myself, my email address is kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

The following organisations may be useful for your child once they have completed the questionnaire if they are affected by any of the issues raised, these are:
Young minds for mental health- https://www.youngminds.org.uk and cyberbullying https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/bullying/.
Childline (0800 1111) is also available for young people to speak with someone about anything that they may be finding difficult. Their website is https://www.childline.org.uk

If you are NOT happy for your child to take part please return a signed copy of the slip below by the morning of DATE. If you are happy for your child to participate, you do not need to take any action. Please keep the top portion of this letter for information on the study and contact details.

Thank you in advance for your help and co-operation.

Keely Pridden
Trainee Educational Psychologist at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Dr Sarah Sivers
Associate Lecturer at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Research project: Exploring the impact of tighter mobile phone restrictions in schools
Please complete this form only if you do NOT want your child to participate in this study.

Name of Parent/Carer.....

I **DO NOT** give permission for my child to participate in the questionnaire for this research project.

Name of Pupil……...…….Year Group.....…….....

Signature of Parent / guardian…….....….....……..……
…

Appendix R. Pupil focus group information sheet and consent form.

Focus group information sheet

By taking part in this focus group, it means you will be helping us find out more about the impact of introducing tighter restrictions on the use of mobile phones in your school. The focus group will approximately take 30-45 minutes, and you will be asked questions about your views on tighter mobile phone restrictions in school. The researcher will present findings to you from a questionnaire that your year group and other year groups completed in the school. This was based upon a range of factors such as attention/concentration, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. We will ask for your opinion on the findings. It is important to note that the focus of this group is not on individual responses but on the general themes that come out of the discussion.

All your opinions and answers are confidential and anonymous. The general themes that come out of the discussion will be shared with your school and written up in a thesis report. We will not name individuals, but we may use small direct quotes from the discussion. Your responses will not be shared with parents or teachers unless the researcher is concerned about your safety or the safety of somebody else based on the discussion. In this group:

- We would really appreciate your participation and honest answers to the questions
- You can stop at any time, and do not have to give a reason. Just put your hand up and someone will come over to you to help
- You are consenting to being audio-recorded and for the researcher to use your responses for analysis
- If you wish to withdraw your responses, you can up until a week after this focus group which is 19/11/25.
- This is not a test – there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, we will not share your individual responses with parents or teachers, so just say whatever you think.
- Do you have any questions? Are you happy to take part in this focus group? If you would like any more information, then please put up your hand and

someone will come to help you.

Additional information about the research

This study has received ethical approval from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee and this research project is part of a degree where research findings will be presented in a thesis. The researchers are Keely Pridden (Trainee Educational Psychologist at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, Email: kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk) and Dr Sarah Sivers (Associate Lecturer at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, Email: ssivers@tavi-port.nhs.uk). Data generated throughout this research will be retained in accordance with the trust's privacy policy (https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/).
If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact: Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Head of Academic Registry (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

Consent form

I consent to take part in this focus group: YES NO

Your Name:……..

Today's date:……

Your year group:.....

Your age in years (e.g. 12):.....

Gender (Circle one): MALE FEMALE TRANSGENDER NON-BINARY

What is your race/ethnicity? Tick an ethnicity below that you think best describes you.

White:	**Black:**	**Asian:**	**Dual Heritage:**	**Other ethnicity:**
White British White Polish White Irish Other……..	Black African Black British Black Caribbean Other……..	Bangladeshi Indian Pakistani Sri Lankan Other……..	White & Black Caribbean White & Black African White & Black British White & Asian Black & Asian Other……..	Other……..

Appendix S. School staff focus group information sheet and consent form.

Focus group information sheet

By taking part in this focus group, it means you will be helping us find out more about the impact of introducing tighter restrictions on the use of mobile phones in your school. The focus group will approximately take 30-45 minutes, and you will be asked questions about your views on tighter mobile phone restrictions in school. The researcher will present findings to you from a questionnaire that pupils have completed in the school. This was based upon a range of factors such as attention/concentration, behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. We will ask for your opinion on the findings. It is important to note that the focus of this group is not on individual responses but on the general themes that come out of the discussion.

All your opinions and answers are confidential and anonymous. The general themes that come out of the discussion will be shared with your school and written up in a thesis report. We will not name individuals, but we may use small direct quotes from the discussion. Your responses will not be shared with other members of school staff unless the researcher is concerned about your safety or the safety of somebody else based on the discussion. In this group:

- We would really appreciate your participation and honest answers to the questions
- You can stop at any time, and do not have to give a reason.
- You are consenting to being audio-recorded and for the researcher to use your responses for analysis
- If you wish to withdraw your responses, you can up until a week after this focus group which is 19/11/25.
- This is not a test – there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, we will not share your individual responses with other members of school staff, so just say whatever you think.
- Do you have any questions? Are you happy to take part in this focus group? If you would like any more information, then please let the researcher know.

Additional information about the research

This study has received ethical approval from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee and this research project is part of a degree where research findings will be presented in a thesis. The researchers are Keely Pridden (Trainee Educational Psychologist at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, Email: kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk) and Dr Sarah Sivers (Associate Lecturer at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, Email: ssivers@tavi-port.nhs.uk). Data generated throughout this research will be retained in accordance with the trust's privacy policy (https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/).

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact: Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Head of Academic Registry (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

Consent form

I consent to take part in this focus group: YES NO

Your Name/Signature:……..

Today's date:……

Your role in the school:……

Gender (Circle one): MALE FEMALE TRANSGENDER NON-BINARY

Age (Circle one): 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65 and older

What is your race/ethnicity? Tick an ethnicity below that you think best describes you.

White:	**Black:**	**Asian:**	**Dual Heritage:**	**Other ethnicity:**
White British White Polish White Irish Other……..	Black African Black British Black Caribbean Other……..	Bangladeshi Indian Pakistani Sri Lankan Other……..	White & Black Caribbean White & Black African White & Black British White & Asian Black & Asian Other……..	Other……..

Appendix T. Parental information sheet and opt in consent form for pupil focus group.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Keely Pridden, and I am a trainee educational psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I am carrying out a research project exploring whether having tighter restrictions on smartphone use in secondary school impacts upon a range of factors such as concentration/attention in class behaviour/disruption, connections in school, physical activity, wellbeing, screen time and cyberbullying. Your child will have taken part in completing a pre and post measure questionnaire on this topic.

Your child has been selected by SCHOOL to take part in a small focus group (with seven other students) to discuss this topic and the findings from the questionnaire. I have arranged to visit SCHOOL during November 2025 and would greatly appreciate the participation of your child in this valuable research project.

I will record the discussion within the focus group which will be stored securely and destroyed once the data has been coded. Your child's identity will be anonymised, and their information will be used for research purposes only. Your child's responses will only be seen by my supervisor and myself and will not be shown to teachers or parents/guardians. It is important to stress that your child's individual responses are not the focus, but rather the focus is on the thoughts and opinions of the group as a whole. Once the research is complete SCHOOL will be provided with a summary of the research findings.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee. I have had a recent Criminal Records Bureau check (DBS), a copy will be left with SCHOOL. Pupils invited to take part in the study can decide not to answer any question and will be allowed to withdraw from the session at any time if they do not wish to continue. If your child decides not to participate, this will not affect their education. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research you can contact myself, my email address is kpridden@tavi-port.nhs.uk

The following organisations may be useful for your child once they have completed the focus group if they are affected by any of the issues raised, these are:
Young Minds for mental health- https://www.youngminds.org.uk and cyberbullying https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/bullying/
Childline (0800 1111) is also available for young people to speak with someone about anything that they may be finding difficult. Their website is https://www.childline.org.uk

If you are happy for your child to take part, please return a signed copy of the slip below by 24th October 2025. Please keep the top portion of this letter for information on the study and contact details.

Thank you in advance for your help and co-operation.

Keely Pridden
Trainee Educational Psychologist at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Dr Sarah Sivers

Associate Lecturer at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Research project: Exploring the impact of a mobile phone ban in schools
Please complete this form to provide consent for your child to participate in this study.

Name of Parent/Carer.....

I **DO** give permission for my child to participate in the focus group for this research project.

Name of Pupil……...…….Year Group.....…….....

Signature of Parent / guardian…….....….....……...……
…

Appendix U: Graphs from question 13 on the post-measure survey which asked pupils about their views on whether the policy change had made a difference to their concentration, behaviour in school, wellbeing, physical activity, social interactions in school and screen time.

Figure 38.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their levels of concentration from the post-measure survey.

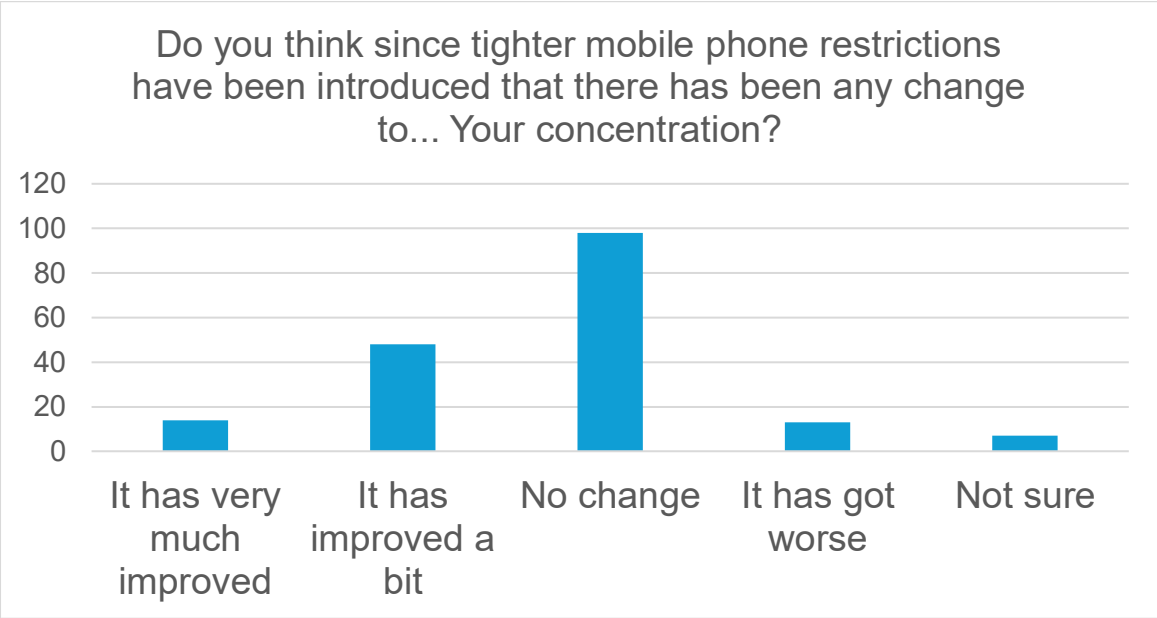


Figure 39.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their behaviour in school from the post-measure survey.

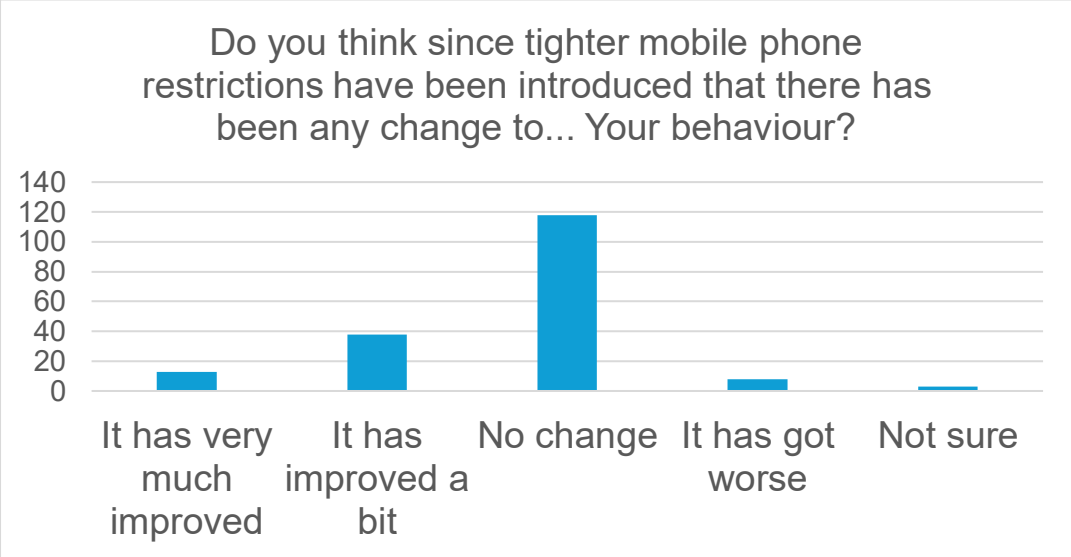


Figure 40.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their wellbeing from the post-measure survey.

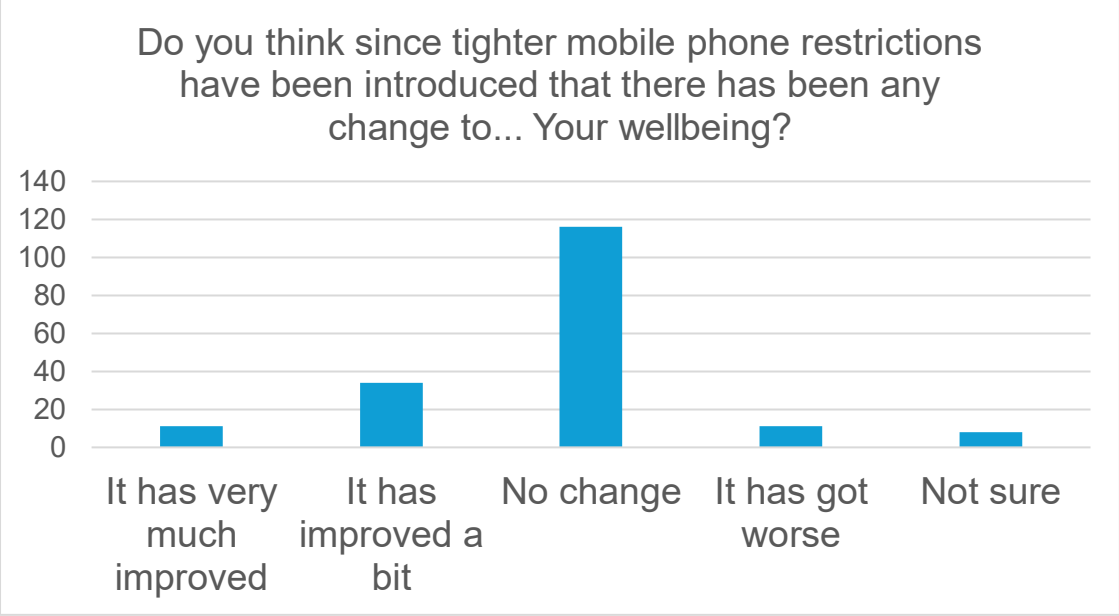


Figure 41.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their levels of physical activity from the post-measure survey.

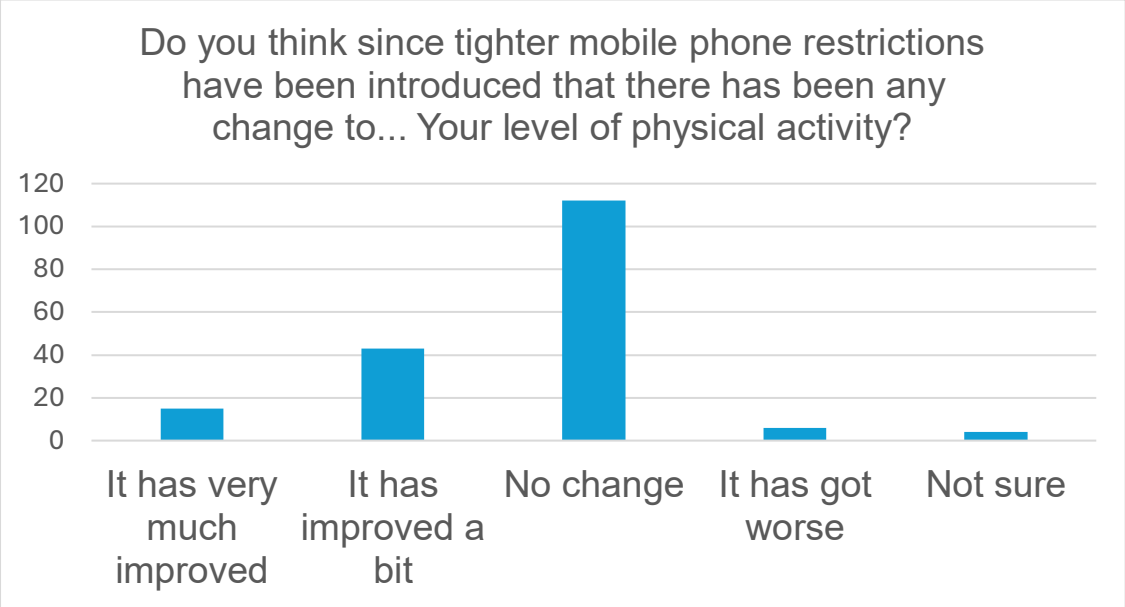


Figure 42.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their social interactions in school from the post-measure survey.

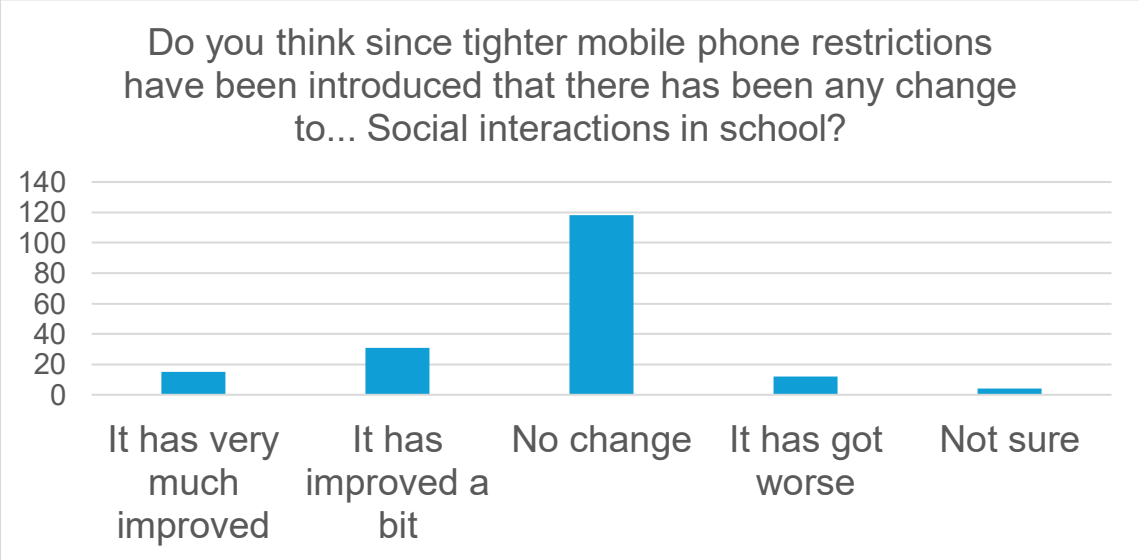


Figure 43.

Pupil views about whether the policy change has made a difference to their screen time from the post-measure survey.

