

**St Patrick's National School, Drumcondra, D09XH52**

**Scoil Phadraig, Droim Conrach, Ath Cliath D09 XH52**

**Email: [secretary@saintpats.ie](mailto:secretary@saintpats.ie) Telephone: (01) 8373714**

**Charity number: 20116453**

## **Digital Devices Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy was drawn up in response to technological advances, and a significant increase in the number of digital devices among the school population over recent years, and aligns with Circular 0044/2025 ("Banning the use of and access to personal mobile phones by pupils during the school day")

Appropriate use of specific digital devices is recognised at St Patrick's NS.

The school also recognises potential problems associated with certain digital devices, especially smartphones, some of which are listed below:

- digital devices can be valuable items and might render a pupil vulnerable to theft
- digital devices (and their cost and level of sophistication- or otherwise) can make pupils objects of envy or disparagement and could have implications with regard to discipline and potential bullying, in addition to the risk of cyberbullying.
- even when switched off, digital devices can be intrusive, distracting and anti-social in a school environment
- the use of digital devices could lead to child protection and data protection issues with regard to inappropriate capture, use or distribution of images and videos.

### **Purpose**

This policy is designed to support the well-being of all students at St Patrick's NS by encouraging a healthy, safe, and balanced environment; free from the pressures of social media, bullying, and the risks of unfiltered internet content. It emphasises the importance of childhood being a time for face-to-face interactions, outdoor play, and learning, without the distractions and pressures that certain digital devices can bring. St Patrick's NS strongly supports parents to resist purchasing smartphones for primary school-aged children. We aim to create a healthy, distraction-free environment where children can thrive emotionally, socially and academically.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all students enrolled in St Patrick's NS. It is a guideline for parents and guardians to help them make informed decisions regarding the purchase of digital devices for their children.

## Relationship to School Ethos

The use of digital devices may contravene the provision of a safe and secure school environment and is not conducive to learning - a provision which is central to the mission statement and ethos of St Patrick's NS.

## Aims of this Policy

### 1. To avoid pressure, bullying and cyber bullying

Digital devices, in particular smartphones, amongst children can lead to feelings of exclusion or peer pressure. Children who do not have smartphones may feel left out, while those who do may face unwarranted attention or bullying related to their devices. We encourage parents to prioritise the safety of their children by limiting their access to smartphones until they are older and more capable of handling such content responsibly.

### 2. To encourage outdoor play and social development

Limiting screen time and the use of smartphones helps promote physical activity, outdoor play, and real-world interactions that support creativity and play, and emotional and social development

### 3. To avoid access to unfiltered content

Smartphones can provide children with access to the internet, often leading to exposure to unfiltered or inappropriate material, including violent, explicit, or otherwise harmful content.

## Guidelines for Parents and Guardians

The Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free initiative was launched by the Department of Education in 2023 to support parents to voluntarily agree to not purchase smartphones for their primary age children.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/publications/keeping-childhood-smartphone-free/>

1. We encourage parents not to buy smartphones for children in primary school to help limit exposure to online pressures and risks. Parents are requested to sign up to the '**No Smartphone Voluntary Code**' established collaboratively by the School's Parents' Association.

The '**No Smartphone Voluntary Code**', in its introductory year (2025/2026), will be for pupils from Junior Infants to 6th class, with recognition that some 5th and 6th class pupils may already have a smartphone. If this is the case, we encourage parents to monitor and limit its use, ensuring that it is only used in safe and supervised ways. We encourage all parents/guardians to review the age-appropriateness of any apps that children may be using including Snapchat, Tiktok and WhatsApp (which have a current minimum age of 13).

From 2026/2027, it is anticipated that the '**No Smartphone Voluntary Code**' will apply in full to all pupils of all classes.

2. If communication with children is needed during school, parents should contact the school directly, and staff will then ensure that students receive any necessary messages.
3. This policy and Circular 0044/2025 applies to all personal mobile phones. Where a pupil in 5th or 6th class brings a phone to school for the purpose of children making contact with their parents before/after school, the device should be switched off and stored in a class storage box

in the teacher's filing cabinet for the duration of the day. In the event of such a device not being handed into the Class Box, and subsequently being confiscated, it can be collected from the principal's office by a parent/guardian after 2.20pm.

4. Child-specific smartwatches for the purpose of children making contact with their parents before/after school and should be **switched off and remain in the child's schoolbag** during the school day. In the event of such a device not being switched off and in their schoolbag, and subsequently being confiscated, it can be collected from the principal's office by a parent/guardian after 2.20pm.
5. Parents are encouraged to have open conversations with their children about the importance of digital safety, managing screen time and focusing on face-to-face relationships.

## **Review and Modifications**

### **Enforcement and Support**

1. This policy will be reviewed annually, in line with the Department's Circular, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the school community. We value feedback from parents and staff and will make necessary adjustments to ensure the policy remains current and effective.
2. Mindful of the duties and responsibilities assigned to all staff when working with children, access to personal mobile phones/smart devices should be limited to breaktimes unless in the event of urgency.
3. Exemptions may apply for medical reasons, specific practical reasons, or for reasons related to pupils' special educational needs. The exemption would allow pupils to access their phone for those specific reasons and not for general use.

Signed:

*Anne Looney*

Chairperson, Board of Management

16/06/2025

*Natasha Bassett*

Principal

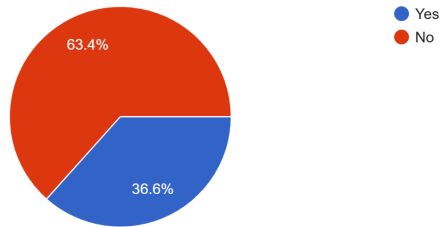
16/06/2025

## Appendix 1: Results of Student Survey, May 2025

### 4th class

Do you own a smartphone?

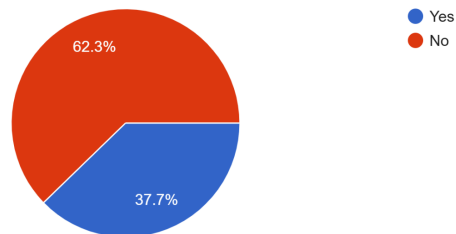
41 responses



### 5th class

Do you own a smartphone?

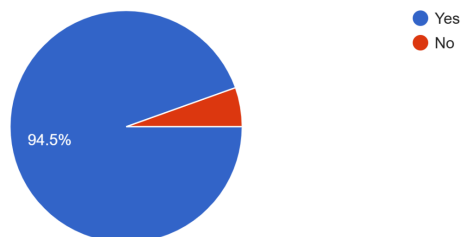
53 responses



### 6th class

Do you own a smartphone?

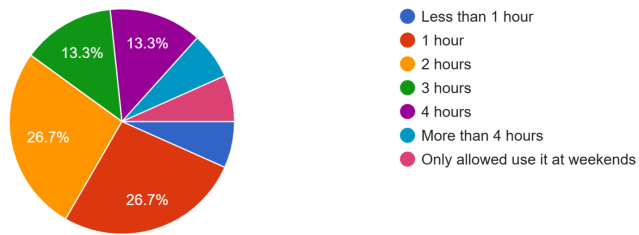
55 responses



## 4th class

Approximately how many hours every day do you spend on your smartphone?

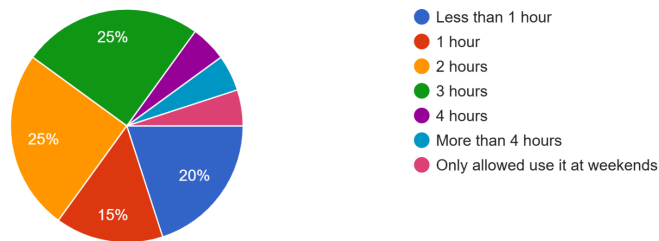
15 responses



## 5th

Approximately how many hours every day do you spend on your smartphone?

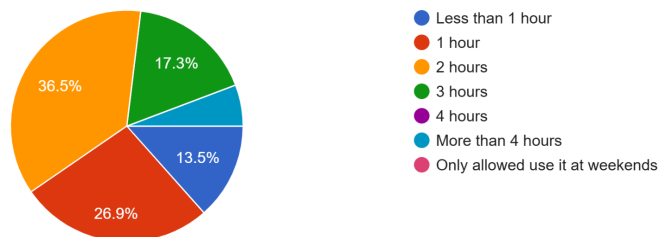
20 responses



## 6th

Approximately how many hours every day do you spend on your smartphone?

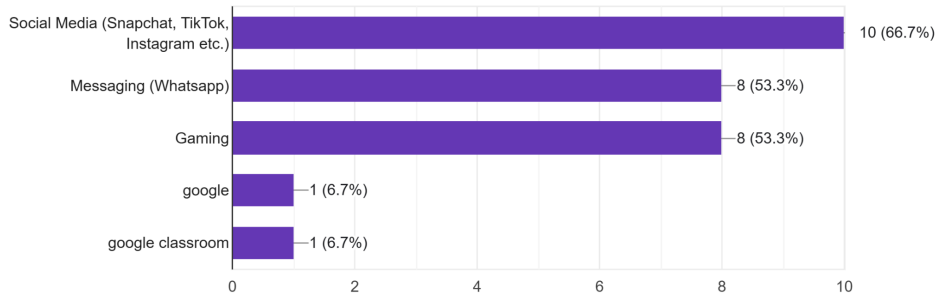
52 responses



## 4th

What do you use your smartphone for?

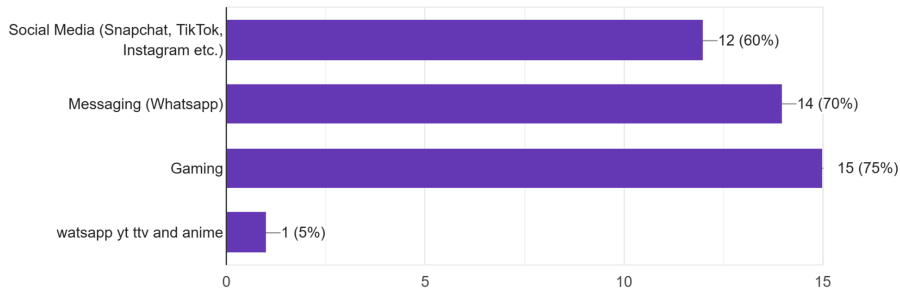
15 responses



## 5th

What do you use your smartphone for?

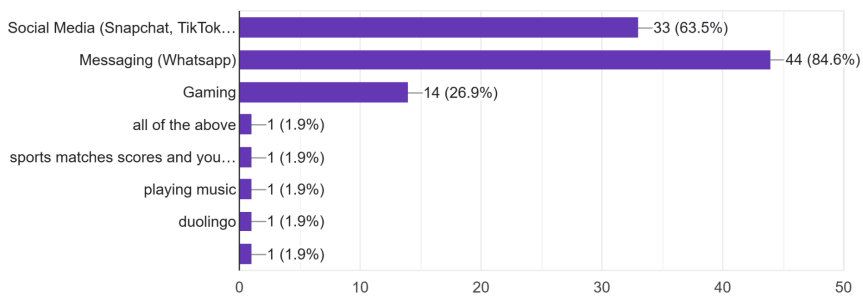
20 responses



## 6th

What do you use your smartphone for?

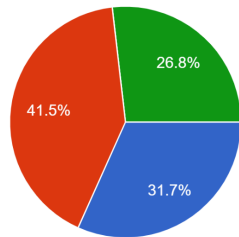
52 responses



## 4th

Which of the following statements do you agree with the most?

41 responses

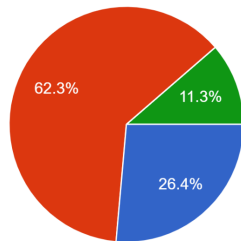


- Primary school children should have a phone with no internet access
- Primary school children should be allowed get a smartphone
- Primary school children should not have any type of phone
- Primary school children shouldn't not have any type of phone

## 5th class

Which of the following statements do you agree with the most?

53 responses

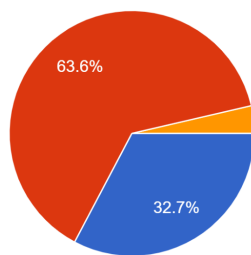


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## 6th class

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55 responses

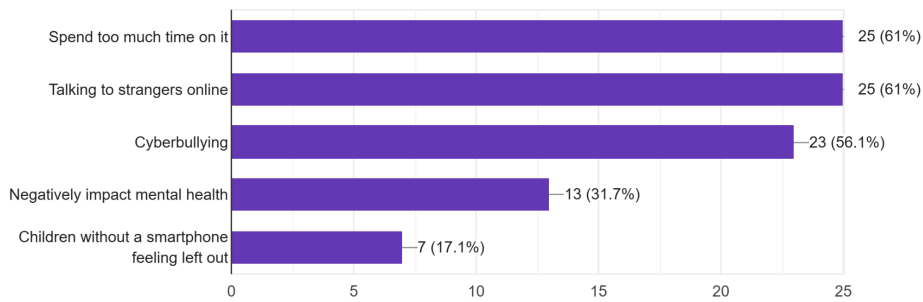


- Primary school children should have a phone with no internet access
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## 4th class

What are the problems that can happen with owning a smartphone?

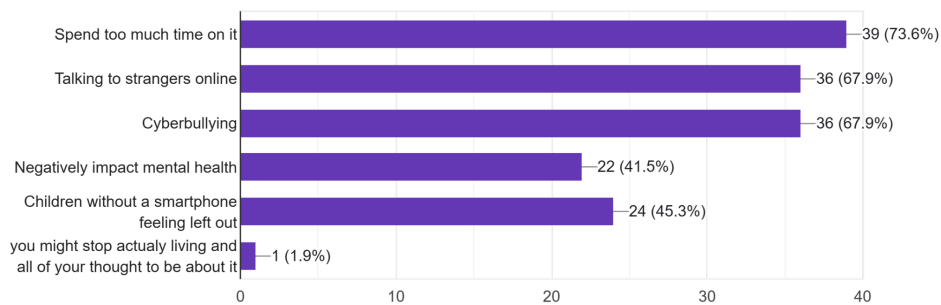
41 responses



## 5th class

What are the problems that can happen with owning a smartphone?

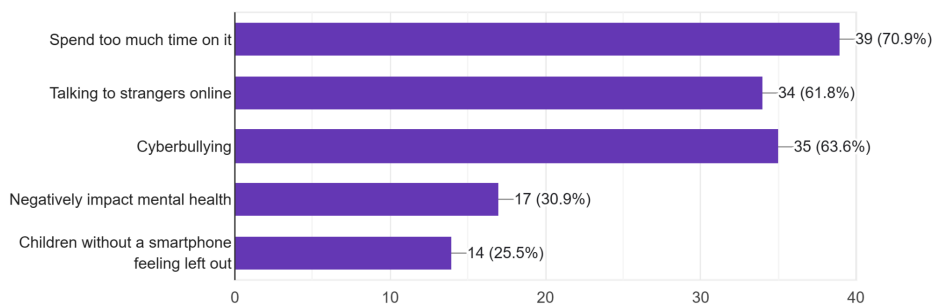
53 responses



## 6th class

What are the problems that can happen with owning a smartphone?

55 responses





## Appendix 2: Article and Programme Links re. the Negative Impact of Children Owning Smartphones:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/publications/keeping-childhood-smartphone-free/>

[Minister Foley launches new plan to encourage parents to avoid buying smartphones for their children in primary schools.](#)

Children's Data and Parental Consent Publication

[https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/dpc-guidance/childrens-data-protection-rights-\(Data-Protection-Commission\)](https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/dpc-guidance/childrens-data-protection-rights-(Data-Protection-Commission))

Websites: Parent Information on Cyber-Safety and Protection

- <https://www.webwise.ie/parents/>

- <https://www.cybersafekids.ie/about-us/>

- Cybersafe Ireland have released a report highlighting the increasing risks of online harm for children in Ireland. It emphasizes that many parents feel ill-equipped to protect their children from cyber threats. The report reveals that cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and privacy concerns are significant issues. It calls for improved education on digital safety for both children and parents, as well as stronger regulatory measures to safeguard young internet users.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0903/1468061-cyber-safety-report/>

- A growing number of young children, including 24% of 6-year-olds, own smartphones, raising concerns about the negative impacts on their development, such as social deprivation and addiction. Experts suggest delaying smartphone use until at least age 13 and using alternatives like "dumb" phones or GPS watches for safety. Parental supervision, setting clear rules, and using parental controls are essential to ensure online safety. Parents are advised to delay smartphones and engage in open discussions with their children about device use, fostering a supportive community to make the decision easier. <https://www.cybersafekids.ie/almost-25-of-six-year-olds-have-a-smartphone/>

Dr. Colman Noctor, a child psychotherapist, discusses the challenges of children owning smartphones, especially in primary school. He argues that children are not developmentally ready for the responsibility of smartphones, citing risks like social anxiety and emotional instability. While acknowledging social pressures, he advocates for delaying smartphone ownership until secondary school, highlighting the importance of collective parental action and school initiatives. He also stresses the need for media literacy, teaching children to use technology responsibly and critically. Dr. Noctor believes that a nationwide agreement to delay smartphones would help protect children's social and emotional development.

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/parenting/arid-41374744.html>

- Richard Hogan: A primary school child has no business with a smartphone.

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/people/arid-41525444.html>

- Australia passes Social Media Ban for under 16s. For some analysis of this move Professor of Cyberpsychology Mary AiFor some analysis of this move Professor of Cyberpsychology Mary Aiken.

<https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22465671/>

- Swiped: The School That Banned Smartphones Emma and Matt Willis challenge a group of Year 8 pupils at the Stanway School in Colchester to give up their smartphones completely for 21 days <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/swiped-the-school-that-banned-smartphones>
- The Most Connected Generation is the Loneliest” - Jonathan Haidt Social Psychologist Jonathan Haidt talks to Brendan about his new book The Anxious Generation which focuses on the effects of the smartphone and social media on young people, how childhood has transformed and what is happening to the mental health of GenerationZ <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22485306/>