



3rd of April, 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

RE: Guiding Digital Childhoods Project

We are writing to you as members of the Chiltern Area Partnership, a collective of local schools (both primary and secondary) representing over 2,000 local children. By working together, we aim to support parents in navigating the complex and often challenging landscape of e-safety and digital childhoods.

To better understand these challenges in our schools, we conducted a comprehensive survey, gathering 737 individual responses from parents across our partnership. At the end of this letter, please see the two-page summary survey results.

The survey results confirm what many of us already feel: The digital world has made parenting more complex and uncertain than ever before. Parents are worried. As professionals, we share these concerns. We heard from many parents struggling with setting boundaries, monitoring online activity, and protecting children from inappropriate content while navigating peer pressure and social media's often negative influence. Many expressed feelings of frustration, isolation, and uncertainty about how to manage these issues effectively.

Yet, there is hope. The survey also showed that when parents, schools, and the community work together, we can make a meaningful difference. By sharing our experiences, combining our knowledge, and supporting each other, we can create a safer, healthier environment for our children—one that balances the benefits of technology with the importance of real-world connection and growth.

Over the coming months, our schools will come together, both staff and pupils, to develop our collective action approach. We will develop two sets of principles:

- The first set of principles will be to influence our schools' approaches to online safety policy and education.
- The second set of principles will be for parents to subscribe voluntarily to as part of collective action; *you are not alone*. This will be a more tailored version of the [Smartphone Free Childhood Campaign](#) that we know some of our parents have subscribed to. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that a register of commitment would help delay their child from entering the smartphone world, so we must take this seriously.

In addition, we will share and develop resources for parents and pupils, consider hosting workshops and forums, and offer guidance to help parents address the challenges of raising children in a digital age. We are committed to this journey alongside you as, together, we can really achieve something for the benefit of all.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to your children's well-being. Together, we can ensure that technology serves our families—rather than the other way around.

Kind regards,

Mr Isaacs
Headteacher

1. How old is your child (or children)?		Responses	%
	4-6 years	224	26
	7-9 years	200	23
	10-12 years	183	21
	12+	262	30
		Total: 869	
2. At what age do you believe it is appropriate for a child to have a smartphone?		Responses	%
	Under 9	2	<1
	9-11	92	12
	12-14	395	54
	15 or older	248	34
3. How concerned are you about the impact of smartphones on your child's: Mental health (e.g., anxiety, self-esteem)?		Responses	%
	Very concerned	423	57
	Somewhat concerned	270	37
	Not concerned	44	6
4. How concerned are you about the impact of smartphones on your child's: Social skills (e.g., face-to-face interactions, friendships)?		Responses	%
	Very concerned	344	47
	Somewhat concerned	295	40
	Not concerned	98	13
5. How concerned are you about the impact of smartphones on your child's: Sleep habits?		Responses	%
	Very concerned	273	37
	Somewhat concerned	268	36
	Not concerned	196	27
6. What do you believe is the most significant challenge associated with smartphones for children?	<p>Thematic Analysis of Responses: Challenges of Smartphones for Children</p> <p>The responses reflect deep parental concern over how smartphones impact children's mental health, social skills, safety, and academic performance. A recurring suggestion is that schools and parents should collaborate to enforce boundaries, educate children on responsible phone use, and delay exposure to social media.</p>		
7. Does your child currently have a smartphone?		Responses	%
	Yes	370	50
	No	366	50
8. If yes, how do they primarily use it? (Tick all that apply)		Responses	%
	Social media	211	23
	Messaging friends/family	327	34
	Games	224	23
	Schoolwork	142	15
	Other	51	5
9. Do you set any boundaries on your child's smartphone use?		Responses	%
	Yes – we have specific rules e.g. time limits and content restrictions	221	55
	Somewhat – we monitor usage informally	140	35
	No – we do not set boundaries	39	10
10. How often does your family have "tech-free" times or spaces (e.g., during meals or before bedtime)?		Responses	%
	Daily	522	74
	Weekly	63	9
	Rarely	99	14
	Never	26	3
11. Do you agree with the principle: "No smartphones before Year 9"?		Responses	%
	Strongly agree	360	49
	Agree	171	23
	Disagree	202	27
	Strongly disagree	4	1

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Headteacher: Mr. S Isaacs BA (Hons), MA (Ed)

12. What challenges might you face in delaying smartphone use until Year 9?	<p><u>Thematic Analysis of Responses: Challenges of Delaying Smartphone Use</u></p> <p>The responses reflect significant parental concern regarding the social, emotional, and practical challenges of delaying smartphone use before Year 9. Many parents worry about peer pressure, social isolation, and the emotional toll of feeling left out, while others highlight safety concerns and the need for communication when children travel independently. Some suggest alternatives, such as basic phones for emergencies or stricter parental controls. Additionally, the increasing reliance on smartphones for schoolwork adds to the complexity of delaying access. A recurring suggestion is that a collective approach—where schools, parents, and policymakers set unified boundaries—would help reduce peer pressure and promote responsible smartphone use.</p>																	
13. Do you agree with the principle: “No social media before 16”?	<table border="1" data-bbox="608 450 1437 611"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Responses</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Strongly agree</td> <td>414</td> <td>56</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>223</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>99</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strongly disagree</td> <td>1</td> <td><1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Responses	%	Strongly agree	414	56	Agree	223	30	Disagree	99	14	Strongly disagree	1	<1
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14. Do you support a “phone-free school” policy?	<table border="1" data-bbox="608 611 1437 712"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Responses</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>652</td> <td>88</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>85</td> <td>12</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Responses	%	Yes	652	88	No	85	12						
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15. What types of activities or support could encourage your child to engage in more free play and independent learning?	<p><u>Thematic Analysis of Responses: Free Play and Independent Learning</u></p> <p>The responses reflect a strong parental desire to encourage free play and independent learning through physical activity, creative outlets, and structured social engagement. Many emphasise the need to reduce children’s reliance on screens and suggest that schools should shift away from digital homework to promote more hands-on learning. Parents also stress the importance of accessible extracurricular activities, community involvement, and consistent boundaries on technology use. A recurring theme is that both schools and parents must work together to create an environment that prioritises real-world interactions, skill development, and a balanced lifestyle.</p>																	
16. If large numbers of parents voluntarily signed themselves and their child up to a register of commitment to the Four Principles, do you think this would help you delay your child entering the smartphone world?	<table border="1" data-bbox="608 1032 1437 1133"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Responses</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>480</td> <td>67</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>235</td> <td>33</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Responses	%	Yes	480	67	No	235	33						
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17. What kind of guidance, resources or incentives would help you feel more confident in signing up to a register of commitment to the Four Principles?	<p><u>Thematic Analysis of Responses: Guidance, Resources and Incentives</u></p> <p>The responses indicate that parents seek greater clarity on the Four Principles, with research-based evidence and resources to explain their benefits. A key concern is the need for widespread commitment to avoid peer pressure and social isolation, with many advocating for government legislation or school-wide bans to make the policy effective. Parents also highlight the importance of alternative communication options and structured activities to replace smartphone use. Additionally, incentives such as activity vouchers or school-based rewards could encourage participation. A collective effort from parents, schools, and policymakers is seen as essential for successful implementation.</p>																	
18. Are there any other thoughts or suggestions you’d like to share about supporting children in a smartphone world?	<p><u>Thematic Analysis of Responses: Further Suggestions</u></p> <p>The responses reflect deep parental concerns about the impact of smartphones on children’s mental health, safety, and social development. Many advocate for stronger education on digital risks, both in schools and for parents, as well as stricter regulations on social media access for young people. Schools are seen as key players in enforcing smartphone restrictions, with calls for phone bans and reduced digital homework. Parents also stress the importance of providing alternative activities to keep children engaged offline. A recurring theme is that adults must lead by example, setting clear boundaries and limiting their own screen time to foster healthier habits in children.</p>																	
19. Would you attend a future Parent Forum to view and discuss the data from the survey and contribute to the next steps of a potential collective action project for the Chiltern Area Partnership schools?	<table border="1" data-bbox="608 1783 1437 1883"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Responses</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>433</td> <td>61</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>282</td> <td>39</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Responses	%	Yes	433	61	No	282	39						
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