

Draft Children's Rights Impact Assessment

1. Policy objectives

- ***What decision are you impact assessing?***

This impact assessment considers the publication of new statutory guidance for school leaders, education authorities and local authorities to implement a policy to restrict learner use of mobile phones during the school day.

The Welsh Government announced its decision to introduce national guidance restricting the use of mobile phones in schools on 16 June 2026, with the announcement made by the Cabinet Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, Anna Brychan. 'Guidance to restrict mobile phones in schools announced as education priorities set out | GOV.WALES'

The purpose of the statutory guidance is to support schools and local authorities to develop, implement and review local policies that are clear, consistent and appropriate to their individual contexts.

The guidance aims to support schools to create environments that promote learning, wellbeing, positive relationships and safety by reducing disruption caused by mobile phone use during the school day. It also recognises that schools will need to consider individual circumstances and make appropriate arrangements where access to a mobile device is required for health, wellbeing, accessibility or additional support needs.

In line with children's rights, the guidance will encourage schools to seek and consider the views of children and young people when developing, implementing and reviewing a mobile phone policy. This will help ensure that the policy reflects the experiences of learners, support their understanding of the rationale for restrictions, and provide opportunities for meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC.

This impact assessment therefore considers the potential effects on children and young people of the statutory guidance and its implementation within schools.

2. Gathering evidence and engaging with children and young people

- ***What existing research and data on children and young people is available to inform your specific policy? Your policy objective may impact on other policy areas – discussions with other policy teams will be an important part of the impact assessment process ensuring you have gathered a range of information and evidence.***

The draft statutory guidance has been informed by a range of evidence relating to children and young people's educational attainment, wellbeing, behaviour, concentration, online safety and the impact of digital technology in schools.

Evidence considered includes:

- International evidence, including UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, highlights the detrimental effects that excessive smartphone use can have on concentration, learning and wellbeing and recommends that technology should only be used where it demonstrably supports learning outcomes
- In light of evidence presented by the Senedd Petitions Committee and the 2025 Behaviour Summit, a national Mobile Phone Use in Schools Forum was established, comprising practitioners, headteachers, third sector representatives, local authorities, youth parliament and researchers to ensure a broad range of views inform future developments.
- The Welsh Government's workforce survey on mobile phones in March 2026 found that while most schools already have a mobile phone policy, there was considerable variation in practice and 82% of respondents supported greater statutory direction on mobile phone use in schools.
- A range of evidence from school leaders including those involved in the mobiles forum, a head teacher roundtable and ministerial head teacher advisory group who have already introduced restrictions, indicating improvements in learner engagement, behaviour, concentration and social interaction.

The guidance has also been developed in recognition of growing concerns regarding cyberbullying, access to inappropriate content, social media harms, online safeguarding risks and the impact of constant connectivity on learners' wellbeing.

- ***Using this research, how do you anticipate your policy will affect different groups of children and young people, both positively and negatively? Please remember policies focused on adults can impact children and young people too.***

The guidance is intended to benefit all learners by supporting a calm, focused and safe learning environment. However, impacts may differ between learner groups.

Primary-aged children

- Positive impact through reduced exposure to online harms and fewer distractions during the school day.
- Positive impacts through improved concentration, engagement with learning, social interaction and wellbeing.
- Limited negative impact anticipated as mobile phone ownership is generally lower amongst younger children.

Secondary-aged children and young people

- Positive impact through reduced exposure to online harms and fewer distractions during the school day.
- Positive impacts through improved concentration, engagement with learning, social interaction and wellbeing.
- Some learners may initially perceive the restrictions as reducing autonomy or limiting communication with peers during the school day.

Some learners may require access to a mobile phone device to access essential services, including digital travel passes and app-based payment systems. Any restrictions on mobile phone use should therefore take account of learners' ability to access these services where necessary.

Children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and disabled children

- Positive impacts where reduced distraction supports engagement and participation.
- Some learners may require access to mobile devices as a reasonable adjustment or for medical, communication or assistive technology purposes.
- The guidance recognises the need for appropriate exemptions and flexibility to meet individual needs.

Children with medical needs

- Some children rely on mobile devices to monitor health conditions or communicate regarding medical requirements.
- Schools will be expected to make appropriate arrangements and exemptions where required.

Children living in poverty

- Positive impacts through creating greater consistency and reducing inequalities linked to ownership of high-cost devices.
- No significant negative impacts have been identified.

Care-experienced children, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant children

- Positive impacts through a safer and more inclusive school environment.

Schools should consider the needs of all children including care-experienced children, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant children who may rely on mobile communication to maintain contact with carers, family members or support services.

Welsh-speaking children

- No differential impact identified.

LGBTQ+ children and young people

- Positive impacts through reducing opportunities for cyberbullying and harmful online interactions during the school day.
- Some learners may rely on online peer networks for support and connection. Restricting mobile phone use during the school day could reduce immediate access to these networks, although access outside school hours would remain unaffected.

Young carers

- Restricting mobile phone use during the school day could impact on young carers who rely on their phones to stay in contact with, or receive updates about, family members they help care for.
- The guidance mitigates this risk by recognising the need for schools to consider individual circumstances and provide appropriate access arrangements where required.

Overall, no evidence has been identified to suggest that any protected group would experience disproportionate adverse impacts provided schools implement the guidance flexibly and appropriately.

- ***What participatory work with children and young people have you used to inform your policy? If you have not engaged with children and young people, please explain why.***

The development of the guidance has been informed through Welsh Government engagement activity on mobile phone use in schools, including engagement with children and young people as part of the wider programme of stakeholder discussions on behaviour in schools.

Specific engagement on mobile phone use has included the Keeping Safe Online Youth Group and wider engagement with the Welsh Youth Parliament on behaviour, safety and wellbeing. Learners shared their views on online safety, social media and smartphone use, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of restricting phones during the school day. Learners generally favoured clear, consistent expectations, alongside greater education on the safe and responsible use of smartphones

Publishing an easy read version of the consultation on the new guidance will further support participation by children and young people. Providing information in a more accessible format will help ensure that a wider range of learners can understand the proposals, consider their potential impact and share their views, thereby supporting meaningful engagement in the consultation process.

While the Ministerial decision to introduce statutory guidance has already been taken, the live consultation on the draft guidance provides an opportunity for children, young people and other stakeholders to help shape the final guidance. The Welsh Youth

Parliament will be engaged as part of the consultation process to ensure children and young people have a meaningful opportunity to contribute their views and inform the final guidance. Further opportunities for participation will arise during implementation of the guidance.

Schools will be encouraged to directly involve learners in developing, communicating and embedding local mobile phone policies. This will help ensure that learners understand the rationale for restrictions and can contribute constructively to arrangements within their school.

This approach supports Article 12 of the UNCRC by providing opportunities for children and young people to express their views on how school-level policies are implemented.

3. Analysing the evidence and assessing the impact

- ***Using the evidence you have gathered, what impact is your policy likely to have on children and young people? What steps will you take to mitigate and/or reduce any negative effects?***

The evidence suggests the guidance is likely to have an overall positive impact on children and young people.

Expected benefits include:

- Improved concentration and engagement with learning.
- Reduced classroom disruption.
- Greater opportunities for face-to-face social interaction.
- Reduced exposure to cyberbullying and other online harms during the school day.
- Improved wellbeing and school climate.
- Greater consistency of expectations across Wales.

Potential negative impacts include:

- Some children and young people may feel their autonomy or independence is reduced.
- Restrictions may create difficulties for learners who require device access for medical or accessibility reasons.
- Learners may initially view the policy negatively if they do not understand the rationale behind it.

Mitigation measures

The guidance will mitigate these risks by:

- Providing for reasonable exemptions and adjustments where needed for health, disability, safeguarding or additional learning needs.
- Maintaining flexibility in implementation arrangements.
- Encouraging schools to engage learners in developing and reviewing local policies.
- Communicating clearly the educational, safeguarding and wellbeing rationale for restrictions.
- Monitoring implementation and impacts during the first year of operation. This will include gathering feedback from children and young people through established links with Children in Wales and the Welsh Youth Parliament.
- ***How does your proposal enhance or challenge children's rights, as stipulated by the UNCRC articles and its Optional Protocols? Please refer to the articles to see which ones apply to your own policy.***

UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol	Enhances (X)	Challenges (X)	Explanation
Article 2 - Non-discrimination	x		The new statutory guidance applies equally to all learners, with reasonable adjustments, where required.
Article 3 - Best interests of the child	x		The new statutory guidance aims to promote children's wellbeing, learning and safety.
Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child	x		Schools will be encouraged to involve learners in the implementation and review of a mobile phone policy.
Article 13 - Freedom of expression		x	Restrictions on the use of mobile phones in schools may limit some forms of communication during the school day. This is proportionate, time-limited and justified by educational and safeguarding considerations and balanced by increased social interaction with peers.

Article 16 - Right to privacy	x		Reduced use of mobile phones during the school day will reduce inappropriate image sharing and privacy risks.
Article 17 - Access to information		x	Some access to information via mobile phones will be restricted during school hours. Alternative educational resources remain available in schools.
Article 19 - Protection from harm	x		The new statutory guidance will support protection of learners from cyberbullying, online abuse and exposure to harmful content.
Article 23 - Rights of disabled children	x		The new statutory guidance recognises that some disabled learners and those with ALN may need access to mobile devices for communication, assistive technology, medical monitoring or other support needs. Schools will be expected to make reasonable adjustments and provide exemptions where appropriate. This flexible approach helps ensure that mobile phone restrictions do not disadvantage disabled learners and supports their full participation in education alongside their peers.
Article 29 - Goals of education	x		The new statutory guidance supports a positive and safer environment for learning, development and social interaction.
Article 31 - Leisure, play and cultural life	x		The new guidance will promote greater face-to-face social interaction and participation during break times.

- ***Consider whether any EU Citizens Rights (as referenced in the Equality Impact Assessment) relate to young people up to the age of 18.***

As noted in the Equality Impact Assessment as part of this consultation, there are no specific impacts on EU citizen children and young people have been identified.

The guidance applies equally to all learners regardless of nationality, immigration status or settlement status. No differential impacts on EU citizens' rights are anticipated.

4. Communicating with Children and Young People

- ***If you have sought children and young people's views on your proposal, how will you inform them of the outcome?***

The live consultation on the draft statutory guidance provides children and young people, schools, parents, carers and other stakeholders with an opportunity to help shape the final guidance. Information about the guidance, its implementation and intended outcomes will be communicated through schools, learner participation networks and other relevant stakeholder channels. Schools will be encouraged to engage directly with learners, including through school councils and other established participation mechanisms, to explain the final guidance and how it has been informed by consultation responses and wider engagement activities.

Feedback to learners should set out:

- Why restrictions on mobile phone use are being introduced.
- How the views of children and young people have informed the development of the guidance and local arrangements.
- How the guidance is intended to support learning, wellbeing, positive relationships and safety.
- What flexibility exists to meet individual needs and circumstances.

Where possible, information will be shared in accessible and age-appropriate formats to help ensure learners understand both the rationale for the guidance and the role their contributions have played in informing policy decisions.

5. Monitoring and Review

- ***Please outline what monitoring and review mechanism you will put in place to review this CRIA.***

The impact of the guidance will be evaluated during the school year following implementation, consistent with the Ministerial commitment accompanying publication of the guidance.

Monitoring will draw on:

- Feedback from schools and governing bodies.
- Feedback from children and young people.
- Feedback from parents and carers.
- Local authority engagement.
- Behaviour, attendance and wellbeing evidence where available.
- Consideration of any safeguarding, inclusion or equality issues that emerge.

Particular attention will be paid to the experiences of children requiring exemptions or reasonable adjustments, including disabled learners and those with medical needs.

- ***Following this review, are there any revisions required to the policy or its implementation?***

We will monitor the implementation of the guidance through feedback from stakeholders. Should evidence demonstrate negative impacts on children and young people or particular groups of learners, revisions to the guidance and/or implementation arrangements will be considered and presented to Ministers as appropriate.