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# Survey of mobile phone use in schools: policies and impacts

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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# Survey of mobile phone use in schools: policies and impacts

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# Glossary

## **ADEW**

Association for Directors of Education in Wales

## **ALN**

Additional learning needs

## **FE**

Further education

## **GSR**

Government Social Research

## **LA**

Local authority

## **LEA**

Local education authority

## **PRU**

Pupil referral unit

## **SLT**

Senior leadership team

# 1. Background

This section provides context on the policy landscape relating to mobile phone use in education settings in Wales, including relevant evidence, existing guidance, and recent policy developments.

Mobile phone use by learners in education settings has received increasing attention in Wales and across the UK. Previous Welsh Government engagement and stakeholder discussions identify concerns related to learner concentration, behaviour, wellbeing and safeguarding, including risks associated with online bullying, exposure to inappropriate content and social media use. At the same time, mobile phones may support communication, accessibility and, in some circumstances, learning. Consideration of mobile phone use in education settings therefore requires assessing both potential benefits and risks.

In Wales, responsibility for determining rules and policies on learner mobile phone use currently rests with individual schools and governing bodies. Headteachers have existing powers to partly or fully restrict mobile phones during the school day, as part of their behaviour policies, and practice varies widely between settings and local authorities. Guidance on developing a behaviour policy is set out in the Welsh Government's [core behaviour guidance](#) for education settings. Approaches to mobile phone use in schools should be consistent with individual schools' behaviour management policies.

References to mobile phone use also feature in broader statutory and non-statutory guidance including [Keeping learners safe](#), which sets out safeguarding responsibilities for education settings, and a suite of online safety and [digital resilience guidance](#) available through Hwb. These documents highlight schools' duties to protect learners from harm, including online and digital risks, and to have clear, well-understood policies and procedures in place. Mobile phone policies therefore intersect with wider areas of policy, including safeguarding, behaviour management, learner wellbeing, additional learning needs, and digital competence under the Curriculum for Wales.

Issues related to learner behaviour and mobile phone use were highlighted at the [2025 Behaviour Summit](#), which brought together education practitioners and stakeholders to consider behaviour and safety in schools, and in [evidence heard by the Senedd Petitions Committee](#). An outcome of the Summit was the establishment of a practitioner and stakeholder forum to support the development of national guidance on mobile phone use in schools. The forum, comprising headteachers, practitioners, local authorities, academic research leads and third sector organisations, was established in July 2025 and met regularly through to January 2026.

Engagement with practitioners through the forum highlighted a broader set of factors influencing school approaches to mobile phone use. In addition to concerns about disruption in the classroom, these included issues of equity and inclusion, such as variation in learners' access to mobile phones, and the importance of consulting with parents and learners when developing school policies. Alongside Welsh Government officials, the forum

co-constructed draft guidance intended to support schools in managing mobile phone use through practical approaches, resources and examples of good practice.

Developments in Wales sit alongside wider policy activity across the UK. In England, the Department for Education published updated [non-statutory guidance in January 2026](#) stating that “all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default; anything other than this should be by exception only”. [Ofsted has confirmed that mobile phone policies and their implementation will be considered as part of routine school inspections](#) in England. In March 2026, the UK Government launched a [consultation on children’s experiences in the online world](#) which includes consideration of whether existing guidance on mobile phone use in schools should be made statutory. The outcomes of this consultation, including analysis of responses from Wales, may inform future policy development in England and Wales.

Within this context, a programme of national engagement has been undertaken. In a [Written Statement](#) published on 6 March 2026, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education launched a national survey of the education workforce to gather evidence on existing mobile phone policies, the rationale underpinning different approaches and perceived impacts on learning, behaviour and wellbeing. This report presents the findings from this survey and is intended to inform the refinement of draft guidance and support evidence-based policy development.

## 2. Methodology

This research aimed to gather views and experiences of the education workforce in Wales in relation to learner mobile phone use in schools. Specifically, it sought to understand the policies that settings have in place, the reasons for adopting different approaches, the challenges and facilitators associated with their development and implementation, and workforce perceptions of the impacts of these policies.

The survey questionnaire was jointly developed by officials in the Equity in Education Division and Government Social Research (GSR) analysts. This collaborative approach ensured that the questions addressed current policy needs, were framed in neutral and analytically robust language, and were relevant across different education settings and workforce roles.

The online survey comprised 15 questions in total. This included 14 closed-ended questions, 6 of which provided opportunities for respondents to provide additional open text responses, and 1 open-ended question. All questions were mandatory. Closed-ended items generated quantitative data on current policies, practices and perceptions relating to learner mobile phone use, while open text responses provided qualitative data on the interpretation, implementation and practical operation of these approaches. This survey design enabled descriptive analysis of patterns across respondents alongside thematic analysis to support deeper contextual understanding of experiences within different education settings.

There is no single, comprehensive sampling frame covering all education staff across schools and settings in Wales. As a result, the survey used an open invitation approach rather than probability sampling. The survey was disseminated through established Welsh Government and sector relevant communication channels to reach the education workforce, including Hwb (the Welsh Government's national digital learning platform providing bilingual resources, tools and support for education in Wales) and the Dysg newsletter (the Welsh Government's official education e-newsletter). The survey link was also shared in the Welsh Government's Director of Education's fortnightly update with the [Association of Directors of Education in Wales](#) (ADEW), with representatives from the professional associations, on the Welsh Government's social media accounts (Facebook and X) and via a [Written Statement](#) from the then Cabinet Secretary for Education.

Participation was voluntary and respondents' self-selected to take part. Because the survey did not rely on an administrative list of named contacts, it was not possible to determine exactly how many individuals received or saw the invitation, nor the total size of the population reached. However, engagement data from Hwb indicate that the '[Mobile phones survey for schools](#)' article received over 2,000 views, providing some indication of reach via this channel alone. No target response number was set in advance, as participation depended on voluntary uptake through open circulation.

The survey was administered online using SmartSurvey and was open between 6 March 2026 and 27 March 2026. Responses were submitted anonymously and no personal or identifiable data were collected. In total, 410 responses were received. All data were stored and handled in line with Welsh Government data protection requirements and research governance standards.

One response was submitted by a learner and was excluded from analysis, as the survey was intended to capture the views of the education workforce only. All remaining responses were included in the analysis. Quantitative data from closed questions were analysed descriptively and are presented as counts and percentages. Percentages are based on the number of respondents answering each question and exclude missing responses.

Open-text responses were provided by a subset of respondents and were analysed thematically alongside the quantitative findings. Responses were reviewed systematically, with recurring themes identified and summarised. Illustrative examples are included where appropriate to demonstrate how respondents described their approaches. Qualitative findings are not generalised beyond those who provided open-text responses.

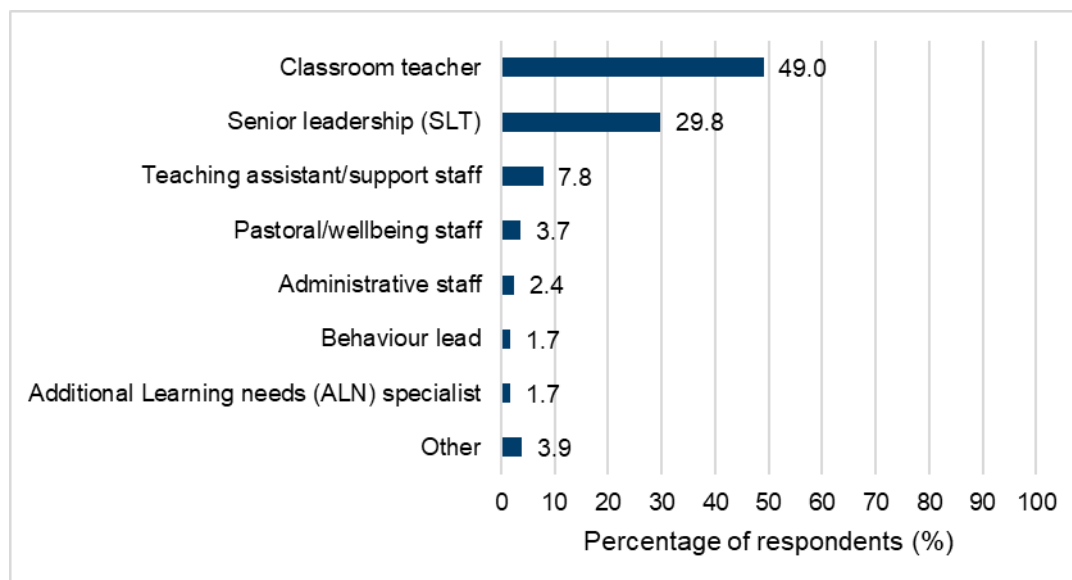
Responses were received from members of the education workforce working across a range of education settings, roles and local authority areas. However, because the survey used an open, self-selecting approach, it is not possible to calculate a response rate meaning coverage of the full education workforce cannot be assessed, and some groups may be over- or under-represented. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative and are not statistically representative of the education workforce as a whole. The survey did, however, enable the rapid collection of evidence from a wide range of education professionals and provided insight into variation in practice across settings.

### 3. Respondent profile

Of the total 410 responses received, 9 responses were submitted in Welsh, with the remainder submitted in English.

Respondents were asked what their main role was (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: respondents' main role (n=410)**



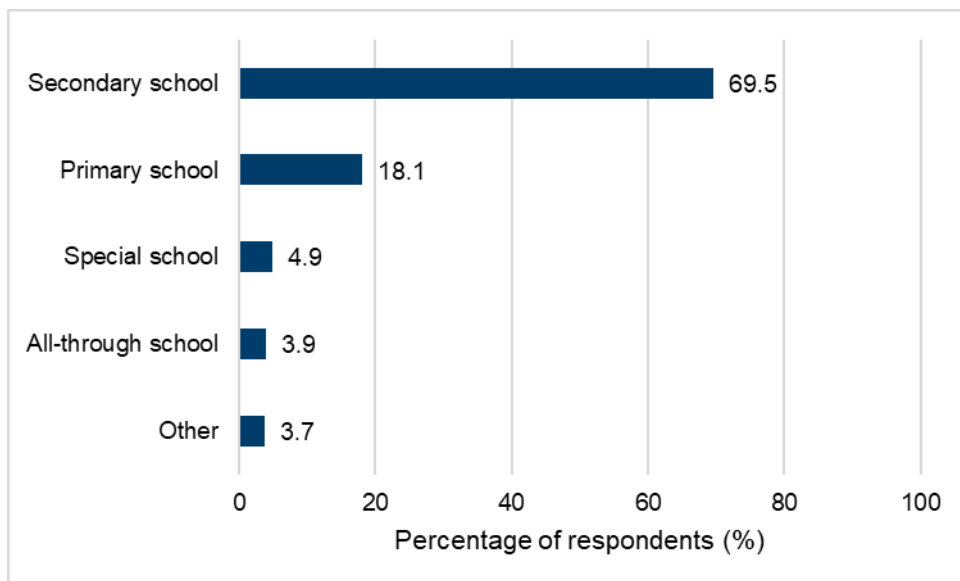
[Note 1]: 'Other' includes 16 respondents who indicated via the open text response that their main role was governor, safeguarding lead, middle leadership, science technician or local authority (LA) officer.

[Note 2]: Percentages sum to 100.1% due to rounding.

Description of figure 1: this bar chart shows that almost half (49.0%) of respondents were classroom teachers and almost a third (29.8%) of respondents were part of Senior Leadership (SLT), while fewer than 1 in 10 respondents were teaching assistants or support staff (7.8%). Very few respondents worked as pastoral/wellbeing staff (3.7%), administrative staff (2.4%), behaviour leads (1.7%) or additional learning needs (ALN) specialists (1.7%).

Respondents were asked what setting they work in (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: what type of setting do you work in? (n=410)**



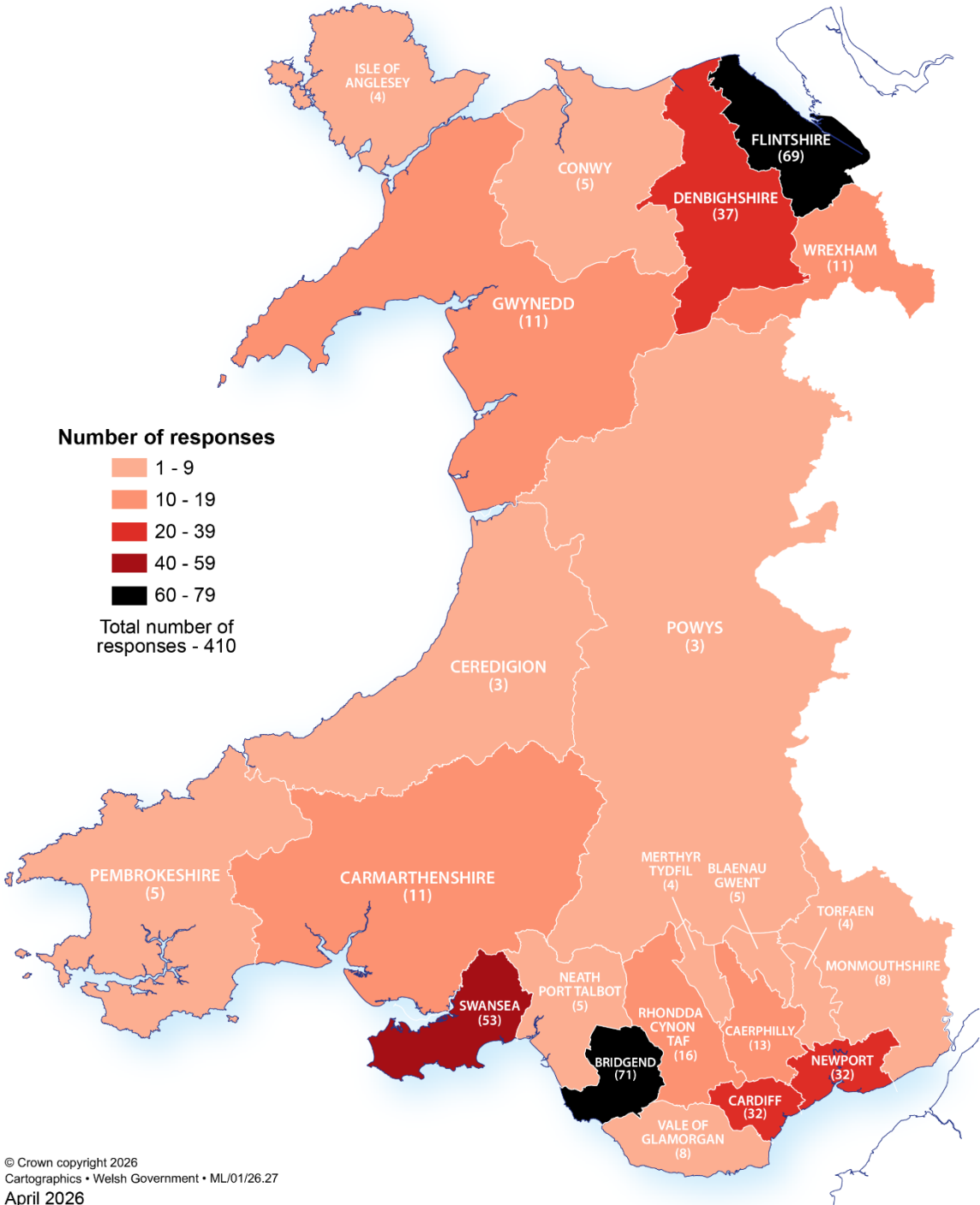
[Note 1]: 'Other' includes 15 respondents (3.7%) working in pupil referral units (PRU) or alternative provision, 16–19 learning settings or further education (FE) colleges, independent schools, and local education authorities (LEAs).

Description of figure 2: this bar chart shows that almost 7 in 10 respondents (69.5%) work in a secondary school. A further 1 in 5 respondents work within a primary school (18.1%). Fewer than 1 in 20 respondents work in special schools (4.9%) or all-through schools (3.9%).

Respondents were asked to indicate the local authority in which their setting is located (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: geographical distribution of respondents by local authority (n=410)**

## Geographical distribution of respondents by local authority



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April 2026

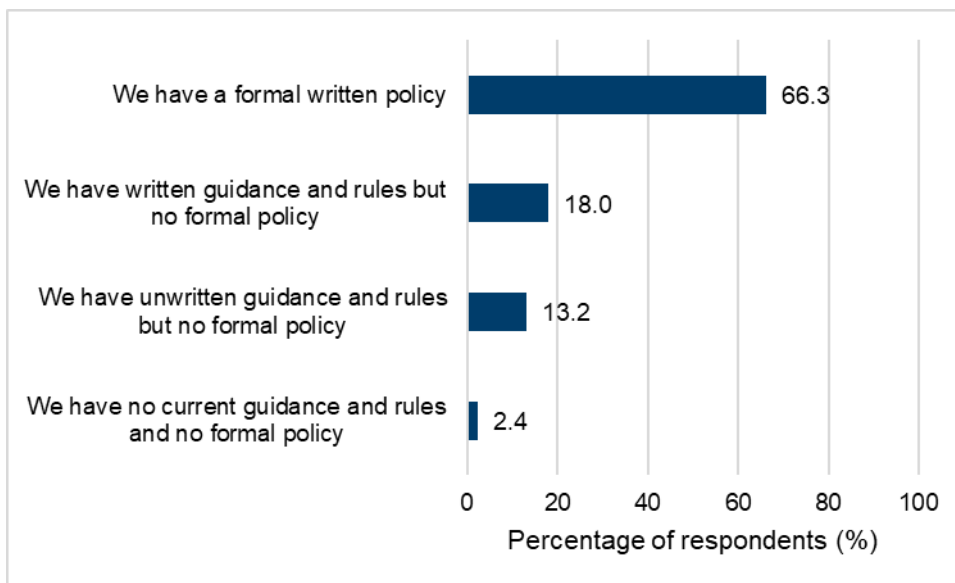
Description of figure 3: this heat map shows the number of survey responses received by local authority. Areas are shaded according to response volume, with higher numbers shown in darker colours (from pale orange to black). The highest numbers of responses were received from Bridgend (n=71) and Flintshire (n=69), followed by Swansea (n=53). Denbighshire (n=37), Cardiff (n=32) and Newport (n=32) also recorded relatively high response volumes. All other local authorities received fewer than 20 responses, including Rhondda Cynon Taf (n=16), Caerphilly (n=13), Carmarthenshire (n=11), Gwynedd (n=11) and Wrexham (n=11), the Vale of Glamorgan (n=8) and Monmouthshire (n=8), Conwy (n=5), Pembrokeshire (n=5), Neath Port Talbot (n=5), Blaenau Gwent (n=5), Isle of Anglesey (n=4), Merthyr Tydfil (n=4), Torfaen (n=4), Ceredigion (n=3) and Powys (n=3). In total, 410 responses were received.

## 4. Findings

### Policy status and current approaches to mobile phone use

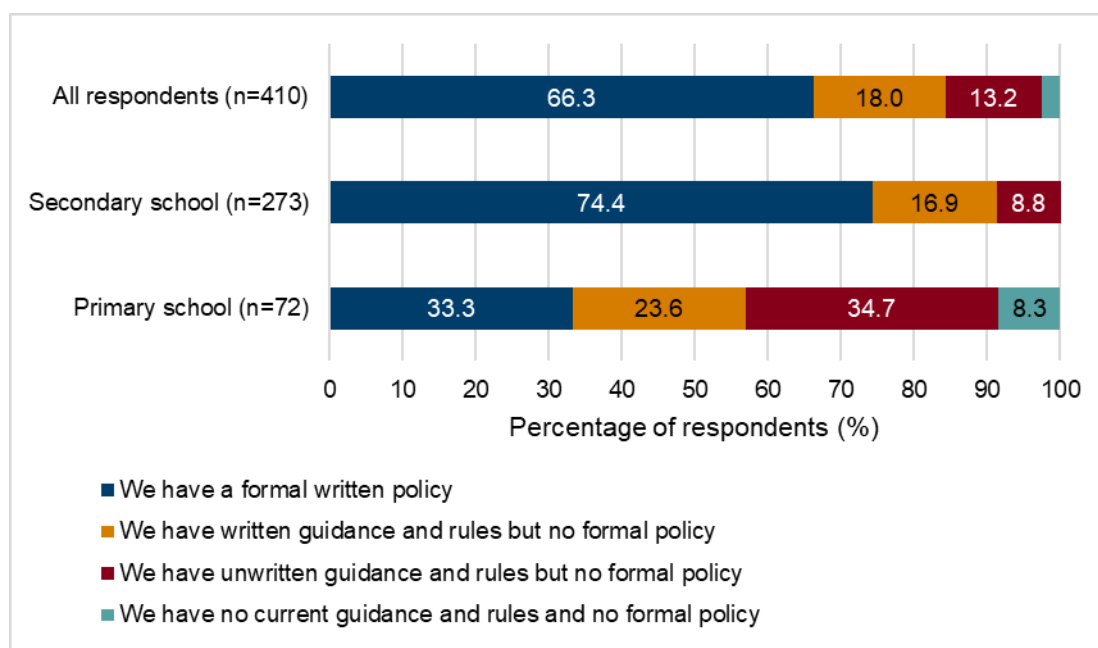
Respondents were asked what their setting's current approach to learner mobile phone use is (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: what is your setting's approach to policy and guidance around mobile phone use? (n=410)**



Description of figure 4: this bar chart shows that two-thirds of respondents (66.3%) reported that their setting has a formal written policy. Almost 1 in 5 respondents (18.0%) reported that they have written guidance and rules but no formal policy, and just over 1 in 8 respondents (13.2%) reported that they have unwritten guidance and rules but no formal policy. Only 10 respondents (2.4%) reported that they have no guidance and rules and no formal policy. These 10 respondents were asked if they were considering developing, or in the process of developing, a mobile phone policy, guidance or rules in their setting. Five respondents reported that they were in the process of developing a policy/guidance and rules and 5 reported that they were not.

**Figure 5: approaches to policy and guidance on mobile phone use, by setting type**



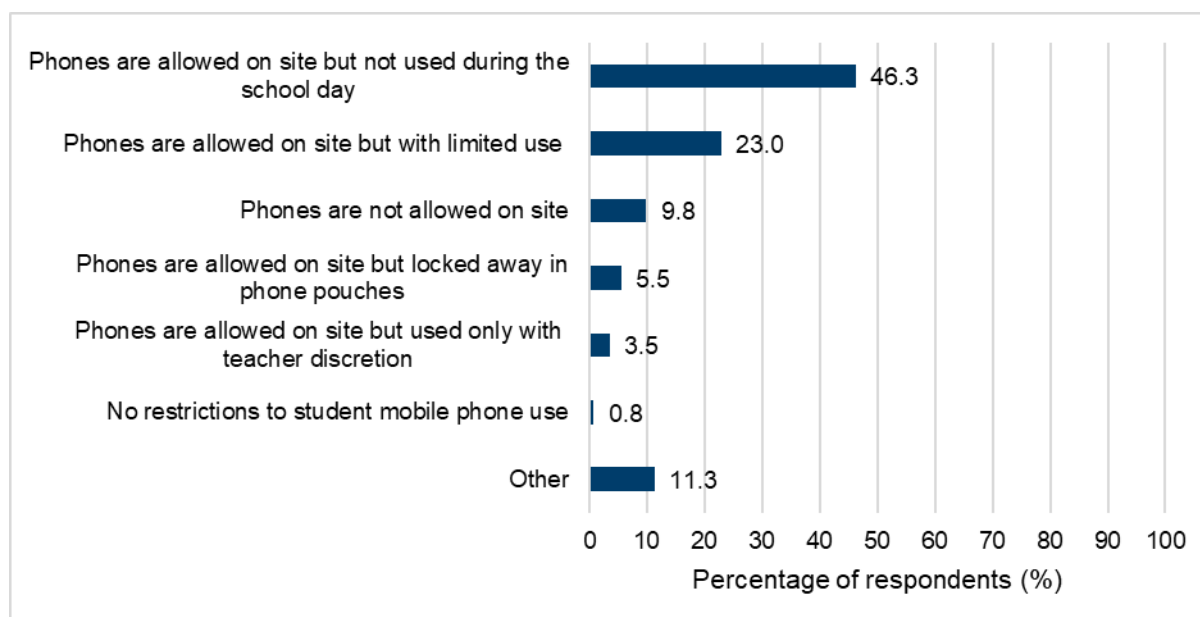
[Note 1]: only 72 respondents who answered this question reported working in a primary school; as a result, findings for this group should be interpreted with caution.

Description of figure 5: this stacked bar chart shows that the presence of a formal written policy on mobile phone use was more common in secondary schools than in primary schools. Around three-quarters of respondents working in secondary schools (74.4%) reported that their setting had a formal written policy, compared with around one-third of respondents working in primary schools (33.3%). In contrast, primary school respondents were more likely to report having either unwritten guidance and rules but no formal policy (34.7%) or written guidance and rules but no formal policy (23.6%), compared with smaller proportions in secondary schools (8.8% and 16.9% respectively). A small proportion of primary school respondents (8.3%) reported having no current guidance or rules and no formal policy, while this was not reported among secondary school respondents.

Responses from PRUs/alternative provision, special schools and all-through schools were small in number and should be interpreted with caution. Among respondents working in PRUs/alternative provision (n=3), 2 reported having a formal written policy, while 1 respondent reported having written guidance and rules but no formal policy. For special schools (n=18), the majority reported having a formal written policy (n=12) while smaller numbers reported having no current guidance or rules and no formal policy (n=2), unwritten guidance and rules but no formal policy (n=2), or written guidance and rules but no formal policy (n=2). Among respondents working in all-through schools (n=14), most reported having a formal written policy (n=12), with 1 respondent reporting unwritten guidance and rules but no formal policy and 1 reporting written guidance and rules but no formal policy.

Respondents were asked what is the current approach to learner mobile phones in their setting (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: what is the current approach to student mobile phones in your setting? (n=400)**

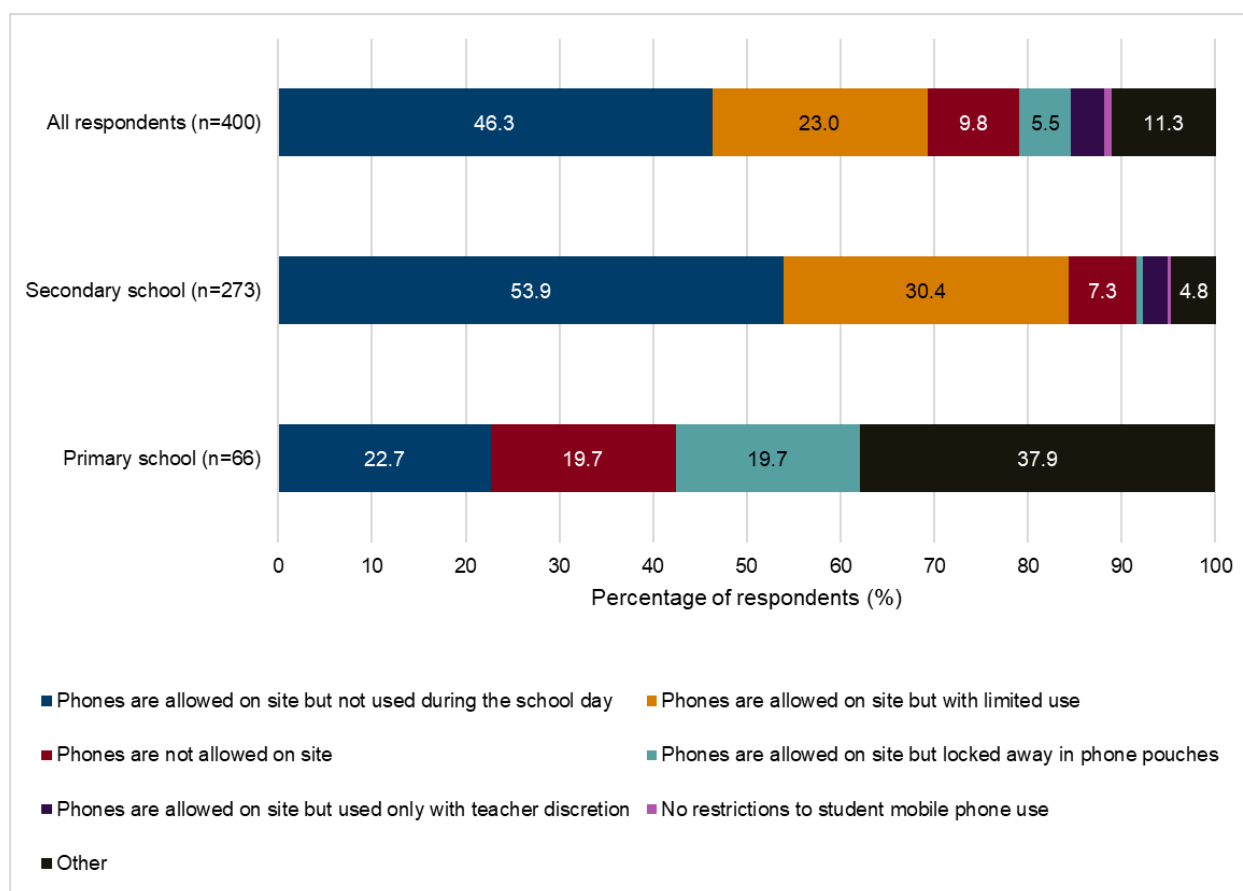


[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were, 'Phones are allowed on site but with limited use (e.g. at break times)' and 'Phones are allowed on site but used only with teacher discretion (e.g. learning activities and emergencies)'.

Description of figure 6: this bar chart shows that just under half of respondents (46.3%) reported that phones are allowed on site but not used during the school day. Almost 1 in 4 respondents reported (23.0%) that phones are allowed on site but with limited use. Only 1 in 10 respondents (9.8%) reported that phones are not allowed on site. Very few respondents reported that phones are allowed on site but locked away in phone pouches (5.5%) and that phones are allowed on site but only used with teacher discretion (3.5%). Fewer than 1% (0.8%) of respondents reported that there are no restrictions to learner mobile phone use.

Just over 1 in 10 respondents (11.3%, n=45) chose to provide an open text response to this question. Many indicated that phones were permitted on site but stored securely (for example, in an office, reception area or with staff) and returned to learners at the end of the day. Others described lesson-based collection systems, such as holders or pouches, with phones handed in at the start of lessons and retrieved at the end. Nine respondents reported restrictions that varied by year group, most commonly applying from Year 5 or Year 6, often linked to travelling home independently and, in some cases, requiring parental permission. Some used the open text response to elaborate on limits to phone use on site, including spatial restrictions (for example, phones not permitted inside the building or only allowed outdoors during break times). A smaller number provided further detail on restricted use for learning purposes or at teacher discretion. A minority highlighted challenges with enforcement, including learners using phones despite stated restrictions, and described the use of confiscation or sanctions as part of implementation.

**Figure 7: variation in current approaches to mobile phone policy and guidance by setting type**



[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were, ‘Phones are allowed on site but with limited use (e.g. at break times)’ and ‘Phones are allowed on site but used only with teacher discretion (e.g. learning activities and emergencies)’.

[Note 2]: only 66 respondents who answered this question reported working in a primary school; as a result, findings for this group should be interpreted with caution.

[Note 3]: Open text responses provided under ‘Other’ are discussed in the qualitative findings on page 14.

Description of figure 7: this stacked bar chart shows that the most common approach reported in secondary schools was allowing mobile phones on site but not allowing their use during the school day, reported by just over half of respondents working in secondary settings (53.9%). Around 3 in 10 secondary school respondents (30.4%) reported allowing phones on site by with limited use, for example at break times. Smaller proportions reported that phones were not allowed on site (7.3%), were used only with teacher discretion (4.8%), or that there were no restrictions on student mobile phone use. Just under 5% (4.8%) of respondents from secondary schools chose to provide an open text ‘other’ response.

Around a fifth of respondents working in primary schools (19.7%) reported that phones were not allowed on site or that they were locked away in phone pouches and more than 1 in 5 respondents (22.7%) reported that phones were allowed on site but not used during the school day. No respondents from primary schools reported that phones were allowed on

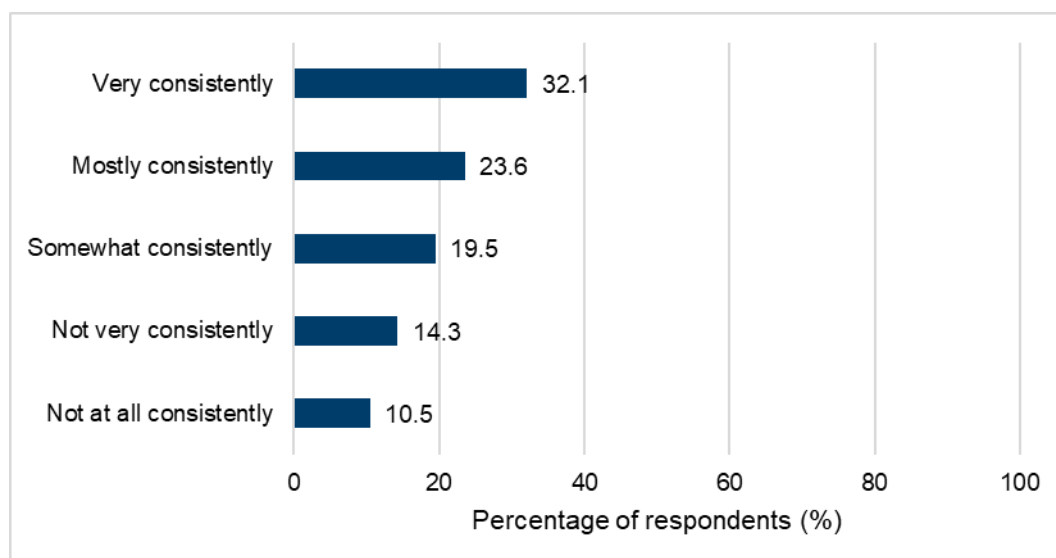
site with limited use. Two fifths (37.9%) of respondents from primary schools chose to provide an open text 'other' response.

Interpretation of findings from this question for PRUs/alternative provision, special schools and all-through schools should be treated with caution due to the small number of respondents from these settings. Among respondents working in PRUs/alternative provision (n=3), all respondents reported that mobile phones were not allowed on site (n=3). Responses from special schools (n=16) indicated a mix of reported approaches. The most commonly reported approach was allowing phones on site but not used during the school day (n=6) while smaller numbers reported that phones were locked away in phone pouches (n=3), were used only with teacher discretion (n=3), were not allowed on site (n=2), or selected 'other' (n=2). For all-through schools (n=14), the most commonly reported approach was allowing phones on site but not used during the school day (n=9) with smaller numbers reporting phones being locked away in phone pouches (n=2), limited use (n=1), no restrictions on use (n=1), or 'Other' approaches (n=1).

## Consistency and enforcement of current approaches

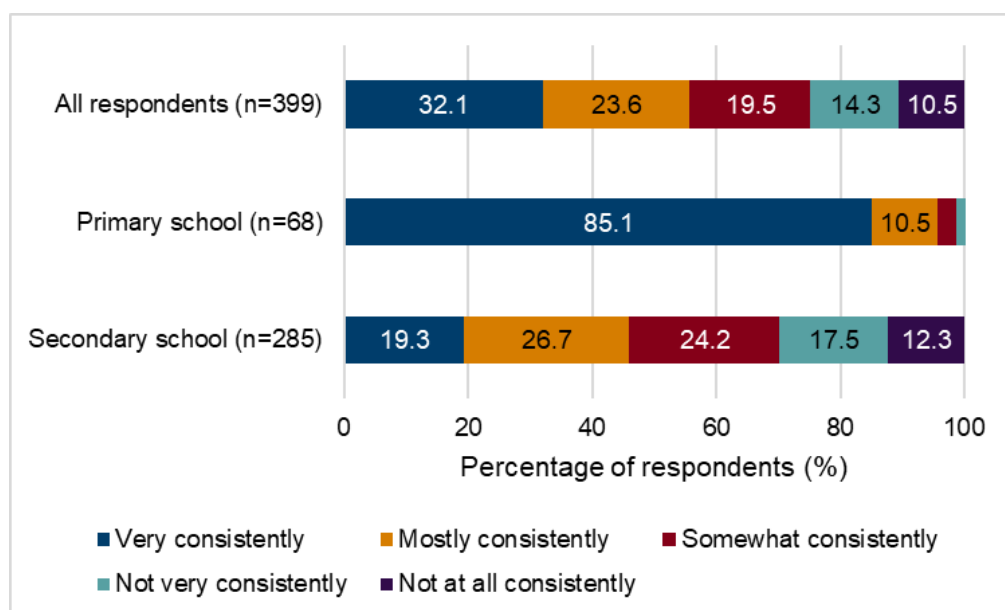
Respondents were asked about the consistency of enforcement of the mobile phone policy across their setting (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: to what extent is the mobile phone policy enforced consistently across your setting (e.g., classrooms, corridors, social spaces)? (n=399)**



Description of figure 8: this bar chart shows that over half (55.7%) of respondents reported that the existing phone policy or guidance in their setting is enforced either very consistently (32.1%) or mostly consistently (23.6%). Around a fifth (19.5%) reported that enforcement is somewhat consistent, while a quarter (24.8%) reported that it is not very consistent (14.3%) or not at all consistent (10.5%).

**Figure 9: consistency of mobile phone policy enforcement, by setting type**



[Note 1]: only 68 respondents who answered this question reported working in a primary school; as a result, findings for this group should be interpreted with caution.

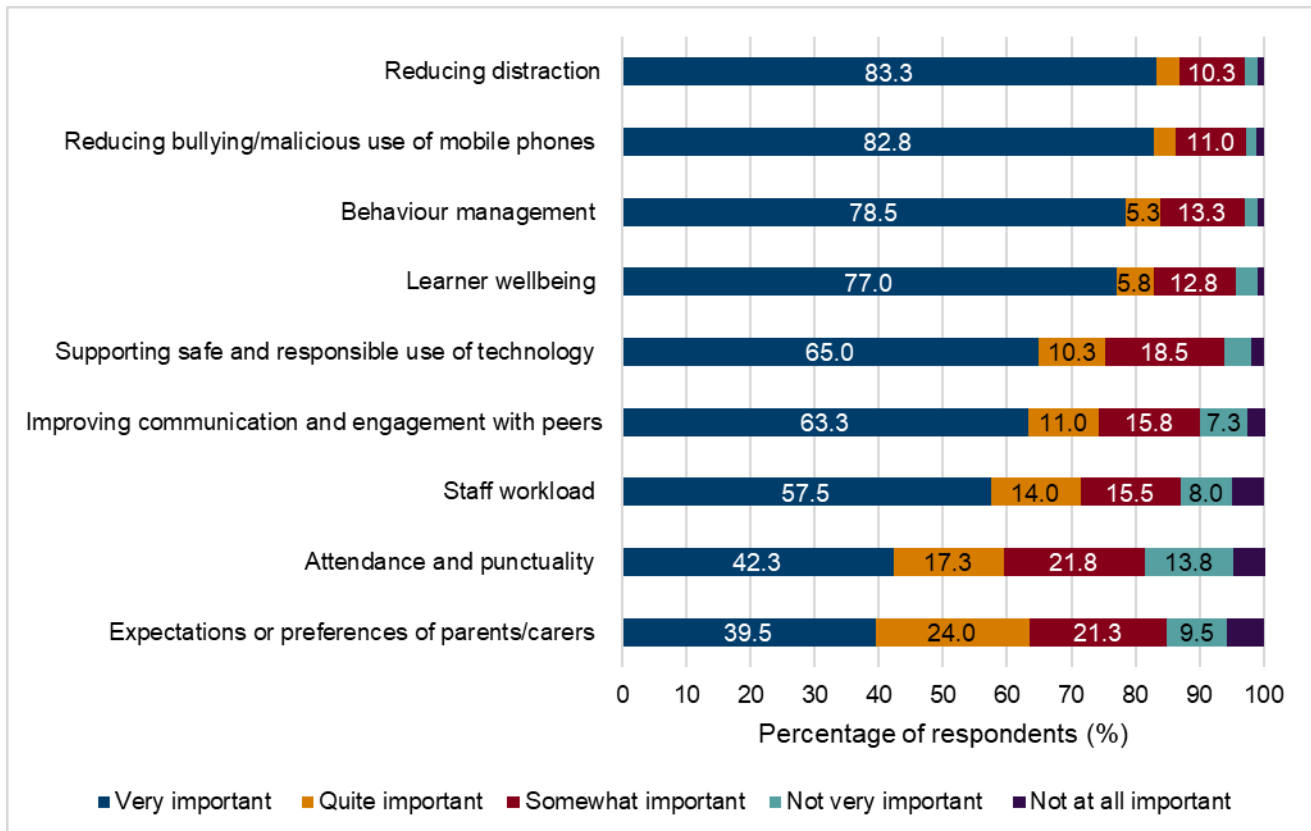
Description of figure 9: this stacked bar chart shows that reports of consistent enforcement of mobile phone policy differed between primary and secondary schools. Respondents working in primary schools were most likely to report that policy was enforced very consistently, with over 8 in 10 indicating this (85.1%), and a further 1 in 10 reporting enforcement mostly consistently (10.5%). In secondary schools, responses were more mixed. While around half of respondents (46%) reported that policy was enforced very consistently (19.3%) or mostly consistently (26.7%), over two fifths (41.7%) reported enforcement somewhat consistently (24.2%) or not very consistently (17.5%). Around 1 in 8 respondents who indicated that they worked within a secondary school (12.3%) reported that policy was not at all consistently enforced.

Responses from PRUs/alternative provision, special schools and all-through schools were based on small numbers and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Among respondents working in PRUs/alternative provision (n=3), responses were split between reporting that mobile phone policy was enforced very consistently (n=1), mostly consistently (n=1) or somewhat consistently (n=1). Responses from special schools (n=17) showed a mixed pattern, with respondents most commonly reporting enforcement as very consistently (n=6) or mostly consistently (n=5) with smaller numbers reported enforcement as not at all consistently (n=3), not very consistently (n=2), or somewhat consistently (n=1). Among respondents working in all-through schools (n=16), views were similarly mixed. Six respondents reported that policy was enforced very consistently, while others reported enforcement as mostly consistently (n=3), not at all consistently (n=4), not very consistently (n=2) or somewhat consistently (n=1).

## Factors influencing approaches to mobile phone use

Respondents were asked about the importance of different factors influencing their setting's current approach to mobile phone use within their setting (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: how important are each of the following reasons for your setting's current approach to mobile phone use? (n=400)**

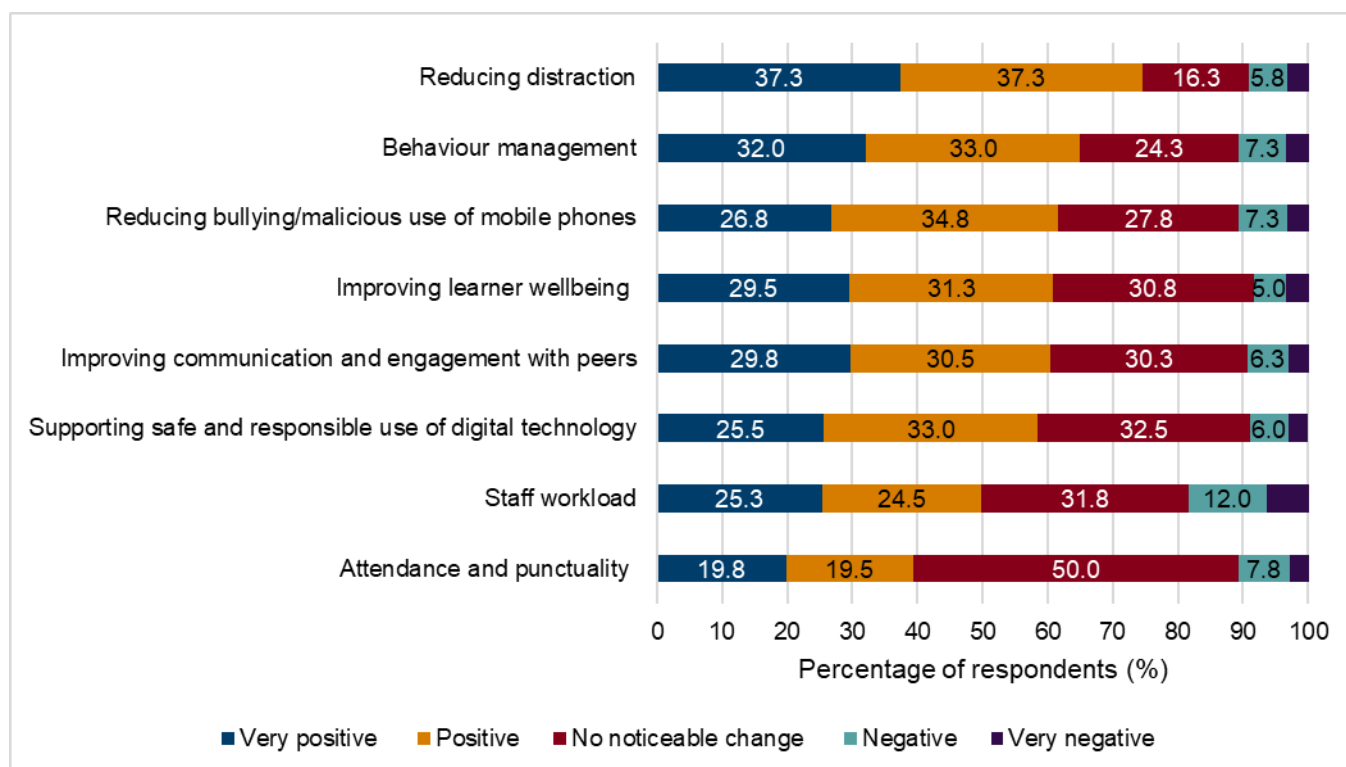


[Note 1]: the full response option in the survey were, 'Reducing bullying/malicious use of mobile phones (inappropriate content, image sharing)', 'Behaviour management (e.g. reducing low-level disruption)', 'Staff workload (e.g. reducing phone-related conflict or administration)' and 'Attendance and punctuality (e.g. reducing lateness due to phone use)'.

Description of figure 10: this stacked bar chart shows that respondents consider multiple factors to be important in shaping their setting's approach to mobile phones use, though there is some variation in responses. The factors most commonly reported as very important include reducing distraction (83.3%), reducing bullying and malicious use of phones (82.8%), behaviour management (78.5%) and improving learner wellbeing (77.0%). These are followed by improving communication and engagement with peers (63.3%), staff workload (57.5%), attendance and punctuality (42.3%) and the expectations or preferences of parents/carers (39.5%).

Respondents were asked about the perceived impact of their setting's approach to mobile phone use across a range of areas (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: how would you describe the impact of your setting’s approach to mobile phone use on the following areas? (n=400)**



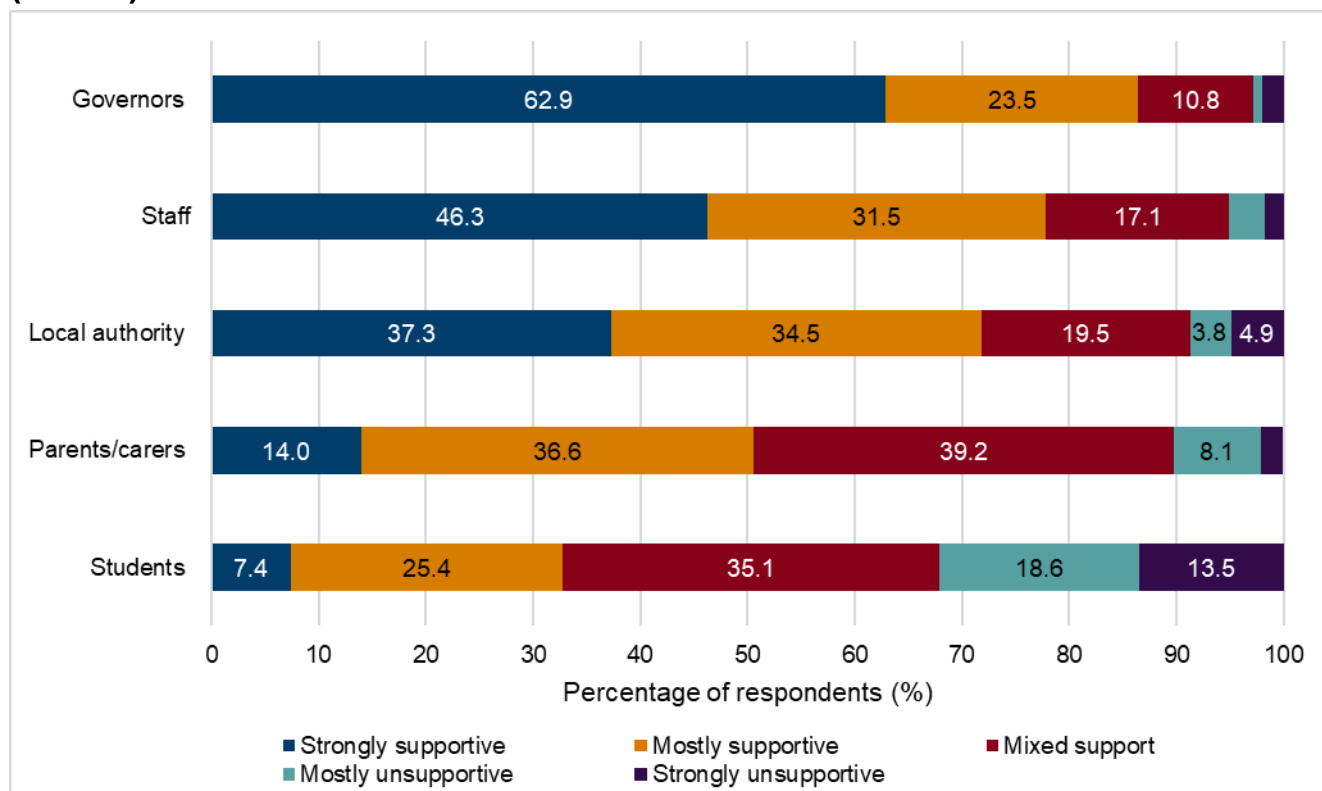
[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were, ‘behaviour management (e.g. reducing low-level disruption)’, ‘reducing bullying/malicious use of mobile phones (inappropriate content, image sharing)’, ‘staff workload (e.g. reducing phone-related conflict or administration)’ and ‘attendance and punctuality (e.g. reducing lateness due to phone use)’.

Description of figure 11: this stacked bar chart shows that respondents most commonly reported a positive impact of their setting’s approach to mobile phone use on reducing distraction, with around three quarters of respondents (74.6%) indicating a positive or very positive impact. Around 6 in 10 respondents reported a positive or very positive impact on behaviour management (65.0%), reducing bullying or malicious use of phones (61.6%), improving learner wellbeing (60.8%), improving communication and engagement with peers (60.3%), and supporting the safe and responsible use of digital technology (58.5%). Fewer than half of respondents reported a positive or very positive impact on staff workload (49.8%) and on attendance and punctuality (39.3%).

The proportion suggesting that there had been either a negative or very negative impact is low across most aspects. The exception was staff workload where almost 1 in 5 respondents (18.5%) reported a negative or very negative impact. This suggests that, in some cases, implementing mobile phone policies may be perceived as associated with increased work for staff for example through rule-related conflict and increased administrative demands.

Respondents were asked about the level of support for their setting’s approach to mobile phone use from a range of relevant groups (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: how would you rate the level of support for your setting’s current approach to mobile phone use among the following groups? (n=400)**



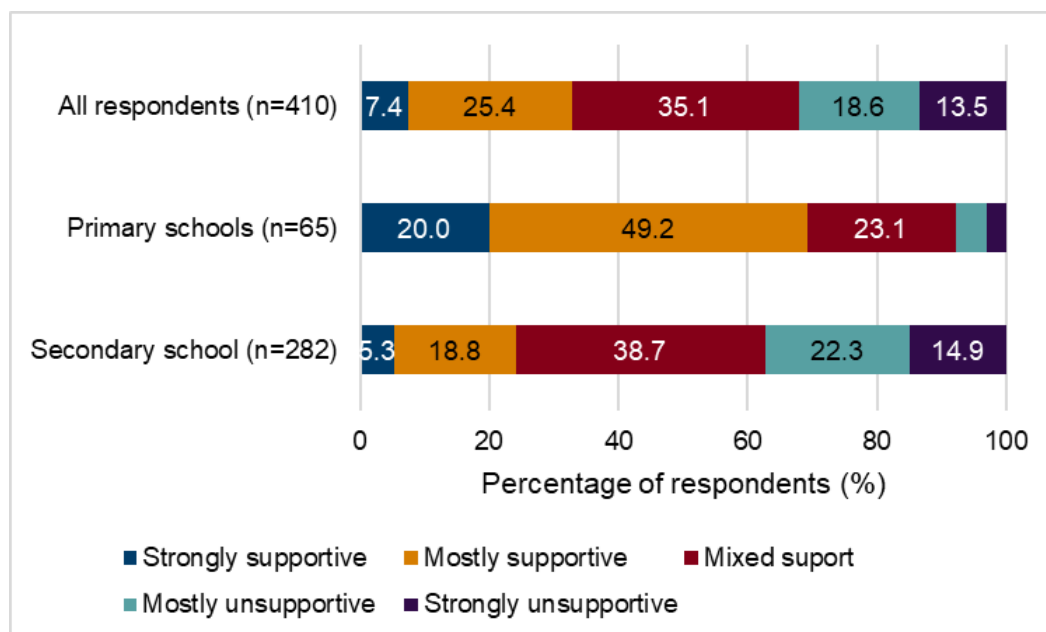
[Note 1]: The survey question included a ‘not applicable’ response option. The number of respondents selecting this option varied by group: staff (n=3), students (n=7), parents/carers (n=7), governors (n=47) and local authorities (n=113). The relatively high number of ‘not applicable’ responses for governors and local authorities suggests that some respondents did not consider these groups to be directly involved in developing or implementing their setting’s approach. ‘Not applicable’ responses have been excluded from this analysis.

Description of figure 12: this stacked bar chart shows that respondents reported higher levels of support for their setting’s approach to mobile phone use from governors, staff and local authorities than from parents/carers and students. Governors were most commonly reported as strongly supportive (62.9%) or mostly supportive (23.5%). Over three quarters of respondents indicated that staff were strongly (46.3%) or mostly supportive (31.5%), alongside similarly high levels of support from local authorities (37.3% strongly supportive and 34.5% mostly supportive).

In contrast, perceptions of support from parents/carers and students were more mixed. Just over half of respondents (50.6%) reported that parents/carers were either strongly supportive (14.0%) or mostly supportive (36.6%), while almost two fifths (39.2%) were described as providing mixed support. Students were least likely to be described as supportive (32.8% strongly or mostly supportive) and most commonly associated with mixed support (35.1%). Around a third of respondents (32.1%) described students as unsupportive (18.6% mostly unsupportive; 13.5% strongly unsupportive).

There was little variation between setting types among the above groups, with the exception of students. Levels of student support by setting type are analysed below.

**Figure 13: perceived levels of student support for the current approach, by setting type**



[Note 1]: only 65 respondents who answered this question reported working in a primary school; as a result, findings for this group should be interpreted with caution.

[Note 2]: The survey question included a 'not applicable' response option. Three respondents who reported working in a primary school selected this option and 3 working in a secondary school. 'Not applicable' responses have been excluded from this analysis.

Description of figure 13: this stacked bar chart shows that staff in secondary schools were more likely to report mixed support among students (38.7%) than any other category. Reports of unsupportive views were also prevalent in secondary settings, with over a fifth (22.3%) indicating that students were mostly unsupportive and almost 1 in 7 (14.9%) strongly unsupportive. Lower proportions reported that students were mostly supportive (18.8%) or strongly supportive (6.3%), indicating a more mixed or negative perception of student support in secondary schools.

In primary schools, staff perceptions were more positive. Around half reported that students were mostly supportive (49.2%), and a further 1 in 5 (20.0%) indicated that students were strongly supportive. Fewer staff reported mixed support (23.1%), and only small proportions indicated that students were mostly or strongly unsupportive (around 8% combined). This suggests that staff in primary settings were more likely to perceive student support as positive.

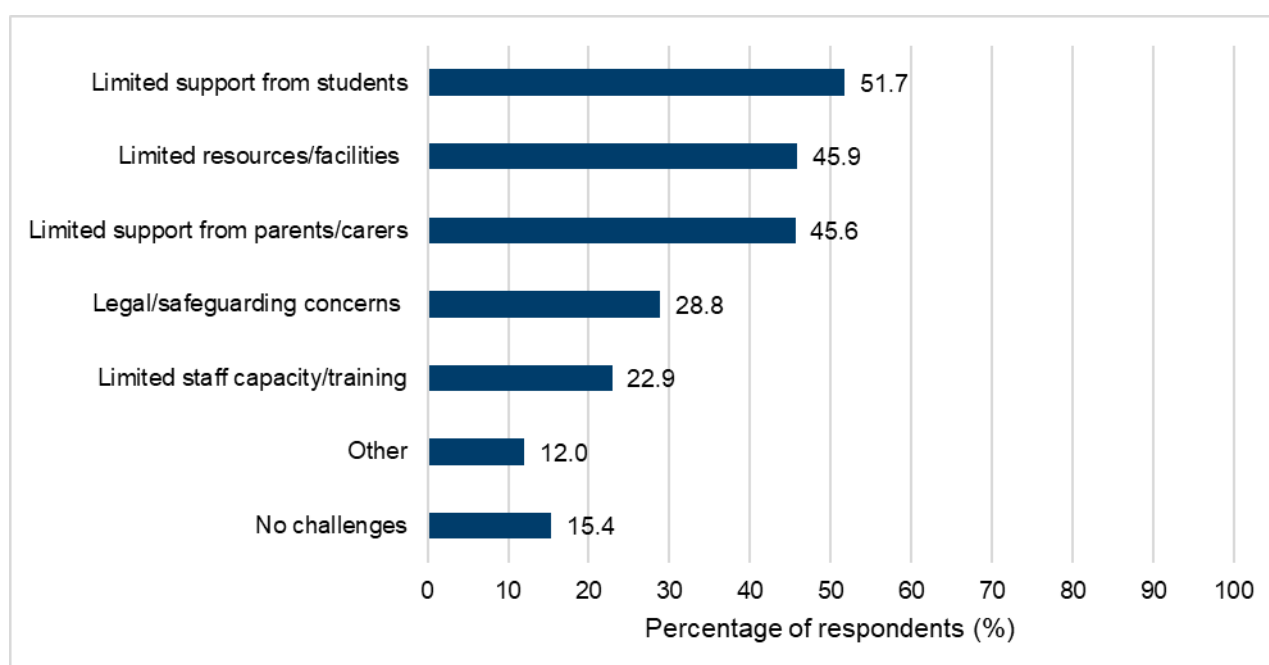
Responses from PRUs/alternative provision, special schools and all-through schools were small in number and should be interpreted with caution. In all-through schools (n=16), staff most commonly reported that students were mostly supportive (n=7), although responses were mixed overall, with smaller numbers indicating mixed support (n=3) and mostly

unsupportive views (n=3). Very few reported that students were strongly supportive (n=1) or strongly unsupportive (n=2). In special schools (n=17), responses were more evenly distributed (mostly supportive n=5; mixed support n=4; mostly unsupportive n=2; strongly unsupportive n=6). In PRU/alternative provision settings (n=3), 2 respondents reported mixed support and one reported that students were mostly unsupportive.

## Development and implementation of approaches to mobile phone use

The next section of the survey asked 4 questions about the development and implementation approaches to mobile phone use. Firstly, respondents were asked about the challenges they had faced when developing their approach (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: what challenges has your setting faced when developing your approach to mobile phone use? (n=410)**



[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were ‘limited resources/facilities (e.g. storage, confiscation procedures)’ and ‘legal/safeguarding concerns (e.g. handling devices/seeing inappropriate content)’.

[Note 2]: this was a multiple-choice question and respondents could select more than one option. As a result of this, the percentages for each option given do not total 100%.

Description of figure 14: this bar chart shows over half of respondents reported that limited support from learners has been a challenge when developing their setting’s approach to mobile phone use (51.7%). This is followed closely by limited resources/facilities (45.9%) and limited support from parents/carers (45.6%). Around a quarter of respondents also reported legal/safeguarding concerns (28.8%) and limited staff capacity/training (22.9%) as challenges.

Just under 1 in 8 respondents (12.0%, n=49) selected 'other' and chose to provide an open text response. Many of these elaborated on challenges captured in the structured response options, providing additional detail on issues such as limited support from students and parents/carers, resource constraints, and staff capacity.

Challenges relating to student support were reflected in descriptions of non-compliance with school rules, including learners refusing to adhere to restrictions or "sneaking in" phones. Some respondents also highlighted a perceived reliance on mobile phones, with one noting that "pupils feel they cannot survive without their phones – addiction to technology".

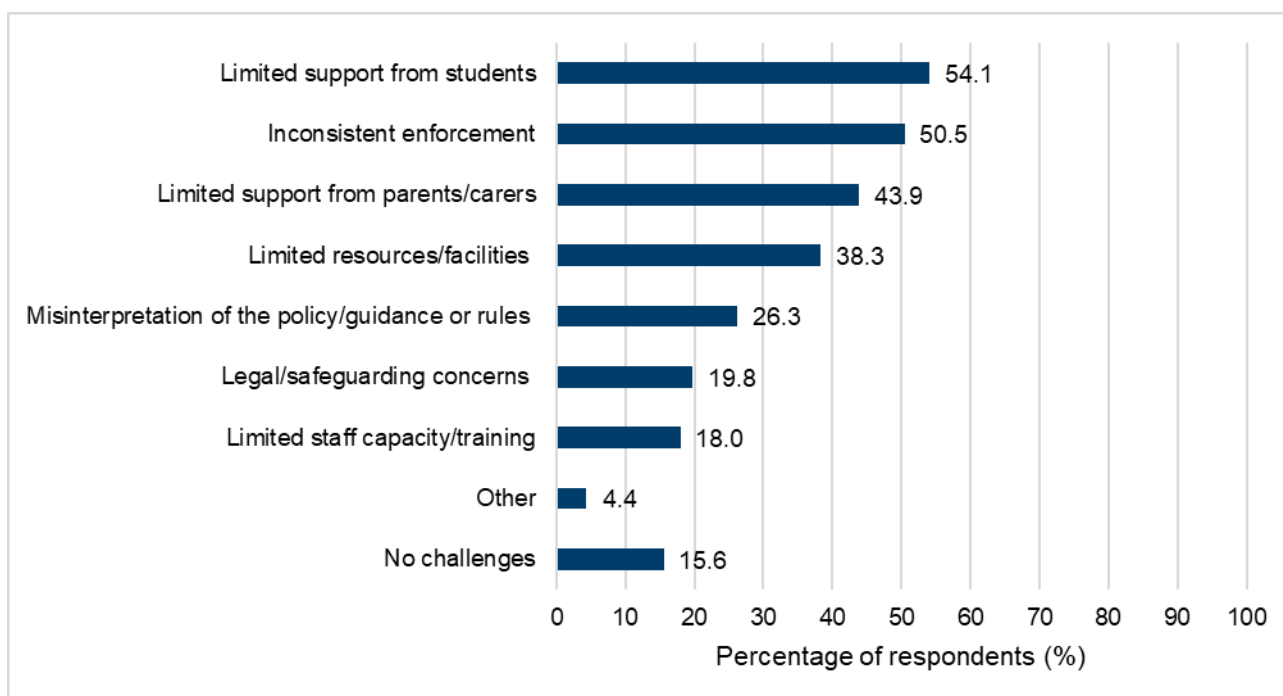
Awareness of more liberal policies in other schools was also described as contributing to difficulties in securing consistent compliance. Inconsistencies in implementation within and between schools were frequently reported, including differences in approach across settings for example, "inconsistencies between schools. Other schools have a more relaxed policy", and variation in staff practice. Some respondents additionally pointed to the influence of factors beyond the school environment, particularly in relation to social media use. This included instances where "children using social media to bully others outside school and bringing the issues into school the next day", illustrating how issues originating beyond school can affect behaviour and safeguarding within it.

A smaller number of responses referred to practical challenges in day-to-day implementation, such as the time required to manage devices, with one respondent describing the "time challenges of having to go out of our way to drop it off at a different room" and noting this as an additional stressor during the school day. Finally, a few responses raised issues not captured in the structured options, including references to additional learning needs (although with limited detail provided) and comments relating to a perceived lack of "direction", "support" or "advice" at a national level.

More than 1 in 7 respondents (15.4%) reported that they experienced no challenges when developing their setting's approach.

Respondents were also asked about the challenges their settings had faced when implementing their approach to mobile phone use (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: what challenges has your setting faced when implementing your approach to mobile phone use? (n=410)**



[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were 'limited resources/facilities (e.g. storage, confiscation procedures)' and 'legal/safeguarding concerns (e.g. handling devices/seeing inappropriate content)'.

[Note 2]: this was a multiple-choice question, and respondents could select more than one option. As a result of this, the percentages for each option given do not total 100%.

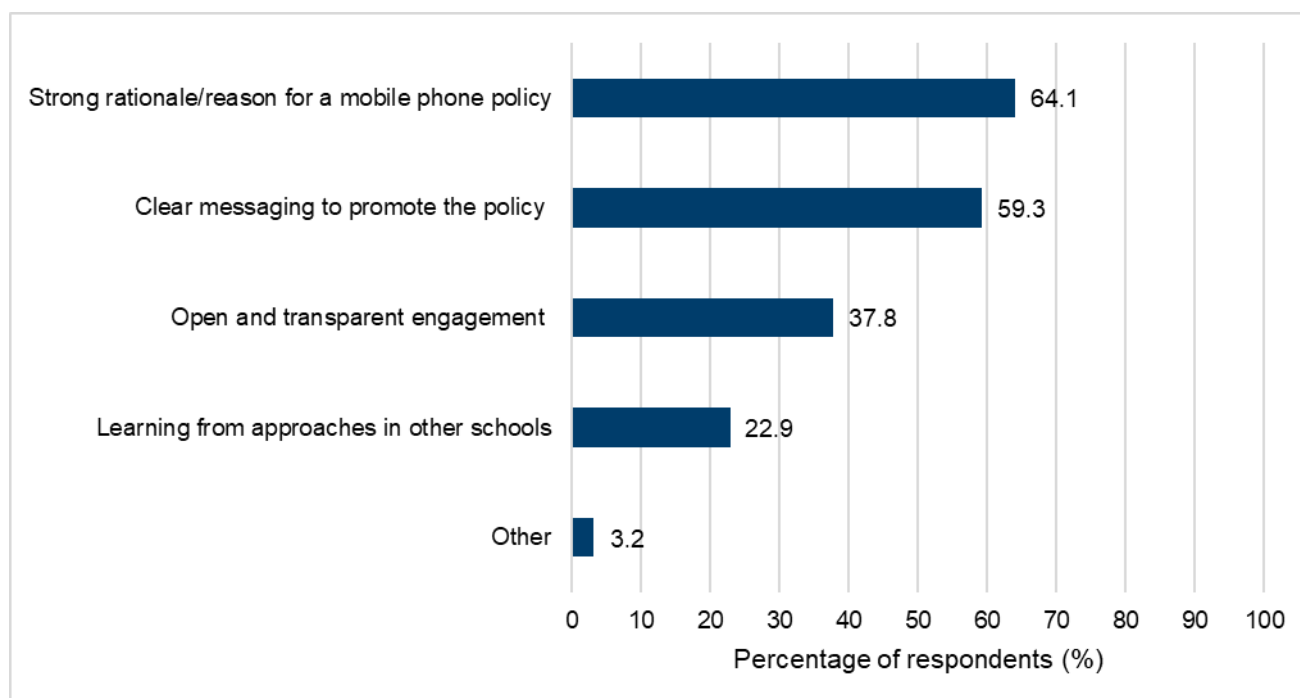
Description of figure 15: this bar chart shows more than half of respondents reported limited support from students (54.1%) and inconsistent enforcement (50.5%), followed by limited support from parents/carers (43.9%) and limited resources and facilities (38.3%). Just over a quarter of respondents reported challenges associated with the misinterpretation of policy or guidance or rules that had been developed as part of their setting's approach (26.3%). The least commonly reported challenges cited by around 1 in 5 respondents were legal or safeguarding concerns (19.8%) and limited staff capacity or training (18.0%).

Eighteen respondents (4.4%) selected 'Other' when responding to this question, and some chose to provide an open text response. These responses largely reiterated the closed response options in textual form, particularly highlighting limited student support. Some respondents associated this with reports of challenging or disruptive behaviours from students, as well as perceived difficulties in enforcing their setting's existing approach.

More than 1 in 7 respondents (15.6%) reported that they experienced no challenges when implementing their setting's approach.

The survey also asked respondents about the factors that have been most useful when developing their setting's approach to mobile phone use (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: what factors do you feel have been the most useful in the development of your setting’s approach to mobile phone use? (n=410)**



[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were ‘open and transparent engagement (including consultation with the school community)’ and ‘clear messaging to promote the policy (i.e. assemblies, parents evenings)’.

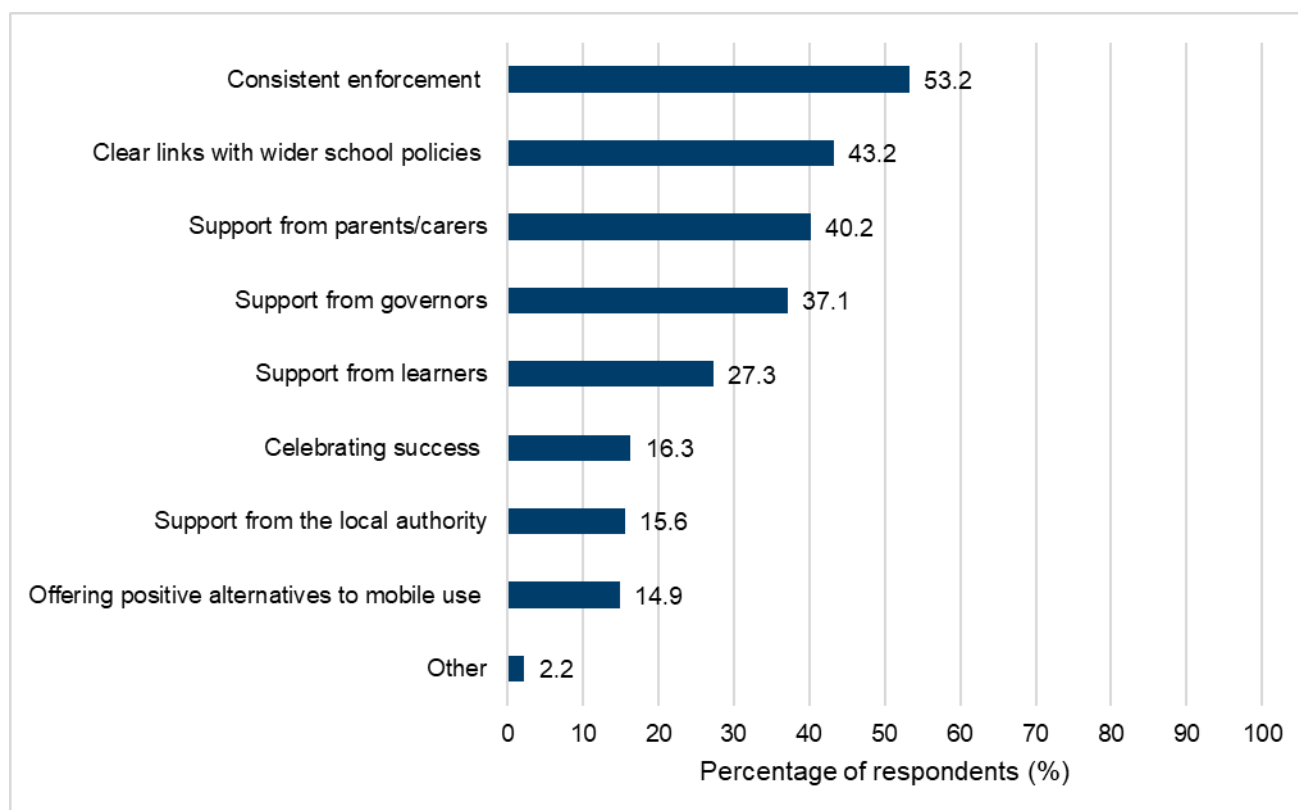
[Note 2]: this was a multiple-choice question, and respondents could select more than one option. As a result of this, the percentages for each option given do not total 100%.

Description of figure 16: this bar chart shows that a strong rationale/reason for a mobile phone policy was the most commonly identified factor supporting the development of approaches, reported by nearly two thirds (64.1%) of respondents, which is followed closely by clear messaging to promote the policy (59.3%). Over a third of respondents reported that open and transparent engagement was useful (37.8%) and just under a quarter identified learning from the approaches of other schools as useful (22.9%).

In addition to these, a handful of respondents selected ‘Other’ (3.2% n=13). In the open text responses given, some respondents mention agreement from staff and consistent messaging from staff to parents and carers as relevant factors. On several occasions respondents referred to the presence of a longer-term policy or culture of practice prohibiting mobile phone use that pre-dates recent concerns and is now embedded and working successfully.

The survey finished this theme by asking respondents about the factors that they feel have been useful when implementing their setting’s approach to mobile phone use (Figure 17).

**Figure 17: factors that have been useful in the implementation of a setting's approach to mobile phone use (n=410)**



[Note 1]: the full response options in the survey were 'clear links with wider school policies (i.e. wellbeing, behaviour/relational policies)', 'offering positive alternatives to mobile use (i.e. break time activities)' and 'celebrating success (e.g. more face-to-face interaction, stronger friendships, improved wellbeing)'.

[Note 2]: this was a multiple-choice question, and respondents could select more than one option. As a result of this, the percentages for each option given do not total 100%.

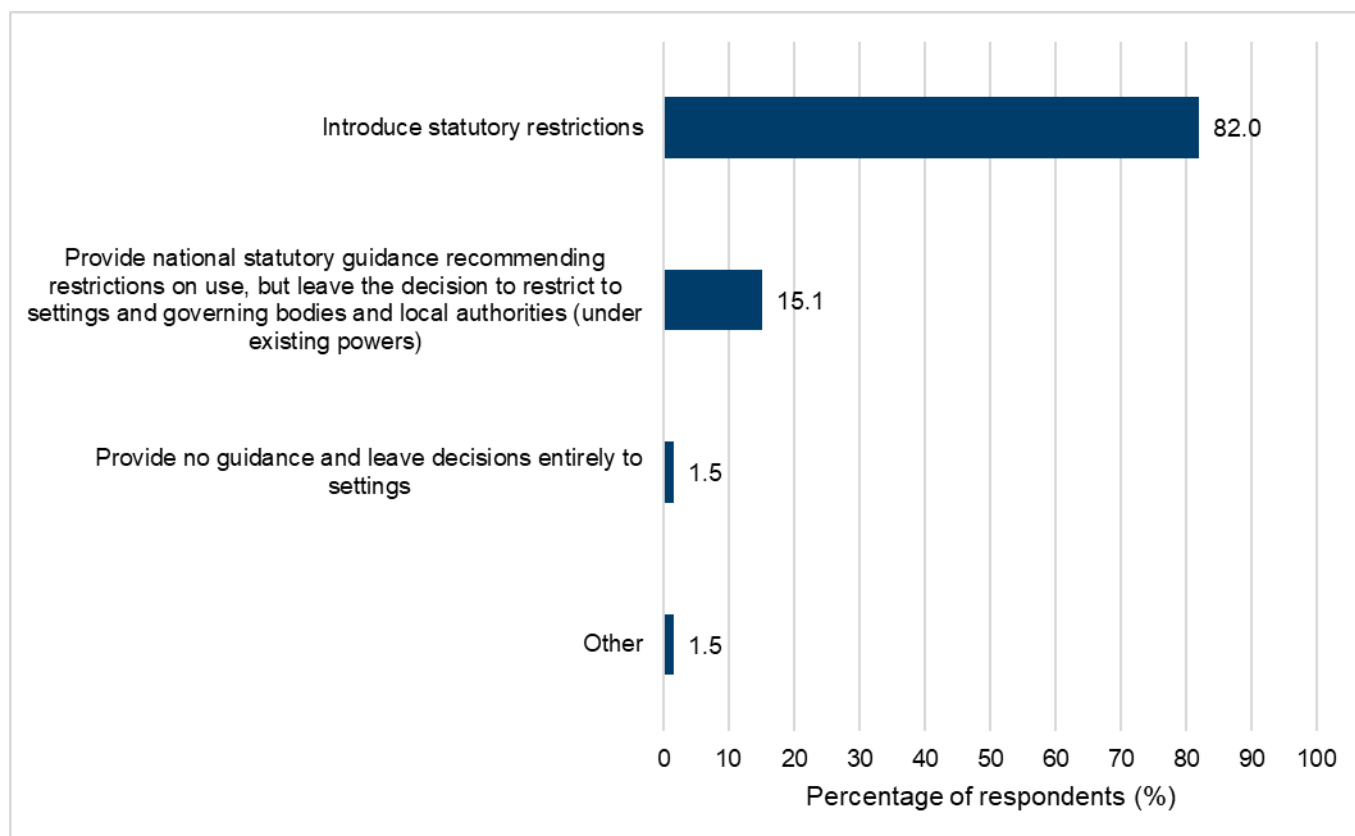
Description of figure 17: this bar chart shows that over half of respondents report that the most useful factor in the implementation of their setting's approach to mobile phone use is consistent enforcement (53.2%), which is followed by clear links with wider school policies (43.2%), support from parents/carers (40.2%) and support from governors (37.1%), and just over a quarter noting the role of support from learners (27.3%). Less commonly reported responses included celebrating success (16.3%), support from the local authority (15.6%) and offering positive alternatives to mobile phone use (14.9%).

Nine respondents (2.2%) selected 'Other' when responding to this question. These open text responses reiterate the importance of consistency in enforcement and support received from teaching staff when implementing the policy or approach. Respondents also referred to consistency in the messaging provided to parents and learners in a way that supports transparency.

## Preferred national approach

Respondents were asked about how Welsh Government should approach mobile phone use in education settings (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: how do you think the Welsh Government should approach mobile phone use in education settings and any related restrictions? (n=410)**



[Note 1]: Those respondents who selected 'Other' and provided a valid response (n=5) indicated that this was because they were unsure which option to select.

[Note 2]: Percentages sum to 100.1% due to rounding.

Description of figure 18: this bar chart shows that more than 8 in 10 respondents (82.0%) felt that the Welsh Government should introduce statutory restrictions on student mobile phone use. Around 1 in 7 respondents (15.1%) supported the provision of national statutory guidance recommending restrictions, while leaving decisions to settings, governing bodies and local authorities under existing powers. Only 1.5% (n=6) of respondents felt that no guidance should be provided and that decisions should be left entirely to settings.

Overall, responses showed a high degree of consistency across settings, with respondents in all settings most commonly supporting the introduction of statutory restrictions on mobile phone use. While there was some variation in the level of support for alternative approaches, patterns were broadly similar across primary schools, secondary schools and other settings.

Respondents were asked to explain their response, and 392 provided an open-text comment. The most frequently expressed view was that Welsh Government should set a clear and consistent national approach across schools and local authorities, as respondents felt that existing variation was seen to undermine understanding and enforcement. Respondents commonly described inconsistency as leading to confusion, disagreement and conflict between schools, learners and parents. As a respondent noted, “if the guidance is the same across all schools, then there is consistency across all schools. There are then no discrepancies and arguments”.

Closely linked to this desire for consistency, many respondents felt that nationally set direction would be more effective than leaving decisions to individual schools and that statutory restrictions are the most robust mechanism as they were seen to provide clarity and remove scope for interpretation. As a respondent put it, “you have to take this out of the hands of schools. Having statutory restrictions simplifies everything for schools and provides the certainty that is required on this matter”. However, while legislation was frequently emphasised, responses suggest that one of the main underlying concerns was the need for greater consistency across settings, rather than whether this was achieved through legislation or guidance.

Respondents also highlighted the pressure placed on schools and staff under current arrangements, particularly where policies led to disagreement with parents or learners. Many described mobile phone rules as a source of dispute, with staff spending time justifying or negotiating restrictions. A nationally led restrictive approach was viewed as reducing this burden by shifting responsibility to Welsh Government and providing external authority to support enforcement. One respondent summarised this view by stating, “if everyone has the same policy then kids can’t complain. Parents and pupils would understand where they stand”.

In explaining why Welsh Government intervention was needed, respondents commonly referred to perceived negative impacts of mobile phone use on learning, behaviour and wellbeing. Phones were widely associated with distraction in lessons, safeguarding concerns, online bullying and reduced social interaction, with some respondents linking these issues directly to increased staff workload. These views were sometimes grounded in respondents’ own experience, for example where restrictions had already been introduced locally. As a respondent stated, “they interfere with my lessons, my pastoral duties and cause significant safeguarding and bullying issues”.

Equity considerations were also prominent. Many respondents argued that national consistency would promote fairness by ensuring similar expectations for learners across Wales, regardless of school or locality, and would reduce difficulties during transitions between schools. One respondent explained that “having national guidance ensures equitable experiences for all learners, giving them the same opportunities to develop relationships and communicate without mobile phones”. This was also linked to safeguarding, with respondents suggesting that consistent restrictions would better protect learners and staff.

Alongside views on national direction, respondents emphasised that Welsh Government's approach should consider practical implementation. Many suggested that any national expectations would need to be supported by clear procedures and appropriate resourcing, particularly in relation to secure storage of devices. Without this, respondents felt that schools could struggle to implement restrictions. As a respondent noted, "if phones are to be brought for the journey to school, there should be funding to all schools for safe wallets or secure storage to lock them away for the day".

A small group of respondents raised concerns about blanket national restrictions and argued for flexibility. These respondents felt that schools differ by context, phase and learner need, and that Welsh Government should allow discretion to accommodate these differences. This included recognising educational uses of phones in some settings and the needs of learners requiring devices for medical or accessibility reasons. As a respondent stated, "no two schools are identical. Blanket statutory restrictions would be unhelpful. Guidance should support successful schools to continue what already works". While these views were expressed, they were substantially less prevalent than calls for a nationally consistent approach.

## 5. Conclusions

Mobile phone use in schools has received increasing policy and stakeholder attention in Wales and across the UK, particularly in relation to its potential impacts on learning, behaviour and wellbeing. In Wales, approaches are currently determined at school level, with practice varying between settings and local authorities.

The survey was designed to provide an evidence base on how mobile phone use is currently managed across education settings in Wales, and to inform policy development in this area. The survey met these aims by gathering evidence on existing policies and practices, exploring the reasons underpinning these approaches, and identifying the challenges and facilitators associated with their implementation. It also assessed perceived impacts of current approaches on areas such as learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and captured views on how Welsh Government might approach mobile phone use in schools.

Quantitative findings indicate considerable variation in how mobile phone use is managed across settings. While most respondents reported the presence of a formal written policy, others described more informal arrangements, including unwritten rules or partial guidance. Differences are also evident between settings, with respondents working in secondary schools more likely to report formalised policies and more restrictive approaches than respondents working in primary schools and other settings. Despite this variation, there is broad alignment across settings in restricting the use of mobile phones during the school day. The most commonly reported approach is to allow phones on site but limit their use during learning time, although alternative approaches, such as limited use at specific times or complete restrictions are also reported.

Respondents generally perceived their setting's approach to mobile phone use to have positive impacts across several areas. The most commonly reported positive or very positive impacts were on reducing distraction, behaviour management, reducing bullying or misuse, and improving learner wellbeing. In contrast, perceived impacts on staff workload and learner attendance were more mixed. While some respondents reported positive effects, a notable proportion described increased workload or no noticeable change, suggesting that the implementation and enforcement of policies may, in some cases, create additional demands on staff.

The findings also highlight a range of challenges associated with both the development and implementation of mobile phone policies. Limited support from students, inconsistent enforcement, and limited support from parents or carers were among the most commonly reported challenges. Resource constraints, including the availability of secure storage, were also identified. These findings highlight the importance of the extent to which mobile phone policies and guidance are consistently applied and supported by the wider school community.

At the same time, evidence on factors supporting development and implementation highlights the importance of clarity, communication and consistency. Respondents identified that a clear rationale for policies and consistent messaging to staff, learners and parents as important in supporting development. In implementation, consistent enforcement, alignment

with wider school policies, and support from parents, governors and staff were identified as important facilitators. Taken together, these findings suggest that successful implementation depends on a combination of clear expectations, shared understanding across the school community, and consistent application in practice.

In relation to future policy development, there is strong and consistent support among respondents for greater national direction. Quantitative findings show that a large majority favour the introduction of statutory restrictions on mobile phone use, with relatively little support for approaches that leave decisions entirely to individual settings, governing bodies and local authorities. Qualitative responses suggest that this preference is primarily driven by a desire for greater consistency across schools and local authorities, alongside a perception that nationally set expectations would support enforcement and reduce conflict with learners and parents. These views reflect respondents' experiences of challenges associated with current variation in approaches and implementing policies at a local level.

At the same time, a small number of respondents highlighted the importance of flexibility in any national approach. Although these views were less prevalent, they indicate a potential tension between the benefits of national consistency and the need to accommodate local circumstances.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while restrictive approaches to mobile phone use are already widely in place, there is a clear appetite within the education workforce for greater national consistency and direction. Simultaneously, the evidence highlights that effectiveness is likely to depend on implementation factors, including consistency of enforcement, stakeholder support and access to appropriate resources. These factors are likely to be important considerations in the design and implementation of any future guidance or restrictions on mobile phone use in education settings in Wales.

# Annex A Survey tool

The Welsh Government is seeking the views of the education workforce on student mobile phone use in education settings across Wales. The findings from this research will help the Welsh Government understand current approaches, the reasons behind them, and any perceived impacts. This evidence will inform next steps regarding future mobile phone support for education settings.

This short survey should take you no more than 10 minutes. Please answer based on your current setting.

**1) Are you responding today as a (please answer based on your main role):**

- Classroom teacher
- Teaching assistant/support staff
- Pastoral/wellbeing staff
- Additional Learning needs (ALN) specialist
- Behaviour lead
- Safeguarding lead
- Senior leadership (SLT)
- Administrative staff
- Other (please specify):

**2) What type of setting do you work in?**

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Special school
- PRU/Alternative Provision
- 16-19 learning setting/FE college
- All-through school
- Other (please specify):

**3) Within which Local Authority is your education setting based?**

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Cardiff Council
- Carmarthenshire County Council
- Ceredigion County Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Denbighshire County Council
- Flintshire County Council
- Gwynedd Council
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Newport City Council

- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Powys County Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- City and County of Swansea
- The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- Wrexham County Borough Council

4) Which of the following best describes your setting’s approach to policy and guidance around mobile phone use:

- We have a formal written policy
- We have written guidance and rules but no formal policy
- We have unwritten guidance and rules but no formal policy
- We have no current guidance and rules and no formal policy

**Routing** Are you considering developing, or in the process of developing, a mobile phone policy, guidance or rules in your setting?

- i. Yes
- ii. No

Please tell us more:

5) What is the current approach to student mobile phones in your setting?

- Phones are not allowed on site
- Phones are allowed on site but locked away in phone pouches
- Phones are allowed on site but not used during the school day
- Phones are allowed on site but with limited use (e.g. at break times)
- Phones are allowed on site but used only with teacher discretion (e.g. learning activities and emergencies)
- No restrictions to student mobile phone use
- Other (please specify):

6) To what extent is the mobile phone policy enforced consistently across your setting (e.g., classrooms, corridors, social spaces)?

- Very consistently
- Mostly consistently
- Somewhat consistently
- Not very consistently
- Not at all consistently
- Not applicable

7) How important are each of the following reasons for your setting’s current approach to mobile phone use?

	Very important	Quite important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
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Reducing distraction					
Behaviour management (e.g. reducing low-level disruption)					
Reducing bullying/malicious use of mobile phones (inappropriate content, image sharing)					
Supporting safe and responsible use of digital technology					
Attendance and punctuality (e.g. reducing lateness due to phone use)					
Learner wellbeing					
Improving learner communication and engagement with peers					

Staff workload (e.g. reducing phone-related conflict or administration)					
The expectations or preferences of parents/carers					

8) Overall, how would you describe the impact of your setting's approach to mobile phone use on the following areas?

	Very positive	Positive	No noticeable change	Negative	Very negative
Reducing distraction					
Behaviour management (e.g. reducing low-level disruption)					
Reducing bullying/malicious use of mobile phones (inappropriate content, image sharing)					
Supporting safe and responsible use of digital technology					
Improving learner communication and engagement with peers					

Improving learner wellbeing					
Attendance and punctuality (e.g. reducing lateness due to phone use)					
Staff workload (e.g. reducing phone-related conflict or administration)					

9) How would you rate the level of support for your setting's current approach to mobile phone use among the following groups?

	Strongly supportive	Mostly supportive	Mixed support	Mostly unsupportive	Strongly unsupportive	Not applicable
Parents/carers						
Students						
Staff						
Governors						
Local Authority						

The next four questions focus on the development and implementation of your setting's approach to student mobile phone use.

10) What challenges has your setting faced when developing your approach to mobile phone use? (select all that apply)

- Limited support from students
- Limited support from parents/carers

- Limited resources/facilities (e.g. storage, confiscation procedures)
- Limited staff capacity/training
- Legal/safeguarding concerns (e.g. handling devices/seeing inappropriate content)
- Other (please specify):
- No challenges

**11) What challenges has your setting faced when implementing your approach to mobile phone use? (select all that apply)**

- Limited support from students
- Limited support from parents/carers
- Limited resources/facilities (e.g. storage, confiscation procedures)
- Misinterpretation of the policy/guidance or rules
- Inconsistent enforcement
- Limited staff capacity/training
- Legal/safeguarding concerns (e.g. handling devices/seeing inappropriate content)
- Other (please specify):
- No challenges

**12) What factors do you feel have been the most useful in the development of your setting's approach to mobile phone use?**

- Learning from approaches in other schools
- Strong rationale/reason for a mobile phone policy
- Open and transparent engagement (including consultation with the school community)
- Clear messaging to promote the policy (i.e. assemblies, parents evenings)
- Other (please specify):

**13) What factors do you feel have been the most useful in implementing your setting's approach to mobile phone use?**

- Support from learners
- Support from parents/carers
- Support from governors
- Support from the local authority
- Clear links with wider school policies i.e. wellbeing, behaviour/relational policies
- Offering positive alternatives to mobile use (i.e. break time activities)
- Consistent enforcement
- Celebrating success (e.g. more face-to-face interaction, stronger friendships, improved well-being).
- Other (please specify):

**14) How do you think the Welsh Government should approach mobile phone use in education settings and any related restrictions?**

- Introduce statutory restrictions
- Provide national statutory guidance recommending restrictions on use, but leave the decision to restrict to settings and governing bodies and local authorities (under existing powers)
- Provide no guidance and leave decisions entirely to settings
- Other (please specify):

**15) Please provide a brief explanation for your response to question 14:**