



Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association

Press Release

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SSTA Members Mobile Phone Survey – February 2024

The SSTA Congress has debated the use of mobile phones and supported members who use mobile phones in class to help lessons. This decision was taken due to the lack of access to mobile devices and the connectivity within schools.

Early in 2023 the SSTA carried out a survey on pupil behaviour and it highlighted that 71% of members were concerned that the misuse of mobile phones was having an impact on poor pupil behaviour and learning.

The SSTA Education Committee wanted to get further information on the use of mobile phones in school and commissioned a survey to find out members' views. The survey took place in February 2024 with 1,451 members responding.

Teachers allowed the use of mobile phones to help with lessons.

63% Yes
37% No

How often do you allow the use of mobile phones?

19% Never
57% Rarely
4% Most lessons
3% Once a day
8% Once a week
10% Several times a week
0.6% Every lesson

Are your lesson(s) interrupted by asking pupils to put away their mobile phone?

92% Yes
8% No

How many lessons in a day are interrupted by asking pupils to put away their mobile phones?

12% one or two lessons
13% half my lessons
42% the majority of lessons
33% All my lessons

Do you have access to other mobile devices that could be used during the lesson?

- 70% Yes
- 30% No

Of those who said yes, how accessible are these devices?

- 1% No access
- 34% Limited access
- 35% Readily available
- 30% Always available

How would you describe the Wi-Fi connection in your school?

- 3% None
- 21% Poor
- 40% Varies
- 27% Good
- 9% Very good

Mobile phone use is causing a number of concerns within schools. Please indicate what concerns you may have over their use?

- 90% Pupils have detachment issues
- 90% Texting during lessons
- 80% Taking photos
- 60% Social media bullying
- 46% Answering calls during the lesson
- 41% Viewing inappropriate content
- 35% Live recording of lessons (audibly, visually, or both)
- 16% Other

(e.g. gaming, recording staff, listening to music, watching tv, contacting parents to make a complaint about staff, taking and hiding other people's phones, anxiety (constantly checking), arranging meetings in corridors or toilets, snapchat or YouTube, cheating during tests, upskirting, videoing fights and bullying then sharing, AI friends and online 'dares', etc.)

What strategies (if any) have been used to prevent the use of mobile phones in your class?

- 86% Pupils asked to put phones away
- 83% Pupils asked to put phone in school bags
- 67% Phones on desk if used in lesson and collected at end of lesson
- 44% Pupils asked to put phone on silent
- 21% Pupils asked to place phones into a box or doocots at start of lesson
- 13% Other

(e.g. confiscation, phones sent to school office, message home, demerits, detentions, Complications - leads to confrontation when pupils refuse to give-up phones often with parental support, possible theft, need phone to pay for school lunch).

Does your school have a mobile phone policy?

- 72% Yes
- 28% No

If yes, how well is the policy operated in school?

- 2% Extremely effective
- 7% Very effective
- 31% Somewhat effective
- 33% Not so effective
- 27% Not effective at all

Would you help to support a mobile phone policy introduced by your schools/local authority?

- 96% Yes
- 4% No

There is an increasing voice to ban mobile phones from schools. Do indicate your position.

- 37% Complete ban
- 22% Ban use in class
- 3% Use in school (outside of class in all areas)
- 11% Use in school (outside of class in social areas)
- 5% Use in school (outside school buildings, playgrounds)
- 10% Use in school (only in specific designated areas)
- 4% No ban
- 7% Other
(e.g. legitimate use with permission, no point a ban unless enforced, lack of support from local authority, would like a ban but need mobile phone as IT provision so poor, pushback from parents, complete ban for S1-S3)

A selection of comments from SSTA members

“Aggressive and defiant behaviour when pupils are asked to put phone away or put it in the box”.

“Phones are such a massive distraction, aside from what they are used for, the fact that the focus is not completely on the lesson means the level of engagement and therefore attainment is diminished”.

“Mobile phones are the biggest challenge in my class. They cause behaviour management issues in virtually every lesson”.

“Pupils are very distracted by their phones. Often when one is confiscated and sitting on my desk it vibrates continually with snap chat and other message notifications.”

“You ask pupils to put them away but it’s the norm for them to have them out. It’s relentless - I wish there were a ban with proper sanctions like in other schools.”

“Giving a demerit and if pupils got 5 demerits parents are phoned. The parents mostly agree to make their children hand in their phones to SMT in the morning and collect

at the end of the day for a week. Unfortunately, this is only for pupils who have their phone out for the whole lesson. It is also a huge workload for guidance staff”.

“More strategic action from government is needed to give teachers powers to remove such devices. We don't have a right to remove pupils' property legally right now”.

“Pupils have a belief that they can do whatever they want with them, for example, a pupil was on their phone in my lesson so I warned her she would lose the phone if she kept doing it, she did so I took the phone off her, she said she was texting her Mum just to see how her day was going. She started crying, later in the day management came and told me I shouldn't have taken the phone off her”.

“Pupils in my school have iPads – so they don't need to have their phones. But they are regularly out in class. Referrals raised don't reduce incidents - there are no consequences”.

“Major inconsistencies across classrooms and sanctions given. However, issues lie with pupils refusing to follow request for phones to go away. It's the defiance that escalates the situation. Sadly, many parents take the side of their young person, or have been the ones to message during lesson time. If parents don't support the policy, it becomes increasingly difficult”.

“The policy has to be Scotland wide with no room for interpretation. I spoke to one class, and they were on their phones up to 8 hours a day! (Can view use in settings). They are hooked on their phones which is incredibly worrying especially when they are not fulfilling their potential”.

“My head teacher says our council policy is that phones cannot be removed from pupils. This means you have no support if you do take the phone for the period, you have no support if a parent complains about a child being told to put their phone away, and no depute or PT is allowed to support sanctions for phone use. Yet we are constantly told pupils are to have no access to their phones and we're to magically nurture them into not wanting to use their phone”.