St Albans Primary Schools Consortium

May 2024

A joint statement on a Smartphone-free Childhood by St Albans Primary School Headteachers

Dear Parents/Guardians

As you may have seen on social media, there is a growing movement amongst parents to support a campaign called "Smartphone-Free Childhood". You can find out more by clicking these links:

https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/ https://delaysmartphones.org.uk/

This campaign has been discussed at length in our St Albans Primary Heads' Consortium meetings and a significant number of our primary schools are keen to support it in any way we can. By "smartphones", we refer to phones that are able to access the internet, as opposed to mobile phones that can only text and make phone calls.

We understand the importance of being able to contact your child as they become more independent, walking to and from school, in order to give you peace of mind and for children to be able to call in emergencies. Children's phones do not need to have access to the internet in order for you to keep them safe however.

The use of smartphones is now a feature of daily life for most adults and over the last few years the age at which children are given their first smartphone has dropped significantly. We know that in our schools some children as young as Key Stage 1 have smartphones.

Whilst smartphones can be a very helpful piece of technology for adults, they can equally expose children to a number of negative risks.

Smartphones:

- Are highly addictive, with the lasting effects on young and developing brains being similar to that of gambling.
- Have been linked to poor mental health, depression and low self-esteem, especially in young teenagers.
- Expose children to harmful content including pornography, grooming, bullying and material that is not age appropriate.
- Reduce attention spans – they are changing the way children's brains develop and fundamentally affecting their ability to concentrate.
- Rob children of their childhood. Time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting and developing vital social skills.

To show our professional support for this campaign, we encourage all parents to delay giving children a smartphone until they reach the age of 14, opting instead for a text/call phone alternative if necessary. As Head Teachers, we have committed to promoting our own schools as **smart-phone free**. We believe we can all work together across St Albans and join the growing movement across the country to change the 'normal' age that children are given smartphones.

However, to be successful, this movement relies on you, our children's parents, to resist the pressure from your children and their peers and hold back on giving your children smartphones until they are 14. In this way you will be working together with a wide network of parents and schools to re-set the expectation and remove social peer pressure.

If you would like to find out more about this issue (including the facts listed above and alternative phone options) or would like to become more actively involved, please ask at your school or click on the links in this letter.

Our children's futures are so important, to you and to us. In a world where fast-changing technology is actually impacting the development of our children's brains, it is up to us to stand up for them, and their futures. If not us, then who?

Yours faithfully

St Albans Primary Headteachers