

CYPE(6)-15-22 – Paper to note 1

Additional evidence from teaching unions regarding mobile phones in schools

National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)

All schools have policies in place that ban the use of mobile phones in class. There may be varying degrees of restrictions in secondary, for example they may be allowed to be used at lunch but certainly not in lesson time.

Some LAs would have authority-wide policies adopted by schools or schools have developed their own policies - that's in line with most policies in schools, there is rarely one national policy. For example disciplinary policies - there's national guidance from WG of what the expectation is to be included, but it's just guidance and schools and LAs develop their own policies to suit their own needs and settings.

NAHT's view is that of our members which is to say that mobile phones have no place in the classroom.

National guidance, if it was felt it was warranted would be useful in the same way WG guidance on a host of issues is useful but its guidance, it's not enforceable and the biggest challenge for schools around mobile phones and social media is not what goes on in school or during school hours, it's what happens outside schools, in our communities that has an impact on school life.

As a rights-respecting organisation it is not for our members or a school to advise parents on whether or not to buy children phones and allow them social media accounts, that is down to parent choice and the responsibility of parents to manage. However, those decisions have consequences for schools. School leaders tend to find themselves involved in very challenging situations when it comes to social media for example. If a child posts something about another child, outside of school, not related to school at all but both children attend the same school, it's the school that has to deal with the parental complaints, even though the school is not directly involved. The school just has to deal with the consequences. It's that blurred line between what is a schools responsibility and what is not that is exacerbated by social media. That is incredibly challenging.

Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

I am aware that many schools would have policies on the use of mobile phones. We would be in favour of Heads having flexibility in their approach to this.

UCAC

As far as you're aware, do schools generally have policies in place restricting access to/use of phones during lessons and/or breaktimes? Is there guidance to schools on this or is it left to schools' discretion?

This definitely varies from school to school – some with very strict policies especially about the use of phones during lessons, and others far more relaxed, up to the point of actually making use of phones for research during lessons. I am not aware of any specific guidance to schools.

Does the union have a position on pupils' use of phones?

Not specifically, but we advocate clear policies and consistent application of them within any school. These need to be seen in the context of broader 'acceptable usage policies' for technology in schools, with connections to anti-bullying and to disciplinary policies and procedures.

Would you welcome a consistent national approach, such as for example a general restriction on pupils using mobile phones throughout the school day?

Not necessarily. It depends a lot on the general 'culture' of the school. Implementing policies in this area is fraught with complexity and sensitivity – and there's a definite danger of unintended consequences, or a counter-productive effect. On the whole, we think it's probably best to concentrate on educating the whole school community about what is acceptable and what isn't (and why), and ensuring the space for discussion – but also the links to disciplinary policies, particularly in relation to bullying, sexual harassment, etc.

National Education Union (NEU)

The NEU has guidance for its members, setting out its position on mobile phones in schools.

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/cyberbullying-school-staff>

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/mobile-phone-photography>

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/online-safety-protecting-school-staff-and-pupils>

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/social-media-and-online-safety>

<https://neu.org.uk/social-media-model-policy-checklist>

NASUWT

The NASUWT has specific guidance for members facing social media abuse and this specifies how we expect schools to deal with the issue:

<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/social-media-and-online-abuse-of-teachers.htm>

The problem with the issue is that the modern mobile phone is a powerful resource that can be an excellent learning tool. Teachers already use this resource as part of their teaching. The issue is therefore not with the phone but in the abuse of the phone. Where there needs to be consistency is in the robust response to this abuse. The NASUWT would not therefore advocate the wholesale confiscation of mobile phones but would want to see consistency in a robust response to their inappropriate use.

The abuse of mobile phones through inappropriate postings to social media, covert recording of lessons etc... has caused misery in the profession and has ruined some teachers lives and careers. Therefore, the use of mobile phones should be closely monitored and policed and any inappropriate use should be rapidly and robustly dealt with. Learners and parents are fully aware of what appropriate and inappropriate use is so there should be no argument when a range of sanctions are used depending upon the extent of the inappropriate use. What makes teachers angry is if inappropriate use is ignored or lightly dealt with which does not take into consideration the devastating impact inappropriate use can have on teachers lives and indeed other education workers and learners. The NASUWT would therefore want to see schools take this issue seriously to reflect the serious impact it has on staff and learners.

University and College Union (UCU)

The UCU had no comment to make on this issue.