



Draft Voluntary Code on Smartphones
Oatlands Primary School Parents Council
January 2024

Dear Oatlands Families,

We are pleased to announce, with the full support of the School, we are introducing a voluntary 'No Smartphone Code' where families are given the option to agree collectively to delay purchasing a smartphone for their child reaches secondary school.

Thank you to those who completed the recent Parents Council survey on this. Of those replying we had a 83% positive response that families would like a voluntary code on this. At a meeting on 15th November 2023, our Parents Council met with 6 other local primary schools. It looks that similar codes are now at different stages of implementation in many local schools (e.g. Scoil San Treasa, St Lawrences, Mount Anville Junior School, Mount Anville Primary as well as Carysfort National School).

The more families that sign up to the Code, the more normalised it becomes, and this should reduce the pressure that many families feel under to buy a smartphone for their child earlier than secondary school.

Why is it being introduced now?

In recent years, there is concern and evidence around children and pre-teens having unsupervised access to the internet and social media. There is an increasing body of evidence which has shown the negative effects of excessive use of smartphones on the developing brain, especially on children under the age of 14 – socially, emotionally and educationally (see below for references).

Things to know about our school's No Smartphone Code:

1. The Code is **voluntary**; neither the School nor Parents' Council can or should mandate what parents choose to buy their children.
2. It complements the existing school policy regarding mobile phone use which states that students are not permitted to use a personal smartphone on the school premises.
3. The Code does not include regular/basic mobile phones with no internet access (for e.g. Nokia style brick-phones). Simpler mobile phones such as these may be a viable alternative for families that wish to allow more independence for the older children, and a way to keep in touch.
4. It recognises that every family has different priorities and opinions in relation to internet access and smartphone use.
5. We recognise that this voluntary code is not a solution in itself to the growing problem but it is potentially one tool which may be helpful to those who wish to avail of it.

We are aware we introduce this code at a time when there is national discussion regarding it. Late last year, Minister Foley launched a new national plan to encourage parents to refrain from [buying their child a smartphone](#) while they are in primary school.

How to sign up:

If you would like to sign up to the Code, please click on the link provided by Friday 16th February 2024 to fill out the short form. The form is anonymous. We would encourage you to discuss the Code with your child(ren) so that they understand the reasons behind it, and the collective nature of it.

'I/We, as parent(s) or guardians(s) of a child(ren) in Oatlands Primary N.S., agree not to permit my/our child(ren) to own a personal smartphone up to and including 6th Class'.

List of References

Link #1: [Resources - CyberSafeKids](#) CyberSafe Kids - Keeping Kids Safer Online – Online.Safety.Matters. Trends & Usage Report Academic Year 2022-2023' (September 2023) by CyberSafe Kids

Link #2: '[Editorial: Waking up to dangers of smartphones for children | Independent.ie](#)

Link #3: [Collective effort: Parents of primary school pupils sign up to code to hold off on buying their children a smartphone | Independent.ie](#)

Link #4: [Waterford primary schools first for 'no smartphones' \(irisht Examiner.com\)](#)

Link #5: Government Press Release [gov.ie - Minister Foley launches new plan to encourage parents to avoid buying smartphones for their children in primary schools \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

Link #6: ESRI: Children who own phones earlier do worse in tests (rte.ie) - [ESRI: Children who own phones earlier do worse in tests \(rte.ie\)](#)

Link #7: [ESRI: Children who own phones earlier do worse in tests \(rte.ie\)](#)

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What about preparing children to be cyber-safe in secondary school?

The school currently provides age-appropriate guidance to help children navigate the online world. Internet safety and cyberbullying are topics within the SPHE and the Stay Safe Programmes. This initiative is intended to support the school curriculum by helping parents/guardians provide children with the necessary tools to be cyber-safe when they access smart devices with similar technology.

2. Would it not be better to focus on teaching children to use technology safely and responsibly?

Research shows that even limited access to smartphones can be harmful to primary school-aged children. Thus the aim of the Code is to delay access to smartphones until children are a) mature enough to handle the technology, b) to allow children to be children free of the stresses of the online world, and c) to reduce the chances of them forming unhealthy smartphone habits.

3. What about kids who already have a smartphone?

The existing School Policy relating to smartphones still applies here. This is a parent/guardian decision as to whether it is appropriate to continue access to their smartphone. Parents/Guardians may wish to consider pausing current smartphone access if appropriate for their child. However, we would encourage parents/guardians to review the age appropriateness of any apps that children may be using including Snapchat (current minimum age is 13), Tiktok (current minimum age is 13), and WhatsApp (current minimum age is 16). There are also many parental controls for smartphones that are helpful (see below for more details).

4. What Parental Controls are currently available for smart devices?

There are a number of parental controls available for smart devices, both free and fee-based. The key free options are 'Screen Time' for Apple users, and 'Family Link' for Android users. Both allow monitoring of how long the device is online and manage what apps can be accessed and for how long.

5. If I sign-up to this Code, can I subsequently change my mind?

This is a voluntary collective code. If a parent /guardian alters their view subsequently and wants to purchase a personal smartphone device for their child(ren), they can of course do so at any stage. It is intended that we review it each year as a community and give families an opportunity to renew their commitment.

6. How will you review how the Code is going?

This is a pilot initiative that the P.A. and the School will review at key stages throughout the school year, to see how the Code is working, and whether any changes to the No Smartphone Code or its operation are needed. It is intended to be reviewed annually as the context may change and families to renew their participation each year.

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