SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD NEWSLETTER

March 2026

Supporting Families
Managing Mobiles & Use of Technology

Dear Parents/Carers,

Families will be aware of our action over recent months to explore concerns about children's use of technology and smart phones. In July 2025, we ran a survey to establish parents'/carers' view on this issue.
The results were stark. I responded with the letter below:

Thank you to all families who completed our survey regarding children's access to mobile phones in July. The information and views provided by parents and carers have all been read individually and reflected on.

I am struck by the depth of anxiety from families about their children engaging in the online world via smartphones. Many parents stated that they were concerned about the impact of access to the internet on children's safety, wellbeing and self-esteem. Online bullying was a major concern, as well as children accessing content which distorted their views of themselves, relationships and the world around them.

One parent commented that children should develop the maturity to manage relationships in real life before trying to navigate relationships online. It was highlighted that children often do not understand the implications of messages they send. Families expressed concerns about their child's views of themselves and the world being distorted by unknown and uncontrolled influences on the internet, rather than by their family and those who love and care for them.

Several parents/carers also highlighted that, whilst parental controls can be useful, often children and teenagers are tech savvy and able to circumnavigate these and learn how to delete records so they can access inappropriate and unsuitable content or delete online messages.

Concerns about safety were also common. Many families recounted how they had seen children have near misses on roads as they have been absorbed on their mobile phone rather than paying attention to crossing safely. I have seen myself that when some of our colder children pass through the school gate at the end of the day, the first thing they do is turn on their phones. Parents/carers also raised issues about personal security and the risk of phones being stolen.

Over recent years, as a school, we have seen an increase in online disputes via group messaging and online gaming. Many schools refuse to engage in discussion about arguments which occur online.

Where we can, we try to help, as we seek to promote compassion and friendship in the real and virtual worlds. However, whilst we will speak to children and notify parents/carers of our concerns about children's habits, language and relationships online, school has very little actual control in policing this

Parents/carers were broadly in favour of children having phones if walking to and from school unaccompanied. I understand the security and reassurance this offers for children and their families. However, many families highlighted that the phone did not need to have internet access. The majority stated that they would prefer for their children to not have a smartphone for as long as possible, despite the pressure parents/carers feel under. Many stated their intention to provide a basic phone enabled for texts and calls only.

As a school leader, I am increasingly concerned about the impact of technology and smartphones on children's social development, emotional wellbeing and relationships.

We have proactively worked over the last two years to 'denormalise' children bringing phones to school just because they are in Year five or six. Whilst we have seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of phones being brought in, I suspect that this could be reduced further and work will be undertaken over the next half term to ascertain exactly why and which days pupils who bring phones actually need to. To a large extent, we are already a phone free school. We enforce robustly that phones need to be switched off before children come in through the school gates. Phones are collected as soon as children enter the classroom and are not returned until the end of the school day or after clubs, when children are leaving school. Children have no access to phones during the school day.

Many pupils who are in Year 5 already have smartphones and so, to some extent, we are limited as to the action we can take to support these pupils. It would be unfair, where many of the children already have smartphones to expect families to purchase basic ones that can be brought to school. However, parents/carers will be expected to ensure that current Year 5 children only bring phones to school where this is absolutely unavoidable in line with our current approach.

In response to the outcome of the survey, I am proposing the following measures.

1. For pupils who are currently in Year four, I propose that from September 2026, when they move into Year five, smartphones are not brought to school.
Children may still bring a basic phone where this is needed because they travel to and from school unaccompanied but smartphones will not be held on site for pupils in Year five.

2. From September 2027, smartphones will not be held on site for any pupils. Basic phones may still be brought to school and will be managed in line with current procedures.

Your cooperation with this issue is crucial. I would ask that families do not seek to circumnavigate and undermine the school's approach by allowing children to wear smartwatches which are internet enabled to school.

Please give your views on the two proposals above. You can do this via our online survey.

The online survey regarding the proposals also had a very high number of responses from families with the vast majority highly supportive of the action outlined above.

I am aware that discussions on What's App class groups were mixed with some families, where children already have smart phones, opposed to the proposals.

You will appreciate that we have no real jurisdiction regarding this issue. We are policing an increasing number of technology related disputes which spill into school. However, whilst we do our best to educate children about responsible, kind and safe use of technology, we cannot restrict children's use or manage what they access out of school.

I am also aware that our pupils attend many different local secondary schools. Many secondary schools have their own approaches to access to technology during the school day and beyond.

On balance, in discussion with school governors, the following approach will be taken from September 2026.

For pupils in Year 6 from September 2026 (current Year 5), there is no change to current arrangements. Pupils may bring phones, including smartphones, only where they are needed because children travel to and from school unaccompanied. Where children travel to and from school with family members, they do not bring phones into school.

From September 2026, for all other pupils who reach Year 5, we encourage that basic phones with no internet access are brought in. We ask that phones are only brought in when absolutely necessary.

We express a strong preference that smart mobile phones and devices are not brought into school at all.

Where children already have smart phones or devices and parents/carers wish them to bring them into school, families will sign to indicate that parental controls are activated.

We are reliant on families working in partnership with us. I respectfully ask that parents and carers do this to avoid undermining the effort of the school to support parents and carers in navigating this issue.

You will appreciate that we are really trying to do our best to protect our pupils' wellbeing and to support families. We acknowledge the views of those who are concerned about their children's safety on the way to and from school, as well as those wish to delay their child's access to smart technology as long as possible.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

R. Flanders
Headteacher

Pinwheel

Families may wish to explore Pinwheel, a safe phone system. Information about Pinwheel has been shared by one of our parents.

Information about Pinwheel is available at www.pinwheel.com.

A range of phone models available from recognised manufacturers are available with the Pinwheel operating systems already installed.

This is not an endorsement as I do not know enough to recommend it but it may be worth exploring if families are managing challenges around mobile phones.

It is marketed as 'a phone that grows with your child.' Additional functions can be added as children mature.

A contact safelist can be set up. This means your child can only make or receive call or texts to contacts on their safelist. They cannot be contacted by strangers.

There are lots of other useful features advertise including:

- A GPS locator
- Ability to set schedules to manage phone use at night, after school or at weekends
- Only vetted apps can be used – no addictive social media apps, addictive games or ad-driven apps
- Facility to monitor text and call history without having to ask child to hand over their phone.

Why Don't You...?

Some parents, carers or family members of a certain age may remember a TV programme which was on during the summer holidays called 'Why Don't You..?'

At our school, we don't waste hours looking at phones or tablets, watching daft video after video or playing games for hours on end. We have too many genius ideas for that!

With a bit of hard work, perseverance, enthusiasm and creativity – look at what can be achieved! We can take old and used things out of recycling boxes and turn them into something beautiful like Alice's ship in a bottle.

The gallery below shows some of our top 'Why Don't You..?' work.

Kenzie's car garage

A4

HOGWARTS

ETTA'S DREAM

DISCO HOOPS
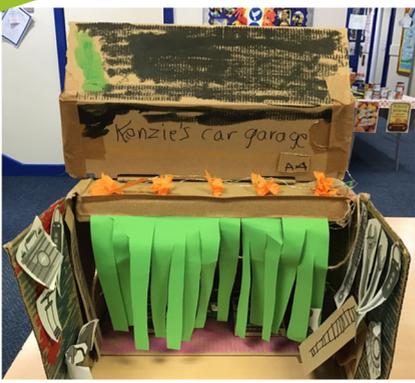
Why Don't You..? Workshops
Over the autumn term, we launched our 'Why Don't You..?' workshops for children to come and learn new skills.

We hope that they will take the skills they learn and develop them in their own time. It may even spark a business idea for our budding entrepreneurs.

Our next Why Don't You..? workshop is for children in Years 2 & 3 to come to learn how to make 3 dimensional greetings cards. It is on Tuesday 21st April and you can sign your child up on School Spider.

Further workshops will follow later this year and beyond.

Consultation – Social Media for Under-16s
The Government has recently opened a three-month consultation on raising the age of social media to 16.

"We are consulting on further measures to prepare children for the future in an age of rapid technological change. This include potential age restrictions on social media and other services such as gaming sites and AI chatbots, restrictions on addictive design features and risky functionalities, and better support for parents and families."

Parents and carers are encouraged to give their views as this will help to shape policy decisions.

You may contribute your views via the link: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/growing-up-in-the-online-world-a-national-consultation. The consultation closes on 26th May 2026.

Save the date!!!!
Please save this date in your diaries – you will not want to miss this.
On September 11th 2026, we welcome DC Andrew Kevan to school for a day working with children and families. DC Kevan works for Cheshire Police's Cyber Crime Unit. He visits schools across Cheshire and beyond to educate about online dangers. We have been fortunate to get this date agreed as demands on DC Kevan's time are very high.

During the day, DC Kevan will hold a briefing session for parents and carers. I strongly recommend that you attend this as the hazards children are exposed to online are evolving and changing all of the time.

I will confirm timings closer to this event, but an outline time for the parent/carer session is currently 2.15-3.15pm.

Hoole Church of England Primary School
Hoole Lane
Chester
CH2 3HB

www.hooleprimary.co.uk

01244 323890