

Frequently Asked Questions

2018 review into mobile digital devices in NSW schools

What do you mean by 'ban' or restriction? Can primary students still take a phone to school so parents can contact them?

- Primary students can still take a phone to school but it will need to be kept in their bag or stored elsewhere and turned off during school hours, unless a teacher gives them permission.
- In emergencies, parents can still contact their children through school administration offices.

Will anyone be exempt from the restriction?

- Students who require access to a mobile phone because of a disability or other health issue will be exempt. Identifying and responding to the personalised learning and support needs of all students, especially those with disability and additional learning and support needs, is an ongoing school process of collaborative planning and consultation with the student and their parents or carers.

How will primary schools implement the restriction?

- There is a dedicated team at the NSW Department of Education that will be working with schools to help them implement these changes. Resources will be developed and made available to all schools, government and non-government, on the department's website in due course.

Why aren't you restricting phones in high schools as well?

- We recognise that technology plays an important and increasing role as students progress through their education.
- We want to give secondary schools the flexibility to balance the benefits and risks of technology in the way that best supports their students.

When will this take effect?

- Implementation will occur during 2019.

What did the review involve?

- In June 2018, the NSW Government announced a review into the use of mobile devices in schools in response to growing concerns in the community.
- The Government announced the six-month review was to be led by Dr Michael Carr-Gregg.
- The review captured thousands of submissions from students, educators, parents/carers, and experts in mental health, technology and cyber safety.

What were the other recommendations?

- There are eight key recommendations in the review that have practical and resourcing implications which we need to carefully consider. We will work with schools and consult with principals and teachers in the coming months on the best way forward.
- Some of the other recommendations include providing greater training for teachers and students about online safety and reviewing existing online safety education in the curriculum.

Shouldn't we just be teaching students to use devices safely?

- We all share a responsibility to ensure students are equipped with the technical skills and social and emotional competencies to use technology responsibly and effectively.
- We are not restricting the use of all devices, just their use when not in direct support of education and when not authorised by a teacher.

What sort of risks are students facing when they use these devices?

- More students are bringing mobile devices to schools and are doing so at an earlier age than ever before, exacerbating risks. Some of the potential risks include: cyberbullying, image-based abuse, access to pornography, distraction from learning and reduced opportunities for face-to-face social interaction and physical exercise.

We know cyberbullying happens outside of school and at all hours. How will restricting phones inside schools help solve this problem?

- Just like parents are responsible for their children when they're at home, schools have a responsibility to ensure that we protect the welfare of our students when they are in our care. Restricting the use of smartphones in schools reflects this commitment.
- We have balanced this responsibility and commitment against our recognition that cyberbullying is a complex issue that requires a range of approaches and strategies.

Is this just the government implementing another restriction of something it doesn't like?

- No. The restriction reflects the Government's commitment to take action on things that matter to school communities. Through this review, we heard parents, teachers and students acknowledge that smartphones are a distraction in class (even though they may also provide other benefits). The significant risks and harms these devices present for children and young people mean we have a responsibility to act.

Do the recommendations put more pressure on teachers in an already over-crowded curriculum?

- Teachers already routinely incorporate and manage the use of devices in classes and schools. The school-based discussions, approaches and policies that could result from this review are intended to provide greater clarity, consistency and certainty for teachers.
- The recommendations reflect the shared responsibility that parents, schools and students have in managing devices and that this responsibility does not solely sit with teachers and schools.

What will be the consequences for a primary school student who is caught with a mobile phone during school time?

- Primary schools will retain discretion to administer and enforce the restriction in the way that best suits their school community.