

Wednesday 6th November 2025

Subject: Supporting Our Children in a Digital World

App age restrictions, to protect children from harmful content or interactions.



13+



13+



13+



13+



13+

16
Legal minimum
age

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I want to take this opportunity to revisit an important conversation about screen time and mobile phone use—one I have long advocated for at Gulval School. The challenges young people face in today's digital world are becoming increasingly visible, and it's more important than ever that we work together to support their wellbeing.

As a parent of two teenagers and a foster carer, I completely understand how difficult it can be to navigate these issues. I remember the constant requests for a phone, then arguments about screen time, the worry about them missing out socially and the concern about what they might be exposed to online. I know how exhausting it can be to first set, then maintain, boundaries when so many other children seem to have unrestricted access. But I also know how incredibly important it is to hold firm and make decisions based on what is best for our children's long-term wellbeing and mental health. It's not about feeling pressured into decision-making but about doing what feels right to us as parents—which is so often the harder option!

Perhaps parenting today is harder than ever—and not because we as parents are doing less, but because the world around us has changed so dramatically. Schools around the country see the impact of this every day: classroom disruption, playground conflicts, and children struggling with boundaries. School leaders know this isn't about blame. It's about recognising that parents are navigating a world where technology has outpaced regulation, eroded confidence, and made it harder to set limits or even understand the challenges their children face online. The digital world is not neutral—it's designed to be addictive, and it often undermines the authority and instincts of even the most engaged parents. We want to work with you, not against you, to support your children in this complex landscape.

Brain science has caught up with the anecdotal evidence we've known for years: excessive screen time, and particularly social media use, affects children's neurological development—literally how their brain develops and grows. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making, impulse control and emotional regulation, is still developing throughout childhood and adolescence. High levels of screen exposure, especially on devices designed to be addictive, can lead to reduced attention spans, increased anxiety and difficulties with self-regulation. Social media platforms create dopamine-driven reward loops which make children more susceptible to dependency and addiction. This in turn makes it harder for our children to disengage from their screens and focus on real-world interactions.



Beyond this, we are also seeing the impact of online content on behaviour and decision-making within school. Trends, challenges and inappropriate content circulated on social media can and do influence how children interact with one another, sometimes leading to unkind behaviour, poor decision-making and even increased anxiety or stress. Exposure to unrealistic or harmful online narratives can shape children's perceptions of friendships, self-worth and acceptable behaviour, making it even more important to guide them towards positive, real-world interactions.

We know our children will thrive in environments that prioritise real-life relationships, play and face-to-face interactions. I want us all to feel confident in setting boundaries around screen time and not feeling pressured to introduce mobile phones too early. While this can be a difficult decision, it is one that will support your child's social and emotional development in the long run.

To help keep children safe online, we encourage all parents to take proactive steps, including:

Delaying smartphone use: Resist the pressure to provide your child with a smartphone. If a phone is absolutely necessary for safety reasons, consider a basic phone without internet access. Smartphones open the door to a world of online risks, and delaying access can help protect your child's wellbeing, mental health and brain development. If you do choose to provide one, ensure it is set up with strong parental controls and a culture of regularly monitoring.

Monitoring phone and internet use: Regularly check the apps your child is using and who they are communicating with.

Using strong parental controls: Set up parental controls on devices and home Wi-Fi to restrict inappropriate content and limit screen time.

Keeping open conversations: Talk to your child about the risks of the online world, including cyberbullying, online strangers and the impact of excessive screen time.

Setting clear boundaries: Establish screen-free times, such as during meals and before bedtime, to encourage healthier habits.

Encouraging offline activities: Promote hobbies, sports and family time to reduce reliance on digital entertainment. Sports clubs offer so much beyond the actual sport itself, if you would like to find out more please do come and speak with us – we are available!

As a school, we will continue to focus on fostering positive relationships, promoting resilience and supporting children's mental health, driven through our school values, our ethos and curriculum. If you would like further guidance or support on managing screen time at home, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Thank you for your continued support, especially on this challenging subject.

Best wishes



Mr P Baker
Headteacher



The following resources offer comprehensive guidance to help you navigate the challenges of keeping your children safe in the digital world.

NSPCC Online Safety: Offers guidance on various online safety topics, including parental controls and dealing with online issues. [NSPCC](#)

UK Safer Internet Centre: Provides tips, advice, and resources to help children and young people stay safe online. [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

Childnet International: A non-profit organization working to make the internet a safe place for children, offering resources for parents, carers, and educators. [Parents Protect](#)

Internet Matters: 'Kids can bypass anything if they're clever enough!' How tech experts keep their children safe online. [The Guardian](#)

Thinkuknow: Developed by CEOP, this site provides information for parents and carers to help keep children safe from online exploitation and abuse [ThinkuKnow](#)

