Grange Primary School

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Headteacher: Miss Rebecca Benjamins   Assistant Headteacher: Miss Amanda Matheson Interim
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9th June 2025

Dear Families

Screen time, Smartphones and Social Media

Please see the attached letter addressing the use by children of smartphones, the amount of screen time they spend on devices and their access to social media and gaming.

A lot of work has been done by educational leaders on child development and the impact screen time has on children from toddlers to teenagers. As a result, they have created a set of principles which we pledge to go by and very much hope you will so the same at home to effectively manage the amount of screen time your child accesses each day. At school we will ensure screen time is only in use when needed and that staff act as role models reducing their own use of devices in front of children.

There are many useful links in the letter to some of the studies undertaken to support this initiative and please take the time to follow the recommendations for age appropriate screen time for your child at home.

Best wishes

Rebecca Benjamins
Headteacher

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Monday 9th June 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

Today I, alongside 20 other educational providers across Southwark, have collectively pledged to address the issues associated with screen time, smartphones and social media. The educational leaders have worked collaboratively to create a set of principles which we will work towards when educating your child on screen time, smartphones and social media. We also hope that you, our families, will support these principles within your own home.

I am under no illusion as to the challenges that screen time, smartphones and social media present for most families in our community, often acting as a source of conflict that strains family relationships. This is not a Southwark, nor a UK problem. It is a global issue; the technological advances of the past 20 years, whilst hugely helpful in many ways, have also come at a cost. Seeking to address this problem is not about 'blaming' or 'shaming' one group or another. It is about understanding the issues associated with a screen-based childhood that many young people now have and seeking to collectively address this problem.

The evidence behind the impact of screen time, smartphones and social media

Over the past 5 years a growing body of evidence has shone a light upon the negative consequences of screen time, smartphones and social media across society, but in particular in children. The impact of these technologies are particularly felt during the key developmental stages, specifically a child's first 1.5 years of life and then during adolescents (aged 10-14). During these periods of development our brain forms the neural pathways that either support us, or hinder us, from becoming emotionally resilient and empathetic adults. The impact of screens during childhood, particularly during these developmtal stages, has proven to have significantly negative consequences for many young people.

Some of the evidence around the impact of this technology includes:

- **Toddlers sleep is significantly improved when screen time is removed** – A UK study used a gold-standard approach to test the impact of removing toddler's screen time in the hour before bed, and replacing it with non-screen-based activities (puzzles, books, play etc…). The toddlers, aged 16-30 months, who no longer used screens in the hour before bed slept better and woke up less frequently. https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2825196
- **Five year old children's behaviour and attention in school directly linked to screen time** – A study in Canada found that 2+ hours of screen time in children aged 3-5 was linked to clinically significant behavioural and attention problems. In this study, high levels of screen time was a stronger factor behind behavioural and attention issues than any other factor, including parenting styles or social-economic status. See here: Screen-time is associated with inattention problems in preschoolers: Results from the CHILD birth cohort study | PLOS ONE
- **Excessive screen time is linked with 'internalizing problems' including depression, anxiety and social anxiety.** The prestigious Yale University in the USA studied over 5,000 10 year olds. The author of the report noted that *"Parents are trying to navigate this complicated environment with their children without having the same lived experience when they were growing up… often parents feel ill equipped to help their children navigate such a complex environment."* See here: Brain structural co-development is associated with internalizing symptoms two years later in the ABCD cohort in: Journal of Behavioral Addictions Volume 12 Issue 1 (2023)
- **Excessive screen time is linked with depression** – A meta-analysis of previous research across numerous countries which in total had over 200,000 participant, concluded that there is a link between excessive screen time and the likelihood someone will develop depression. See here: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9815119/
- **High social media use can lead to negative life satisfaction** – An analysis of over 80,000 people concluded that in UK girls are more likely to experience a negative link between social media use

and life satisfaction when they are 11-13 years old and boys when they are 14-15 years old. https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/scientists-find-that-the-impact-of-social-media-on-wellbeing-varies-across-adolescence

- **High computer game use leads to loneliness – particularly for boys.** One study revealed a significant relationship between students' game addiction and loneliness, in other words, as game addiction increases, loneliness increases. The study focused on 9 and 10 years olds in the USA – a number of whom spent 5+ hours a day on computer games.https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6277725/#:~:text=A%20significant%20relationship%20was%20found,hospital%2Dfamily%20for%20abnormal%20cases.

The above evidence, alongside the lived experiences of many families, educationalists, child psychologists, mental health practitioners and others working with young people have led us to the firm view that we must work together to battle to negative consequences of screen time and promote a more healthy childhood for our young people, away from their screens.

Age-linked recommendations for screen time, smartphones and social media

Young people need a largely screen-free childhood in which to grow up, with screens only used for controlled periods of time and for certain types of activities. Over time, the *amount* and *type* of screen time that a young person can expect to use will of course change. Alongside the professional experiences of the educational leaders within Southwark who have signed this pledge, we have consulted with leading child psychologists and considered numerous published reports on the matter. This includes the advice of the American Academy of Paediatrics who, in 2022, reaffirmed this report: AAP Policy Statement – Media and Young Minds. In the report they make the following statement which acts as a telling reminder of our duty when it comes to a 'play-based' childhood compared to a 'screen-based';

> *"It is important to emphasize to parents that the higher-order thinking skills and executive functions essential for school success, such as task persistence, impulse control, emotion regulation, and creative, flexible thinking, are best taught through unstructured and social (not digital) play, as well as responsive parent–child interactions."*

The below recommendations for screen time, social media and smartphone use are therefore presented as the 'best advice' we can give based upon the current evidence available.

Age/Year group	Maximum screen time per day?	Outside of school hours, what are appropriate *amounts* and *types* of screen time?
Birth to 18 months	5 minutes	Access to short supervised video calls to close family/support network Avoid access to any other screen time of any kind especially in the hour directly before sleeping
18 months to 2 years	Up to 1 hours	Access to up to 1 hours of age-appropriate TV* per day and/or short supervised video calls to close family/support network Avoid access to any other device including computer games, any phone or tablet Avoid screen time in the hour directly before sleeping
2 years to Reception	Up to 2 hours	Access to up to 2 hours of age-appropriate TV per day* and/or short supervised video calls to close family/support network Avoid access to computer games and any type of phone, tablet or social media Avoid screen time in the hour directly before sleeping

Belong   **Believe**   **Achieve**

Reception to Year 2	Up to 2.5 hours	Access to up to 2 hours of age-appropriate TV per day* Access to a tablet/laptop/PC for educational purposes for up to 30 minutes a day Avoid access to computer games and any type of phone, tablet or social media Avoid screen time in the hour directly before sleeping and no screens in the bedroom overnight
Year 3 to Year 5	Up to 3 hours	Access to up to 2 hours of age-appropriate TV show content per day* or age-appropriate computer games** Access to a tablet/laptop/PC for educational purposes for up to 1 hours a day Avoid access to any type of phone or social media Avoid screen time in the hour directly before sleeping and no screens in the bedroom overnight
Year 6 to Year 9	Up to 4 hours	Access to up to 2 hours of age-appropriate TV show content per day* or age-appropriate computer games** Access to a tablet, laptop or PC for educational purposes for up to 1 hour a day Access to a 'brick phone/non-smartphone' for communication to/from school. Avoid access to any other device including smartphones and social media Avoid screen time between 21:00 and 07:00 and no screens in the bedroom overnight
Year 10 to Year 11	Up to 5 hours	Access to up to 2 hours of age-appropriate TV show content per day* or age-appropriate computer games** Access to a tablet, laptop or PC for educational purposes for up to 2 hours a day Access to any phone, although not to be used between 21:00 and 07:00 Avoid access to any applications/social media with age restrictions above the child's age Avoid screen time between 21:00 and 07:00 and no screens in the bedroom overnight

* Access to this content should be age appropriate and through traditional TV channels or streamed through reputable providers like BBC, Disney or Netflix. Youtube or other social media is not appropriate.
**All computer games come with a PEGI age-related warning. These should be adhered to.

Alternatives to a screen-based childhood

In order to change the screen-time habits of our children it is important that we consider the following when implementing the above measures at home and in school.

1. **Adults as role models.** What our children see adults do they, invariably, seek to copy. Therefore staff within school, parents/carers/family members at home and when out and about, must minimise their own screen use when in front of children.
2. **Seek out alternatives to screen based play.** There are many alternatives to screen based play which adults will have to actively encourage, and even role-model, for children. There are literally thousands of suggestions for alternatives to screen based playing; see here and here for some

examples. Whilst it may seem like more effort encouraging children to engage in these types of activities, it is essential our children's emotional and cognitive development development.

Our pledge

I, like the other educational leaders across Southwark, **will work with our families** to ensure that;

1. **Implementation** - Our families understand and work to embed he principles outlined in this letter
2. **Role Models** - The adults in our families limit their use of smartphones and social media as well as computer games and other screens when in front of their children; adults in the home must be role models in this area

To support families in shifting to these behaviours, we **will review our educational practices** to ensure that;

1. **Screens in school** - The use of screens in school is only undertaken when needed
2. **Home learning** – Homework will only be set electronically where there is a clear educational benefit
3. **Role models** – Teachers will minimise their use of phones in front of your child wherever possible
4. **Education** – We will continue to educate and support children and families on the issues associated with screen time, smartphones and social media

I passionately believe that working together to implement the principles outlined in this letter and the press release will have a profound and positive impact upon our young people's education and livelihoods. Together we can tackle many of the negative downsides of these recent educational advancements. I look forward to working with you over the coming months and years to support our children to have an upbringing away from screens wherever possible.

Yours Sincerely,

Headteacher