

Thursday 6th June 2024

RE: Southwark Secondary Schools working together to address Smartphone addiction

Dear parents and carers,

Today 16 of Southwark's 20 secondary schools have released a joint statement outlining our collective desires to address smartphone addiction in our young people. This joint statement, in the form of a press release, is attached to this letter.

In line this joint statement, alongside the other 16 schools, South Bank University Academy will;

1. **Create and deliver an informative programme to staff, students and parents/carers on the evidence behind the negatives impact of smartphones and social media.** This will be informed by the latest research on the topic and will, to parents/carers, be delivered through optional online and face to face forums. The first opportunity to discuss this will be during the Parent/Carer day in July. In these forums we will also outline some of the alternatives to smartphone ownership for your child and the benefits of these approaches.
2. **Update our mobile phone policy so as to encourage students to have non-smartphone devices (typically called 'traditional' or 'brick' mobile phones) until they are in Year 10 at the earliest.** Central to this will be higher sanctions for smartphones compared to non-smartphone devices should they ever be confiscated. The exact changes to our policy will be communicated to parents/carers in the coming weeks for feedback before launching the policy in September.

Why is South Bank University Academy supporting this collective action across Southwark Secondary schools?

As the Principal of South Bank University Academy, I firmly believe, having examined the weight of evidence that is now available, that the impact of Smartphones and Social Media on our young people has been profoundly negative. My colleagues see and deal with downsides of Smartphones and Social Media addiction on a daily basis. We also know, and appreciate, the issues that many families face when dealing with the downsides of smartphone use and social media at home.

Some of the most pressing issues which we must work collectively to address include;

1. **Mental Health.** The rates of increase in mental health concerns in young people (e.g. anxiety, self-harm and even suicide) have increased significantly since 2010. The evidence suggests that the only viable explanation for this increase is the fact that Smartphones, and the associated constant access to Social Media, became mainstream in 2010.

2. **Risk of being a victim of crime.** Regrettably, across London young people with expensive Smartphones are prime targets for muggings and theft. These incidents can be deeply traumatic for our children and can be avoided if the phones they possess are less valuable.
3. **Addiction and dependency.** Social Media is programmed to be addictive; many children in our schools typically spend 6-8 hours on their phones before/after school with hours well above this for the holidays and weekends. Many young people also rely on social media to validate their sense of self-worth.
4. **Inappropriate content and grooming.** With 24-7 access to the internet many of our children are exposed to harmful content including pornography and graphic acts of violence at a very young age. They are also at heightened risk of grooming and bullying and prone to behaving in a way online that they simply wouldn't in the real world. The online world is more dangerous than we think.
5. **Reduced attention spans.** Smartphones are changing the way children's brains develop, fundamentally affecting our children's ability to concentrate.

Finally, the staff at South Bank University Academy care deeply about the education and wellbeing of our children. We have come to learn that Smartphones and Social Media frequently have a hugely detrimental influence on our young people, particularly during primary school and in Years 7/8/9 when, quite simply, they are too young to freely access the internet. What children need during this period of their lives is consistency, compassion and something they can believe in and feel a part of. Families provide this. Schools provide this. Social Media doesn't, and yet it is on Social Media that many of them spend much of their lives.

I look forward to working with you on this over the coming months.

Yours sincerely,



Annette Moses
Principal