

St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School

Learning and growing together in God's love

Headteacher: Mrs Felicity Hope



26th March 2024

Dear Parents,

We are taking the unusual step of contacting you to share our concerns around the increasing use of smart phones by children at St Francis. Whilst we acknowledge that children do not use phones when in school, it has come to our attention that many children are using them at home – often very late at night and in the early hours of the morning. This has resulted in safeguarding concerns around the sharing of highly inappropriate images and unkind gossip on social platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp. The age restrictions on these sites are designed to protect Primary-aged children; currently only those aged 13 and older are legally allowed to access these platforms. Schools across the country, including St Francis, have seen a sharp rise in mental health issues exacerbated by smart phone use; primary school children are not mature enough to navigate and manage the social complexities that social media brings however much you trust your own child. We are having to spend an increasing amount of time unpicking issues that arise out of smart phone use and counselling children whose wellbeing is badly affected by smart phone/tablet use.

We understand that often in Year 6, smart phones are bought for birthdays as a rite of passage as they move up to high school. We also acknowledge that some children make their own way home from Year 4 onwards and smart phones are bought as a way to contact family members. However, children only need a basic mobile phone for safety to make calls and send texts whilst in primary school.

We recognise how hard it can be to withstand pressure from your children, especially when all their friends seem to have been given a smart phone. However, we would like to point you in the direction of the Kids for Now website – kidsfornow.org.uk/resources. This lays out in more detail the harmful effects that smart phones can have on children and provides parents with tools to navigate this difficult situation. At the very least, we strongly urge that parents put on parental controls and ensure that all devices are stored safely downstairs overnight. We also advise regular checking of messages and platforms.

Yours sincerely

Felicity Hope and Claire Furness

From the Kids for Now website

Many parents are concerned about the risks smartphones pose to children but they don't want their child to be excluded without one. Kids For Now tackles this dilemma by connecting parents who want to delay smartphones.

Smartphones pose unique risks to children that go beyond internet safety. They are small and portable, powerful devices connected to the internet with a camera. This means that they are constantly with the child, providing opportunities for unsupervised internet access. Furthermore, apps are designed to be addictive. Parents need to ask themselves if the benefits of their child owning a smartphone outweigh the risks.

Many parents don't feel comfortable about giving their child a smartphone but when they see so many other children with phones, they worry their child will miss out and be excluded. These parents face a dilemma. They are trapped between giving their child harmful technology and fear that their child is going to miss out.

Kids For Now Connects parents who want to delay giving their child a smartphone because parents are more likely to delay giving their child a smartphone if they know others are doing the same.

Having this connection gives those parents and their children the knowledge they are not alone. This knowledge reduces peer pressure on all children within the school to have one and helps those parents to stick to their decision to delay giving their child a smartphone. This helps reduce the number of children owning smartphones and helps to keep all children safe from online dangers because they are less likely to see something on another child's screen.

Parents who sign-up to Kids For Now agree not to give their child a smartphone until either secondary school or until the age of 14. For safety and to stay in touch with friends children only need a basic mobile phone to make calls and texts.

I want to reach out to as many parents as possible who are facing this smartphone dilemma to let them know about Kids For Now.

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Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Claire Furness'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire Furness
Assistant Headteacher