



Scoil San Treasa

Voluntary 'No Smart Phone' Code

March 2024

Introduction

- The Parents Association of Scoil San Treasa (PA), with the support of the staff and Board of Management (BOM), are proposing to introduce the following voluntary 'No Smart Phone' code after a survey of each class group in the school in November 2023.
- Parents representing 82% of the children in the school indicated that they would be interested in supporting a parent-led voluntary code.
- The proposed code is one in which the parents of SST **voluntarily agree to delay purchasing or providing a smart phone** until their child has finished **their time in primary school**.
- The Parents Associations of local schools including Oatlands Primary School, St. Laurence's, St. Raphaela's, St. Brigid's, Mount Anville Primary School, Mount Anville Montessori Junior School and Gaelscoil Laighean are also working to implement a similar voluntary code.

Why introduce a code?

Recent years have seen an increase in the use of smart devices and social media. There is significant evidence of the negative effects of these devices on brain development as well as on the social, emotional, and educational wellbeing of children and young adults. See links below:

- 1) https://sapienlabs.org/whats_new/study-out-from-sapien-labs-links-age-of-first-smartphone-to-mental-wellbeing/
- 2) <https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2019/0115/1023350-mobile-phones/>
- 3) <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/getting-to-grips-with-the-effect-of-smartphones-on-education/37739920.html>
- 4) https://www.cybersafekids.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CSK_Data-Trends-Report-2023-V2-Web-Version.pdf

Considerations of the Code

- The code aims to **support parents in SST** who might face pressure to buy a smartphone for their child, and/or to allow access to social media.
- It is expected that, in conjunction with close supervision of other internet-enabled devices inside and outside the home, most children **will not have access to social media** until their arrival in post-primary school.

- This code recognises **the many benefits of technology** & safe internet use and its role in education when supervised appropriately. The PA, BOM and school staff are committed to enhancing and developing the appropriate use of technology & of the internet within the school community, including parents, by providing education around the safe use of same.
- The code is **complementary to SST's AUP** (Acceptable Use Policy) which states that pupils are not allowed to have phones or personal devices turned on in school. Pupils are not allowed to take photographs or record video clips or audio clips in school. AUP can be found here: (https://sstreasa.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-01/acceptable_use_policy_2021.pdf)
- The code is **voluntary**, and parents can choose to adopt the code or withdraw without any implications. The code acknowledges that the circumstances of each family are individual to them and may change over time. Each family has their own priorities and opinions in relation to smart devices and social media. Introducing such a code also recognises that some families may have older children who have a smart device already.
- The code currently covers **smartphones only**. A device without internet access (such as an older-style mobile phone) is not covered by the code as access to social media is already curtailed. Smart Watches may be included in this code at a later date.

How to Sign Up

- If you would like to sign up to the code, please fill in the short form below. By completing the form you, as a parent, are agreeing to not purchase or provide your child with a smart phone until they have finished primary school. The form asks you to indicate which class your child/children is/are in and if you agree to the code. Completion of the form is completely anonymous.
<https://forms.gle/jbYJNMWs1GfGrXvCA>
- It is anticipated that this form will be renewed each September in each of the years that your child attends Scoil San Treasa.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Smart Phone?

A Smartphone is one which can connect to, and communicate with, other devices and one where the user can access online content including social media.

How do we prepare children to be safe online in secondary school?

SST currently provides age-appropriate education to help children navigate the online world through the SPHE curriculum and Stay Safe programme which covers internet safety and cyberbullying. Further training and education on this are given to older pupils. The voluntary code initiative is intended to support the school curriculum by

helping parents/guardians provide children with the necessary tools to be cyber-safe when they access smart devices with similar technology. The PA will also endeavour to support parents by providing relevant seminars.

Why not focus on teaching children to use technology safely and responsibly?

Research shows that even limited access to smartphones can be harmful to primary school-aged children (See links noted above). Thus, the aim of the Code is to delay access to smart phones until children are a) mature enough to handle the technology; b) to allow children to be children free of the stresses of the online world; and c) to reduce the chances of them forming unhealthy smartphone habits.

What about children who already have a smartphone?

The existing School Policy relating to smart phones still applies (AUP noted previously for reference). This is a parent/guardian decision as to whether it is appropriate to continue access to their smartphone. Parents/Guardians may wish to consider pausing current smart phone access if appropriate for their child. However, the PA would encourage parents/guardians to review the age-appropriateness of any apps that children may be using including Snapchat (current minimum age is 13), Tiktok (current minimum age is 13), and WhatsApp (current minimum age is 16). There are also many parental controls for smartphones that are helpful (see below for more details).

What Parental Controls are currently available for smartphones?

There are several parental controls available for smartphones. The key free options are 'Screen Time' for Apple users, and 'Family Link' for Android users. Both allow monitoring of how long the device is online and manage what apps can be accessed and for how long.

If I sign-up to this Code, can I subsequently change my mind?

This is a voluntary code. If a parent /guardian alters their view subsequently and wants to purchase a personal smartphone device for their child(ren), they can of course do so at any stage.

How will the Code's progress be reviewed?

This pilot initiative will be reviewed by the SST PA throughout the school year, in conjunction with all other school stakeholders, to identify whether any changes to the 'No Smart Phone' Code or its operation are needed.