

# Cloudlearn: smart phones in schools component



Our Cloudlearn research project was funded by the Nominet Trust, 2011 - 2012.

The catalyst for the research was a growing awareness of a deep divide developing between those schools who were embracing social media and portable devices (specifically mobile and smart phones), and those schools maintaining a policy of banning, locking and blocking. The research sought to identify effective and proven practice, to help all schools going forwards.

Concerns were twofold: **firstly**, the embracing schools were achieving greater engagement, a significant component in improving standards, but that opportunity was lost to the locking and blocking schools; **secondly**, we had an acute concern that locking and blocking might be potentially dangerous, for a number of reasons, a concern which this work reaffirmed. Schools needed to be a core part of children's evolution of safe and appropriate practice.

The Mobile devices group, one of four within the Cloudlearn project, consisted of 14 teachers and educationalists, primary and secondary, who all work within a classroom setting. The members varied from Head and Deputy Head Teachers, other Senior Leadership Team members, Heads of Subject (varying from Maths & Science to Arts and Humanities) and classroom practitioners who have been teaching in the classroom anywhere between 2 - 20 years.

The group was mostly based within the UK in a variety of geographical areas: cities, towns, village schools. However, other members were from Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands and Canada. The group contributed their own experience, **but also** researched, crowd sourced and evaluated others' practice.

The schools represented were from a variety of settings: Pupil referral unit, secondary academies, secondary local authority schools, primary academies, all through schools etc. A representative spread of governance type and function. Each contributor had been using smart phones for at least one year within their own classroom, but usually substantially longer.

The research produced a lot of material: case studies, example parental letters, a three stage progression of policy from very controlling to wholesale adoption and more. There were significant gains observed: cognitive, attainment, engagement and safety, with particular gains for data capture in science, sport and elsewhere. This note is a summary for busy practitioners.

Your institutional guidelines will evolve but the research indicated some common starting points:

**Do - in general:**

- Have a clear, lucid and comprehensive policy on the use of smart phones.
- Keep parents informed. Write a formal letter to parents explaining the use of smart phones in school, why they are being used, and the expectation of use when they are provided (including rewards and sanctions). It is never a requirement for parents to supply smart phones, merely an option.
- Your phone policy will be 100% congruent with other school policies; bullying, internet use, social networking, etc. It should be clear that any behaviour with a smart phone that would be unacceptable if spoken or handwritten, will be equally unacceptable when any form of new media or technology are being used.
- Ensure that your students have a lockable area to cover their personal insurance requirements (i.e. lockers or a locked classroom at lunchtimes) to store their handheld.
- Encourage a working group of students and teachers to work and research policy and protocols together, continually reviewing the way smart phones are being used to enhance learning and teaching within the classroom.
- Begin with a small trial and then roll out the the whole school. Each school is different and will experience separate teething problems. Make sure things revealed in your trials are covered in your evolving policy.
- Expect a small spike, but then a larger drop, in bullying reports. Once phones are acceptable tools to use in school, students are more likely to report bullying (which will have been already occurring). When it becomes clear that the same sanctions and rules apply, this will reduce bullying again, and further.
- Consult the students! They often have more knowledge and ideas than the teachers. Once included, they will encourage, refine and 'police' protocols and policy for you.
- Use your trial group of teachers to share resources and information with those interested in the work
- Be clear that equipment is brought in at the students' own risk.
- Encourage different types of kit. This helps limit banter about who has the latest phone, and encourage students to think critically and evaluate the strengths of different solutions.
- If you move forward in stages, the students will be aware that making each stage work will unlock the possibility of further and greater levels of use. Again, this encourages students to police your evolving smart phone protocols.

**Do Specifically** begin by adopting these three base protocols:

- During lessons, student homework diaries, pencil cases and **phones remain out, on the table, usually face upwards**. This means it is MUCH easier to monitor use. Phones on silent, obviously.
- **Be explicit about a formal expectation of sharing.** One phone between two, will be the normal minimum. This means that students will need to allow and expect some others to share their phone - eliminating a number of privacy, equity and "inappropriateness" issues.
- If some children have do phones with them, be sure to **offer at least some tasks using the phones that could not be done without them.** As many have observed, the devil makes work for idle thumbs.