Mobile phones in secondary schools: 1-year review

Contents

Background

In January 2023, the Department for Education's Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy ('policy') received a major update to deliver on the State Government's commitment to ban students' access to mobile phones at government schools, across all year levels.

All students, in all South Australian government schools, are required to keep their mobile phones and other personal devices (such as smartwatches) switched off and put out of sight during school hours, unless they have been given staff permission to use their personal device in line with a policy exemption.

Policy changes in 2023

The previous version of the department's policy, released in January 2021:

- made it compulsory for primary-aged students to keep personal devices 'off and away' during school hours
- allowed individual schools to make local decisions about how and when secondary-aged students were permitted to use personal devices during school hours (if at all)
- outlined some exceptional circumstances where an individual student could be given an exemption to use their personal device (for example, to manage a medical condition), regardless of their age.

This meant the 2023 policy update resulted in little to no change in primary settings, but it was a big shift for many secondary schools that had not previously decided to implement a whole-day ban.

While the same policy applies to all government schools, in recognition of the diverse needs of different communities there is some flexibility for individual schools to make local decisions about:

- where students keep their personal devices during school hours e.g. lockers, handed in to staff, lockable pouches, etc
- how staff respond to non-compliance, in line with their behaviour support policy
- whether they want to include any of the optional exemptions for teachers to allow students to temporarily use personal devices for learning or other agreed purposes (and if so, any local rules about how they can be used e.g. only in certain year levels).

Consultation

The department invited the following external stakeholder groups to provide input to the development of the policy update in late 2022:

- Australian Education Union – South Australia Branch (AEUSA)
- Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement
- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Educators SA
- Public Service Association of South Australia (PSA)
- South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Council (SAAETCC)
- South Australian Association of School Parent Communities (SAASPC)
- South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc. (SAASSO)

- South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA)
- South Australian Secondary Principals Association (SASPA)

The policy team also met with staff and student representatives at secondary schools. Feedback from those that participated in the consultation process was used to refine the details of the policy position, such as ensuring appropriate exemptions, and to develop supporting resources for schools.

Additionally, the policy team considered similar policy models in other jurisdictions, peer-reviewed research and advice from peak national bodies, and feedback provided by school leaders during the development of the previous policy version and since its implementation.

Supports provided to schools

To support secondary schools (including schools that have both primary and secondary students) to implement this policy update, the department provided:

- a transition period to allow individual schools communities to adopt the policy at their own pace by the first day of term 3
- templates, resources, and guidance advice to assist schools with developing and sharing their local policies
- regular check-ins during the transition period
- a communication toolkit for communicating the policy changes to students, staff, families, and governing councils
- a phone and email helpline that schools could contact for consistent advice and support, and to refer families and community members to for any general questions or concerns about the department's policy.

The State Government also:

- ran a public awareness campaign from February to August 2023 to build community understanding that the ban was being implemented in all government secondary schools, and its importance
- committed a budget initiative of $515k to support secondary schools in need of financial support for new or upgraded secure storage strategies for students' devices.

Review summary comments

Purpose

The purpose of this review was to consider:

- how the policy was working 1 year after full implementation
- whether any changes should be made to the policy
- if any additional supports are required for schools to maintain the policy position.

Policy objectives

The Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy states that its aim is "to help promote:

- safe environments with reduced negative impacts of inappropriate use of devices at school, such as cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and critical incidents that involve mobile phones
- classroom environments where teachers can teach, and students can learn, free from distractions caused by personal use of devices
- use of breaks as quality time away from screens, encouraging physical activity and play and meaningful face-to-face connections with peers."

The overall findings of our review suggest that the policy does achieve these aims, with feedback from schools and incident data indicating that staff are seeing fewer issues involving personal devices at school, more socialisation and student interest in other activities in recess and lunch breaks, and improvements in classroom focus and engagement.

It is important to recognise that limiting access to personal devices is just one strategy to promote safe and productive learning environments. However, the clear message from our staff is that the statewide 'off and away' approach provides a consistent policy position and the backing of the department to manage this aspect of the school environment.

Acknowledgements

The success of this policy is only possible through the consistent efforts of our school leaders, teachers, and support staff in supporting students to keep their personal devices 'off and away' all day, every day. We greatly appreciate the work you do.

We also thank all of the staff, students, and parents and carers who gave their time to complete our survey or provide feedback to the department in other ways. Additionally, we thank the professional associations and parent groups who provided such valuable input during the policy consultation, and for your strong support for this important initiative.

Our appreciation also goes to our Local Education Teams for their role in ensuring the rollout of the policy in every government school across the state, and for your continued support of schools in maintaining the policy approach.

Key survey data

- We received **over 3,000 responses** to our 1-year review survey in term 3, 2024

- More than three-quarters of staff, and two-thirds of parents, felt the ban was **having a positive impact**, while nearly two-thirds of students disagreed with the rule

- Observations from staff:
    - 93% of leaders and 79% of teachers reported a **decrease in staff time spent following up** issues with phones/social media
    - 83% of leaders and 75% of teachers reported **more positive break-time activity**
    - 76% of leaders and 70% of teachers reported **increased focus and engagement** during learning time
    - 75% of leaders and 64% of teachers reported a **lower frequency of critical incidents involving devices** happening at school
    - 63% of leaders and 50% of teachers reported **students' wellbeing had increased**.

- Support/ancillary staff tended to rate these areas lower than leaders and teachers

- Staff observations in other areas, as well as **parents' responses** regarding how their children talk about different aspects of school life, **mainly indicated 'no change'** (though skewed toward positive impacts)

- **Student observations** in all categories similarly **suggested little change** since the ban (though skewed toward negative impacts)

- Staff responses were mixed about whether students are actually storing their devices in the expected place; however, felt the policy still had the intended effect as **students are keeping their devices out of sight** and it is now easier to see and respond consistently when a phone is being used

- 57% of students reported having used **personal devices at school for learning** or another agreed positive purpose (with teacher permission)

- 53% of students indicated a **level of preoccupation** with their personal devices when unable to use them at school (reporting feeling worried or upset about it, or thinking about what they could be missing), though this was lower in the 17+ age group (39%)

- 37% of parents indicated **concerns about their children's use** of phones or social media, while 25% were **monitoring or limiting** their children's use of technology and a further 35% **trusted their children** to use technology responsibly.

Recommendations

Policy and supporting web materials

Overall feedback about the *Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy* and supporting materials indicates that:

- staff feel supported by having a clear, statewide policy position
- there is still appropriate flexibility for schools to adapt the policy to their context and to accommodate exemptions
- the advice and resources available online have been helpful to support local implementation and communication with families
- there have been improvements in student focus in learning time, positive break activity, and incidents of inappropriate use of devices (which were the policy's aims).

On this basis, **no changes have been recommended to the policy** itself, nor the additional advice and resources on the department's intranet. However, in response to queries from staff about whether there could be a standardised exemption request form, an **exemption request template will be developed and added to EDi** as an optional resource for schools.

In line with the department's Operational Policy Framework, the **department will continue to record all feedback and review the policy every 3 years** (or sooner as required).

Smart watches

There has been some ad-hoc negative feedback raised by families about the inclusion of smart watches in the 'off and away' policy, for example in relation to wanting students to be able to wear smart watches to keep in contact during school hours or use other functions (e.g. time, fitness tracking, GPS location, etc), and teachers asking students to take off other wearables that look like smart watches. Conversely, staff and professional associations expressed support for the devices' inclusion due to their similar functions to phones, and in turn similar issues relating to inappropriate use e.g. distracting messages during lesson time, filming others without consent.

Some jurisdictions do allow students to wear smart watches in flight mode; however, it is the department's view that it is not feasible for staff to be able to monitor whether every student's smart device remains deactivated throughout every school day. Further, research shows that simply having a smart device in within line of sight can affect cognitive capacity and attention, even if the device is not being used.

For these reasons, the policy requires students to physically take off their smart watches and put them away during school hours, just as phones that are turned off or switched to flight mode must also be kept out of sight. Personal devices can be used again at the end of the school day to check for messages, or families can continue to contact the school office.

On balance of the above considerations, the department has not recommended any changes to the inclusion of smart watches in the policy.

Storage

A recurring theme in staff responses was that some or many students are not actually storing their personal devices as required by their school's policy (for example, putting their phone in their bag instead of keeping it in their locker or a dedicated pouch). However, this has still had the intended

effect of students keeping their devices out of sight at school and made it easier for staff to notice and follow up when a student is using their phone.

Some feedback suggested that certain storage methods should be made compulsory for all schools and funded by the department; however, this would represent a significant financial commitment and may not be welcomed by all schools. It is also of interest that staff at schools where students keep their phones in their bags were most likely to report that students are generally compliant with the policy. The department has therefore **not recommended any changes to policy requirements around storage methods**.

At the time of publishing, 7 schools have accessed financial assistance from the department to implement or upgrade storage options for secondary students' personal devices. **Funding support remains available until the end of the 2024-25 financial year** if further secondary schools identify a need for assistance.

Communications and messaging

Some feedback indicated that the advertising campaign led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2023 (e.g. TV ads and billboards) was very helpful and should continue to ensure the message remains strong and reinforce that the policy is a system-wide direction. However, **renewing the campaign would require additional government resourcing.**

Posters and flyers developed for the campaign were delivered to all secondary schools in term 2, 2023 and remain available for download on the intranet (including translated versions), along with a toolkit of templates that schools can use to communicate reminders about the policy expectations in newsletters/parent handbooks/social media etc. **Feedback indicates the department's communication toolkit is useful and has not identified a need for other resources** to be added.

The *Phones Off While School's On* public webpage also remains active with a copy of the advertisement video and advice for families about the policy and ensuring contact goes via the school office, etc. This webpage and the local policy template used by schools also invite families and community members to contact the department directly if they have any feedback or concerns about the ban, and schools are likewise encouraged to refer families to the department so that they are not needing to field complaints about statewide policy.

General reminders will continue to be messaged to leaders and staff about:

- the importance of maintaining the 'off and away' approach and ensuring all staff are clear about their local policy's expectations
- contacting the relevant policy officer if they need any advice, or support to review their school's local approach.

Educative approaches

There were comments from all respondent groups noting concern that, in addition to (or in place of) a ban, young people should be explicitly taught how to use digital technology safely and appropriately. This has also been the main theme of community feedback that is not supportive of the ban since its announcement.

Schools continue to support students to develop digital literacy skills using their learning

devices, and curriculum areas focused on safety and respectful relationships. The Premier of South Australia has also announced that **all secondary-aged students will receive updated education from 2025** about online safety, risks of inappropriate engagement, and strategies for seeking support.

The policy has **flexibility for teachers to permit use of phones in learning**, providing opportunity for students to experience positive and productive applications for their personal devices.

Issues occurring outside of school

There were concerns raised by some staff and parents that the policy only applies during school hours, and there continue to be issues with how students are using personal devices outside of school (including online issues which school staff are then expected to follow up, or which escalate into face-to-face incidents between students at school the next day).

The Federal Government recently introduced legislation to restrict social media access for young Australians.

Notes about other concerns raised

In addition to the above recommendations, below are responses to some other common concerns or suggestions raised by different respondent groups.

Other concerns raised by staff

Loss of access to personal devices as a learning tool

- There is flexibility in the policy to allow teachers to temporarily permit students to use phones at school for agreed positive purposes (such as a learning activity)
- Schools' local policies set out how and when personal devices may be used, so teachers should check with their leaders if they feel changes are needed to better support access to personal devices in their learning area

Students using their learning devices (e.g. laptops/tablets) inappropriately

- These devices should be connected to school-managed networks which are monitored and managed to filter access to inappropriate content
- Feedback about this issue will be provided to the department's ICT Services

Other concerns raised by students

Being unable to use phones in an emergency to contact parents/carers

- All sites are required to follow the **department's procedure for notifying families about potential or actual emergencies** – this centralised method also helps ensure families receive accurate and consistent information
- Students should always notify staff in the first instance of any issues at school so that staff can take immediate follow-up action and contact families as required

Being unable to contact online friends or occupy themselves with phones during breaks

- Breaks are intended to help students have some "offline" time each day and encourage a balance of activities that support healthy development e.g. physical activity, socialising face-to-face – the policy does not prevent students from keeping in touch with online friends outside of school hours
- **Reminder communications to schools will suggest checking in with students about things to do during breaks** e.g. if students want more access to sports courts, social clubs where students can connect with others over shared interests, etc

Being unable to respond immediately to shift offers from part-time employers

- While out-of-school commitments can have many benefits, it's important to **limit their interruptions to students' education** during school hours
- Employers engaging school-aged staff should be aware from public campaigns and discourse that students cannot access their phones during school hours

Other concerns raised by parents

Being unable to communicate with their child during school hours

- **Students can retrieve devices at the end of the school day to check for messages** and contact their parents – interruptions during school hours should be minimised so students can focus on their learning and social connections
- **Parents can also call the school office** to ask for a message to be passed on if it can't wait until the end of the day

Children wanting to contact them to discuss an issue or ask to be picked up

- Early collection of children must always be arranged via staff and using formal sign-out processes to meet the school's duty of care obligations
- It's important to give young people age-appropriate opportunities to build their confidence, resilience, and skills for managing challenges or conflicts
- Students can also access immediate support from staff where needed, and should notify staff in the first instance if they are feeling unwell or experiencing an issue at school – staff will also arrange contact with families as needed
- Exemptions can be provided where a student needs to have contact with their family as a wellbeing or mental health support (or alternative strategies may be put in place such as providing access to a school phone in the wellbeing space)

Children unable to use their phones to purchase items at the canteen

- Students can still make canteen purchases with cash or physical bank cards, and many schools have also implemented online pre-ordering apps
- Schools generally have options for supplied lunch provisions or an 'IOU' if a student does not have their own food or a form of payment with them – teachers can also provide temporary permission for a student to use their device for payment if absolutely necessary (however, this does not give the student permission to use their phone for any other purpose while waiting in the canteen and the device must be immediately returned to 'off and away' after paying)

Survey of schools with secondary enrolments

Survey process

There are 158 government schools with secondary enrolments in South Australia.

A sample of 50 (approx. 30%) was identified by selecting one site from every education portfolio across the state, and a second site from each portfolio with four or more secondary schools. Sites were chosen to cover a wide range of:

- demographics e.g. location, size, Index of Disadvantage category, context, etc
- local approaches to the policy e.g. different device storage methods, some schools that had already provided positive feedback, some schools that had experienced challenges or needed additional support, etc.

The sample did not include any site contexts where personal devices are not used by students in practice (e.g. special schools, Youth Education Centre), nor any of the adult and distance education sites which have modified policies due to their unique contexts.

Separate surveys were developed for staff, students, and parents/carers to seek their views about how the policy is working, what they have noticed since the ban was implemented, and if they felt any changes or additional supports are needed. The department provided the survey links to principals at the sample schools to be distributed to their staff, student, and family cohorts.

The survey was open from Monday 12 August to Friday 6 September 2024. The total number of responses received to each survey was:

Staff	308
Students	1,896
Parents/carers	945
TOTAL	3,149

All compulsory questions in each survey prompted either a multiple choice or rating scale response, which has provided significant quantitative data.

Each survey also contained optional comment boxes to allow an opportunity for respondents to provide specific feedback or further details about a previous answer. All qualitative responses were individually reviewed, but also broadly categorised to identify common trends represented as "counts" in the results (noting some responses were coded against multiple categories if they raised several different topics).

The survey was conducted anonymously to encourage as much honest feedback as possible. In turn, this means that the department does not have insight to how many responses came from each community and no way to identify individual participants or their schools. For this reason, survey participants were advised to contact the department directly if they wanted to discuss any specific concerns or supports needed.

Staff survey results

Demographics

As the survey was anonymous, staff were asked (multiple choice responses) to provide some brief demographic information to identify whether any trends existed in particular contexts.

Respondent role

- Leader — 65 (21%)
- Teacher — 162 (53%)
- Support/Ancillary — 81 (26%)

School type

- Secondary school — 227 (74%)
- Specialist site — 3 (1%)
- Combined primary/secondary — 76 (25%)
- Multiple sites (e.g. TRT) — 2 (0%)

Location

- Metropolitan — 156 (51%)
- Regional — 132 (43%)
- Remote — 20 (6%)
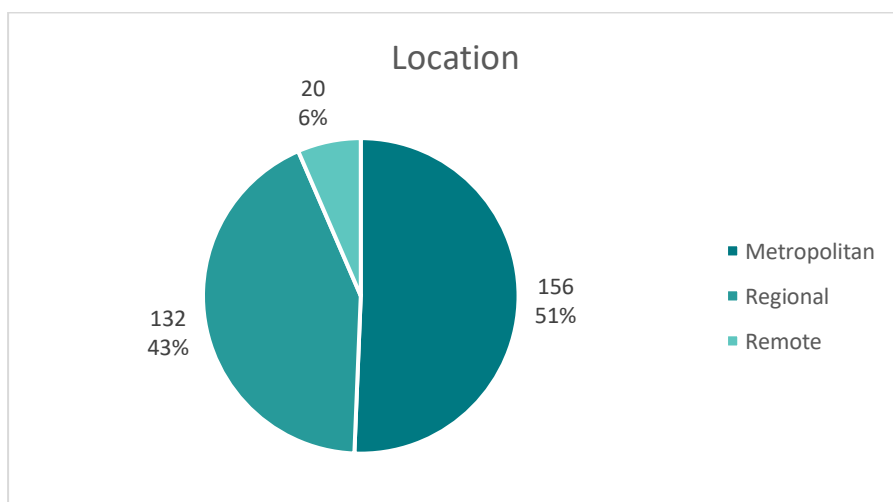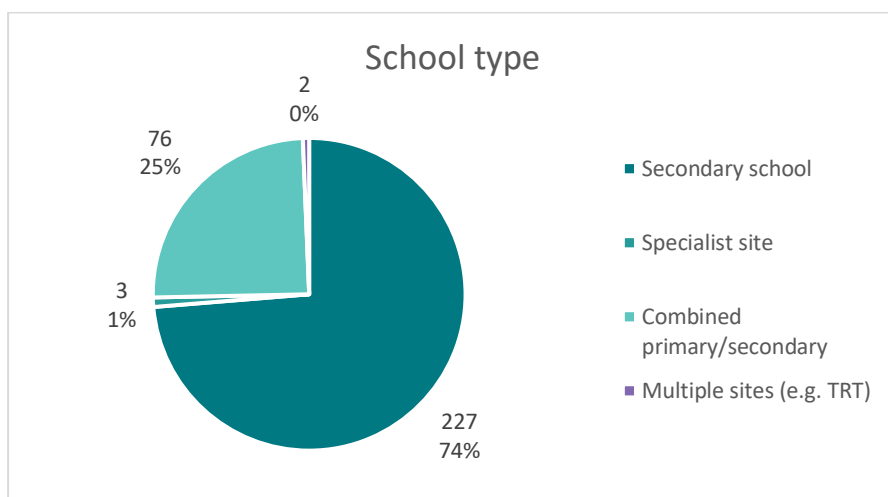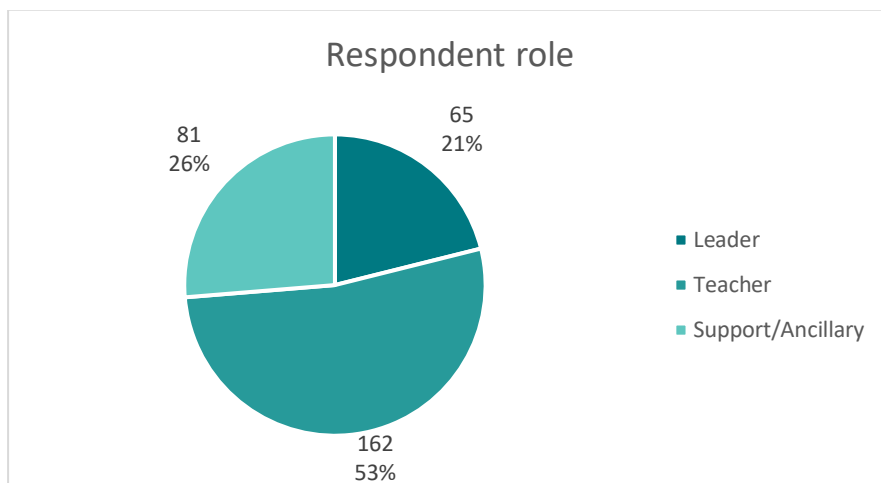
School's Index of Disadvantage Category

40 / 13%	Cat 1-2
108 / 35%	Cat 3-5
83 / 27%	Cat 6-7
77 / 25%	Unsure
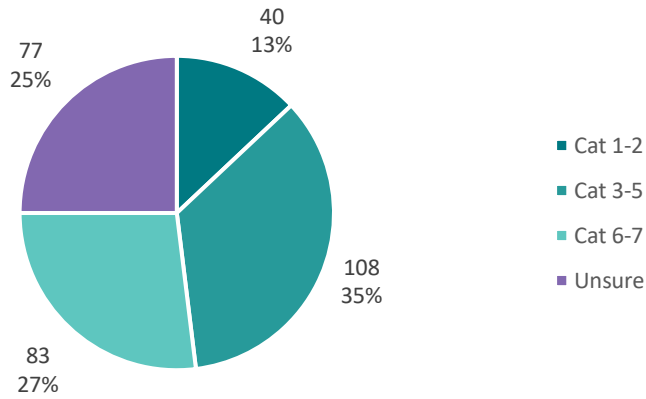
When the school introduced the ban

38 / 12%	Before 2023
83 / 27%	Term 1, 2023
25 / 8%	Term 2, 2023
104 / 34%	Term 3, 2023
58 / 19%	Unsure
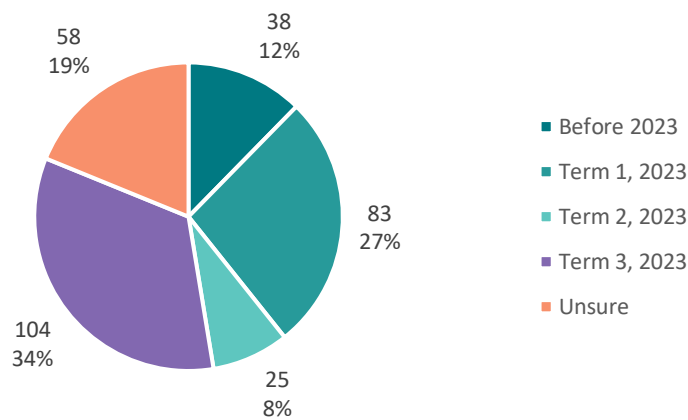
Storage of students' personal devices

Staff were asked to identify where students are required to keep their personal devices during school hours.

Where students need to keep their devices

68 / 22%	In their bag
117 / 38%	In their locker
98 / 32%	In a lockable pouch
10 / 3%	Handed in to office
9 / 3%	Classroom storage
6 / 2%	Other/variable

Staff were then asked (multiple choice response) if they feel this storage method is working well – overall responses:

- Yes: 162 (53%)
- No: 146 (47%)

A higher proportion of leaders (68%) considered their school's storage method to be successful. The proportion of all staff who felt their school's storage method worked well was highest at sites where students keep phones in their bags (62%) and lowest where phones are stored in the classroom (44% - however, there were only 9 using this method).

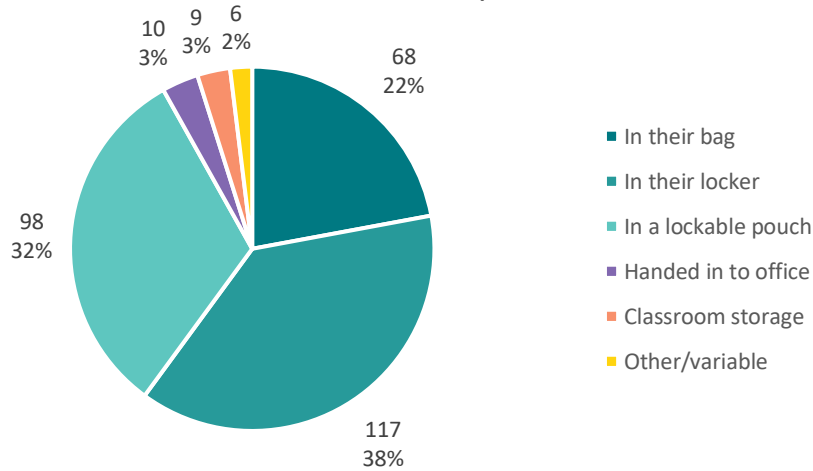Staff were asked (optional free text response) to add a comment about their previous responses. A total of 195 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

It works really well/most of the time	38
Students aren't storing phones where they are meant to, but are not using them - so it has the intended effect (and it's easier to see and respond when they do)	42
There are some issues with workarounds e.g. "dummy" phones, taking phones into toilets, breaking/not locking pouches, using other ICT inappropriately etc	69
There is inconsistent or limited enforcement of the policy	14
It doesn't work most of the time/at all	12

Other comments related to other matters or were not clear.

Sample of comments about storage:

- "I'm sure that not all students are pouching phones every day, but it is working as we do not see phones very often at all now, and if so, it is very obvious and managed quickly."
- "Most students still carry phones on them and have ear pieces. Too hard to monitor."
- "It works well because we don't tend to see students using their phones during school hours. We do know, however, that students do, at times, access them in their lockers, which is a minor issue."

Observations

Staff were asked (rating scale responses) to identify any changes they had noticed about specific aspects of the school environment since the ban was introduced – **over next page**.

Changes respondents have noticed

Category	Significantly decreased	Somewhat decreased	No change	Somewhat increased	Significantly increased
Frequency of social media issues (at or outside school)		41	104	129	22	12
Frequency of critical incidents involving devices		65	126	80	22	15
Frequency of critical incidents at school		25	97	149	30	7
Positive break time activity	2	10	71	137	88
Resilience and problem-solving	4	11	200	81	12
Wellbeing	1	25	115	124	43
Academic performance	1	3	171	124	9
Focus and engagement	3	21	80	148	56
Staff time spent on phone issues	161	80	25	30	12

Significantly decreased Somewhat decreased No change Somewhat increased Significantly increased

Staff were then asked (optional free text response) to add any comments about their observations. A total of 97 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

|	
Seeing positive impacts e.g. more socialising, less violence, more physical activity	21
Further restrictions should be implemented e.g. banning social media, closer monitoring of students' learning devices	7
Haven't noticed any changes/not relevant to their role	15
Behaviours have shifted e.g. using laptops inappropriately, cyberbullying to bullying in-person, distracting others in class	28
Social media issues happening after hours still result in issues spilling over at school the next day	12
Local policy changes could be useful	6
Consistency of enforcement of the ban is still an issue	4

Other comments related to other matters or were not clear.

Sample of comments about changes observed:

- "I have noticed a massive shift in students' attention to learning, a reduction of behavioural issues around phones. This policy has given us the power to deal with this issue in a manner that isn't abrasive and confrontational."
- "Significant behaviour change in the yard, few or no fights."
- "This policy is a positive step towards a more healthy school environment. It has increased productive conversation amongst students and staff. They actually play basketball or football during breaks. The anxiety has decreased markedly."
- "Quite often you see students with phones visible in their pockets. It is difficult to confront students about this issue, as they will quite often speak negatively towards staff members and it creates negative backlash. It is difficult to call students out for having their phones in their pockets, when not all staff members are doing so."
- "A huge take away positive from the phone ban has been seeing students get outside and interact with one another instead of sitting in circles on their phones like they used to. We've also had a decrease in social media/phone related bullying and issues now that 'the norm' is that students don't have access to them during school. Distractions in class have SIGNIFICANTLY decreased as a result of no phones as students aren't fearful of 'missing out' on something that's happening on their phones, as none of their friends should be communicating on them during school hours."

Community views about the ban

Staff were asked (multiple choice response) to indicate the overall view of their school's community (staff, students, families, etc) toward the ban.
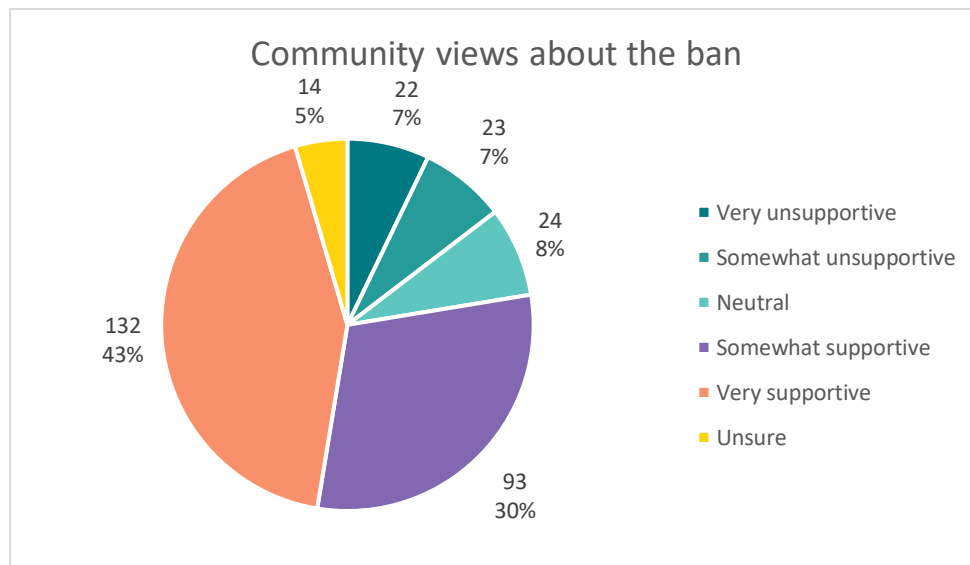
This shows that, overall, approx. three-quarters of staff felt their communities were supportive of the policy.

This was quite consistent between leaders and teachers, and in all Index of Disadvantage categories; however, was **rated lower by support/ancillary staff (64%) and respondents from remote areas (60%)**.

Sample of comments about community views on the ban:

- "It has helped a bit but also caused angst as some students and parents do not like students not having phones."
- "A more positive interaction amongst all members of the school community. Students are actually happier."
- "Negative response from parents - having to manage their inability to contact students on a whim."
- "Teachers/leadership copping really nasty attitudes from students as a result of their phones being confiscated."

Student compliance

Staff were asked (multiple choice response) whether they feel that students are generally compliant with the policy:

Are students generally compliant with the policy?

77
25%

■ Yes
■ No

231
75%
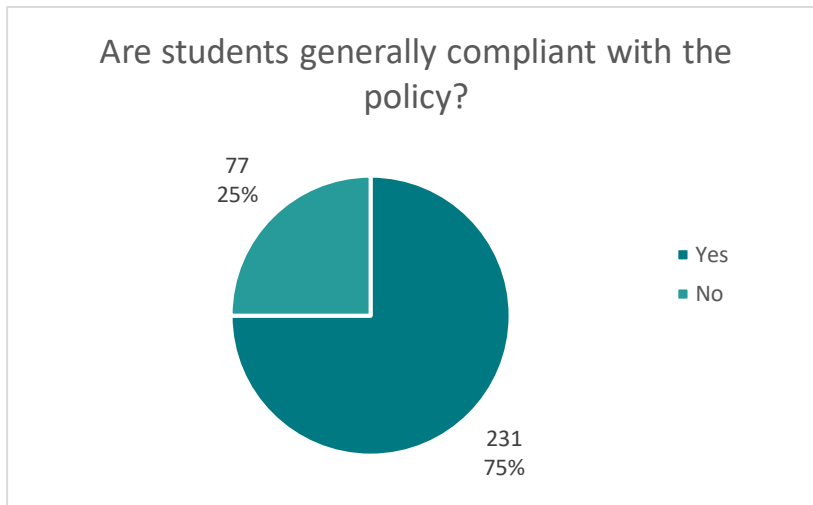
Compliance was **rated much higher by leaders and teachers (83 and 80% respectively)** compared to support/ancillary staff (57%). Staff were more likely to report compliance at schools where students keep phones in their bags (79%), pouches (77%), or lockers (75%).

Sample of quotes about student compliance:

- "Some are hiding it, but most of the students are doing the right thing."
- "A substantial amount of students still carry their device on their person, however they do keep it out of [sight] and are responsive when they are told to put it away."
- "We still confiscate a few phones each day, but it is minimal - 1 or 2 at the most."
- "Always a few cheeky kids who use in toilet or on break however for the most part the students have been great and it's lovely to see them interact with each other more, conversing and playing games."

Impacts of the ban

Staff were also asked (multiple choice response) whether they feel that the statewide ban has had a positive impact for their school.

Has the ban had a positive impact for your school?

- Yes: 239 — 78%
- No: 29 — 9%
- Unsure: 40 — 13%
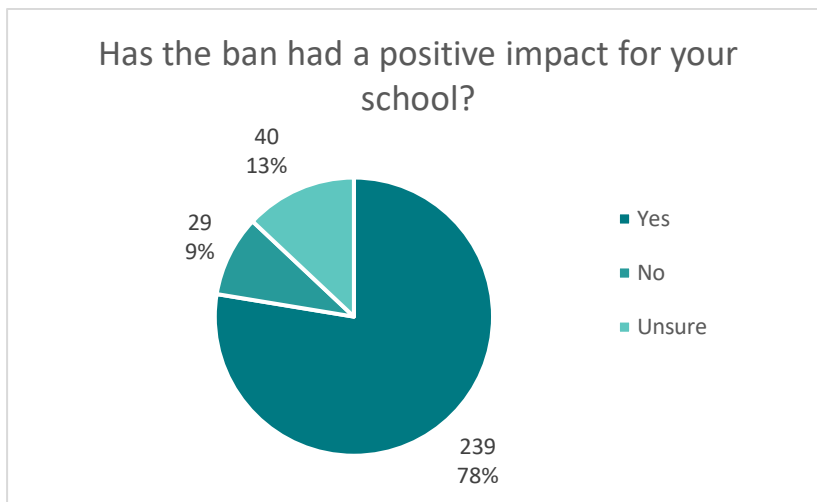
The proportion of 'Yes' responses was much higher among leaders and teachers (86 and 81% respectively) compared to support/ancillary staff (63%). Staff at Category 1-2 schools were more likely to identify positive impact (88%), but less likely in remote schools (70%).

Sample of quotes about whether the ban has had a positive impact:

- "It's been a total gamechanger."
- "There has been a huge improvement in social interaction with lots of students playing sport at lunchtime or talking to each other, rather than sitting together looking at their phones. Staff have felt supported by the change in policy, and school have been supported by this being an external policy."
- "When the phone policy was initially being upheld there were many positive changes. Now that leadership does not support staff, things are continuing as they were before the phone ban."
- "We have noticed a reduction in social issues during class time. Staff have made comments that feel more comfortable that they are not being filmed or audio recorded by students."
- "Only works well with lots of teacher and leadership time ensuring it happens and following up issues with disciplinary responses."

21

Unexpected outcomes

Staff were also asked (multiple choice response) if they had seen any unexpected outcomes from the ban, whether positive or negative.

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

69
22%

239
78%

■ Yes

■ No
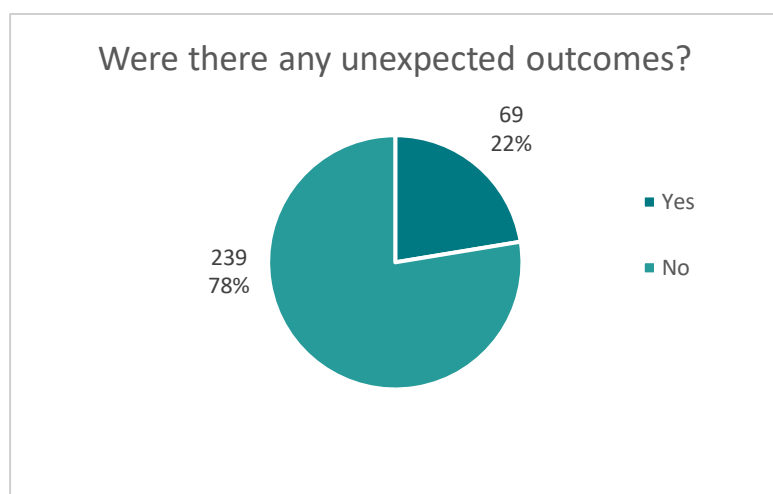
Staff who selected 'Yes' were asked (optional free text response) to add comments about the kinds of unexpected outcomes they'd seen. A total of 67 comments were submitted.

These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

Seeing positive impacts e.g. more socialising, more physical activity, less violence, fewer follow ups for use of phones in class	23
Students are calmer, speak to staff more politely, are less dependent on their phones, feeling less pressure to be online constantly	4
Staff feel supported by the department/the statewide approach reinforces the school's policy	2
Students have found workarounds e.g. dummy phones, "sneaking", frequently going to toilets/lockers to check phones	12
Behaviours have shifted e.g. being off-task on learning devices, negative social interactions occurring more in-person	5
It is more difficult for students to use their phones for genuine learning purposes	9
Increased pressure for staff, students being abusive or defiant when teachers try to enforce the policy, pushback from parents	11

Other comments related to other matters or were not clear.

Sample of quotes about unexpected outcomes of the ban:

- "The policy has far exceeded our expectations. Everyone is very happy with the results so far. Students have developed other ways to message each other via their computer but still it's much better."
- "Old school behaviours reappearing at break time, eg verbal bullying as no distractions from phones. Graffiti in toilets has started up again as well."
- "How quickly most students adapted to the change and how empowering it was for staff to have legislative support implement a ban, it was a school rule for years but it was not widely

enforced due to resistance from students (and some staff), but as it was rolled out across the state it was much easier to enforce."

- "I initially thought it would impact negatively for international students who used devices for interpretation functions, but it actually proved to be beneficial as they had to use other methods which had greater learning benefits."

Feedback about the policy and supports for schools

Staff were asked if they would like to provide feedback (positive or negative) about the policy itself, including any specific features such as exemptions or local flexibility. A total of 58 comments (optional free text response) were submitted.

These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

Policy provides clear guidelines, has had positive effects	13
Local flexibility and the ability to provide exemptions for personal and educational reasons are important features	15
It should be easier to allow use of phones for learning purposes	2
Exemptions need to be more standardised	4
Staff need more strategies to manage inappropriate use of learning devices (e.g. being off-task on school laptops)	11
Enforcement of the policy is inconsistent; teachers are reluctant to address use of phones because it is time consuming/results in student being defiant or abusive	9
Managing non-compliance with families is challenging	3

Other comments related to other matters or were not clear.

Staff were also asked if they would like to provide feedback (positive or negative) or make suggestions about the supporting resources for schools, such as the local policy template or communication toolkit. A total of 13 comments (optional free text response) were submitted, though most related to other topics.

Sample of comments about the policy and supporting materials:

- "Support in the lead up to the process, guidance about policy wording, key advertising strategies in the media, and the 6 months lead in time made this an easy change for schools to implement."
- "Local Policy Template was excellent."

Further support for schools

Staff were asked (multiple choice response) if they felt schools need any other support from the department to maintain the 'off and away all day' approach.

Do schools need more support with the policy?

- 126 — 41% — Yes
- 182 — 59% — No
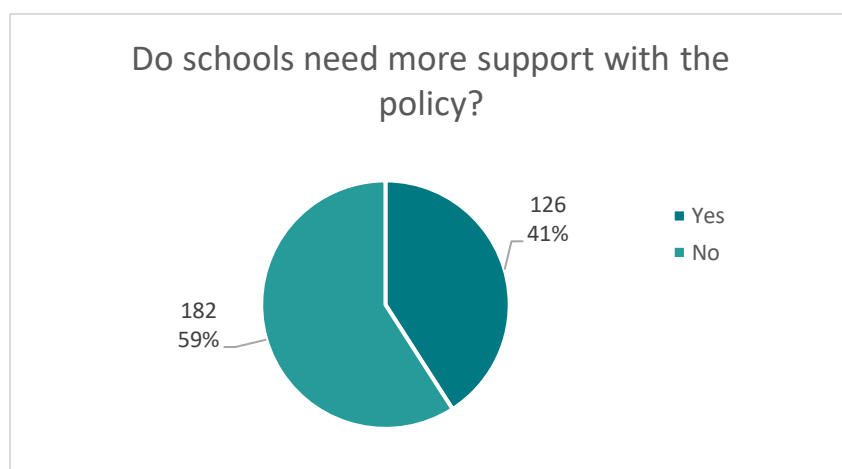
This response was consistent across all role types. Those who selected 'Yes' were asked (optional free text response) to identify what further supports they felt were needed.

A total of 103 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

Financial support for storage costs	18
Staff responses to non-compliance and behaviour management	38
Consistent communication to parents about the policy and encouraging them to support their children to follow the expectations	26
Improving consistency in policy enforcement among staff	5
More time needed for staff, improve reliability of other devices to be used instead	7
Designing alternative activities for students to do in break times	5

Other comments were not clear or indicated they were unsure.

Sample of comments about further supports:

- "Wellbeing issues are huge, so there should be more significant changes, such as complete bans on under 16s accessing social media and internet […] that is resulting in students being less active, not being able to concentrate in class as they are addicted to gaming, accessing internet sites, etc. and not connecting in a healthy way with others and their environments. There is significant apathy being displayed by more and more students."
- "We should be teaching students how to properly use phones. Phones are not banned in the workplace."
- "It eliminates one source of distraction for students however students are using computers/iPads/laptops to message friends during class play games and watch programs that are not relevant to their learning."
- "It has had a negative outcome in teaching and learning in the Visual Arts, as being able to quickly access a phone camera to capture art and design work is now problematic."
- "Just consistency in how often this is being heard and reinforced so that schools don't feel isolated in this uphill but worthwhile battle."

Student survey results

Demographics

As the survey was anonymous, students were asked (multiple choice responses) to provide some demographic information to identify whether any trends existed in particular contexts.

School type

- Secondary school — 1538, 81%
- Combined primary/secondary — 336, 18%
- Another type of school — 22, 1%

Location

- Metropolitan — 1077, 57%
- Regional — 681, 36%
- Remote — 138, 7%

Age

- 11-13 years — 429, 23%
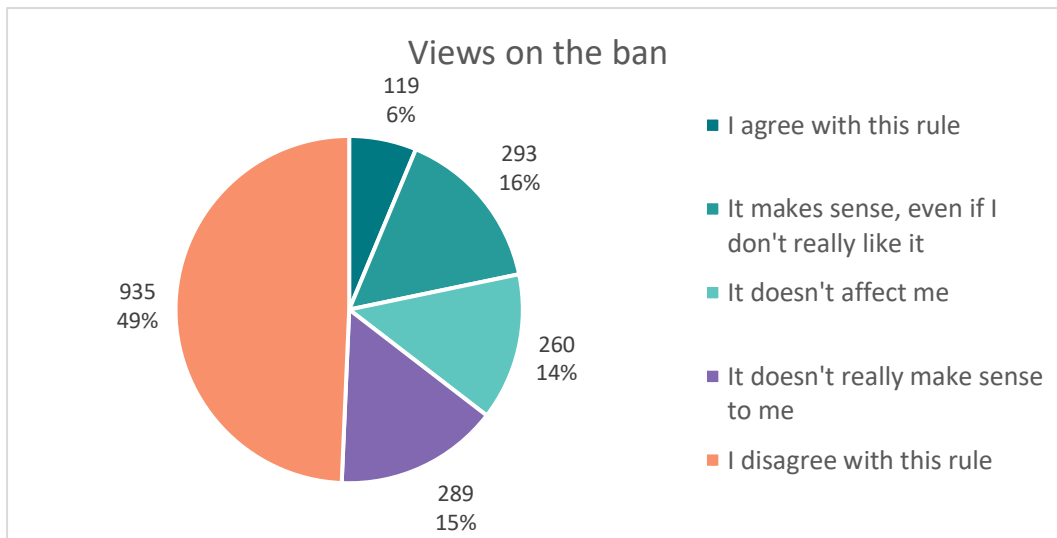- 14-16 years — 1107, 58%
- 17 years+ — 360, 19%
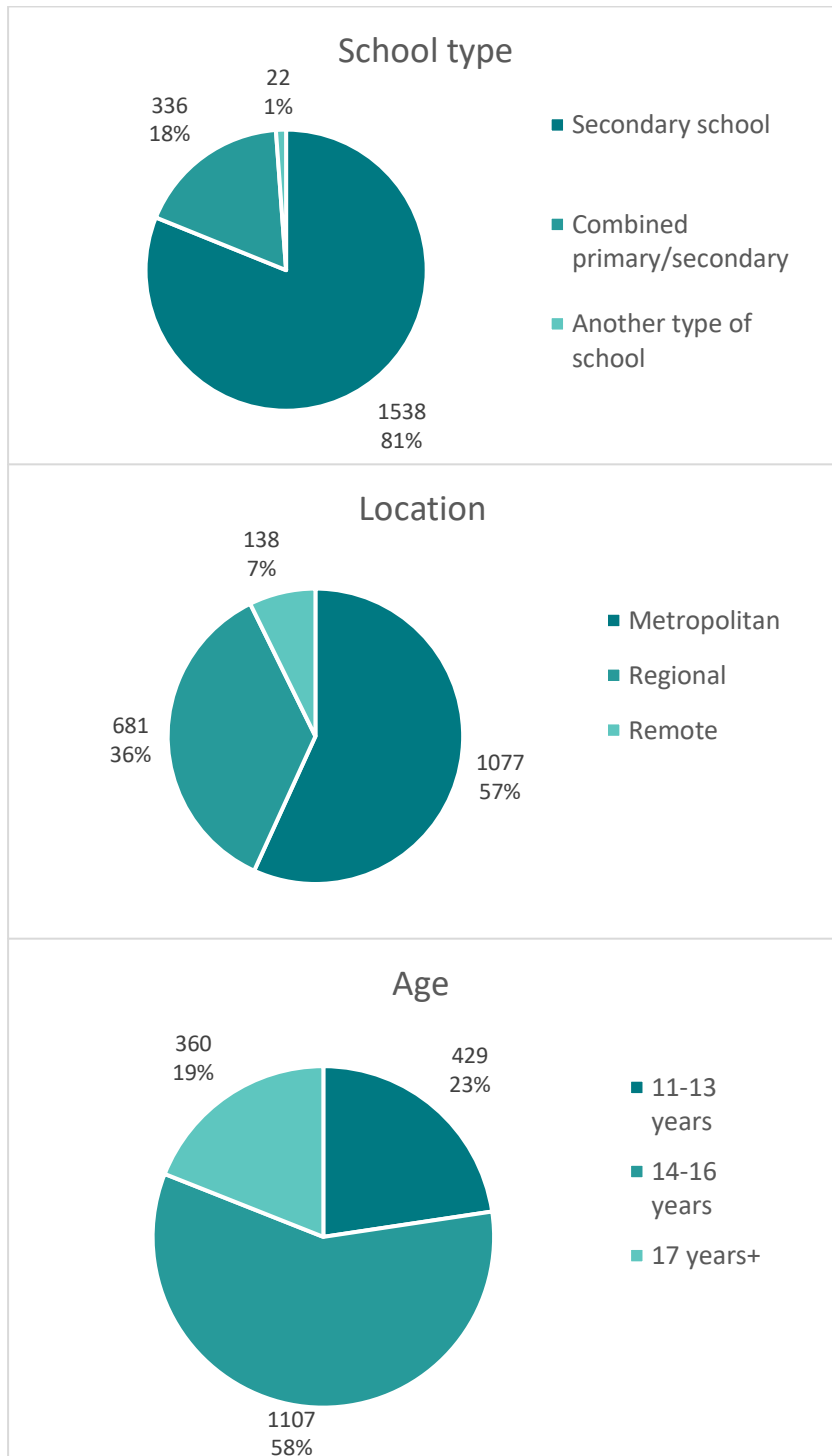
The vast majority of respondents indicated that they bring a personal device to school:

- Yes: 1780 (94%)
- No: 116 (6%)

This proportion increased with respondent age, with 98% of 17+ year olds bringing a phone to school compared to 85% of 11-13 year olds.

Views about the ban

Students were asked (multiple choice response) to identify how they feel about the rule for students to keep their phones 'off and away' at school.

Views on the ban

119 / 6%	■ I agree with this rule
293 / 16%	■ It makes sense, even if I don't really like it
935 / 49%	■ It doesn't affect me
260 / 14%	■ It doesn't really make sense to me
289 / 15%	■ I disagree with this rule

Students were also asked (multiple choice response) how they feel about not being able to use their phone during school hours.

Feeling about not having access to phone at school

167 / 9%	■ It's nice to have a break from my phone and I know I can check it later
152 / 8%	■ I feel OK or relaxed about it
579 / 31%	■ It doesn't affect me
420 / 22%	■ I often think about what I could be missing when I can't use my phone
578 / 30%	■ I feel worried or upset about it
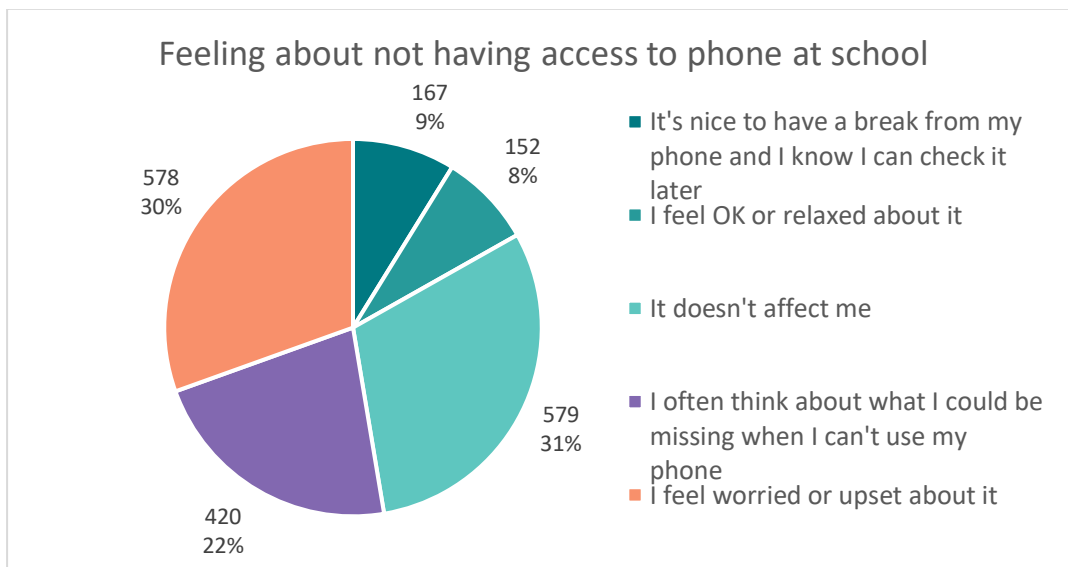
Senior students were more likely than younger peers to report positive feelings (21% compared to 11-17%) and less likely to report negative feelings (39% compared to 50%).

Personal devices in learning

Students were asked (multiple choice response) if they ever use a mobile phone in class for learning, with teacher permission.

Use of personal devices in learning

- Often (every week): 190, 10%
- Sometimes (a few times each term): 390, 21%
- Rarely (only once or twice): 499, 26%
- Never: 817, 43%
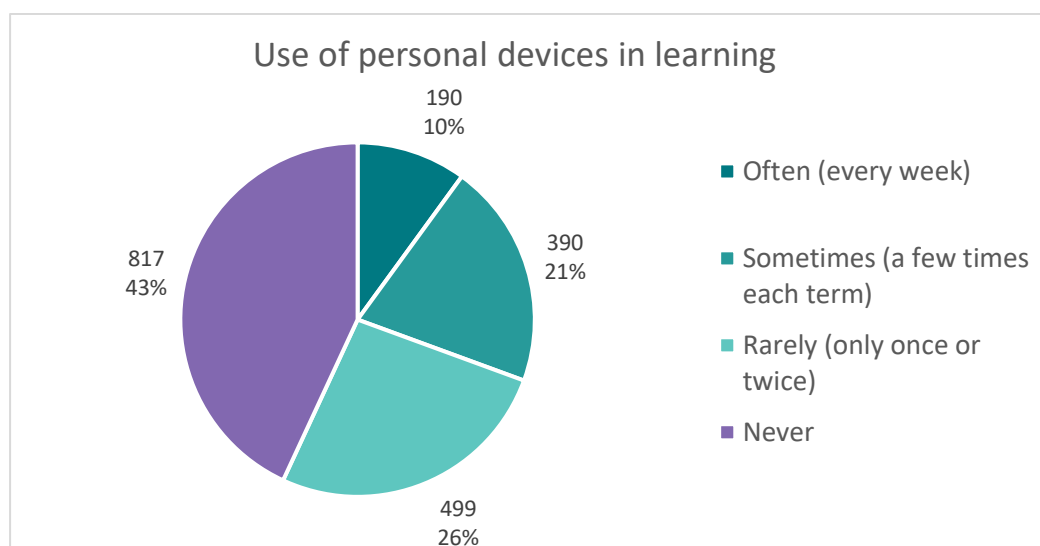
In all categories other than 'Never', 17+ year old students had the highest proportion of usage, while most 11-13 year olds (75%) had never used personal devices in learning.

Respondents who selected any answer other than 'Never' were asked (optional free text response) what kinds of things they have used their phone for in learning.
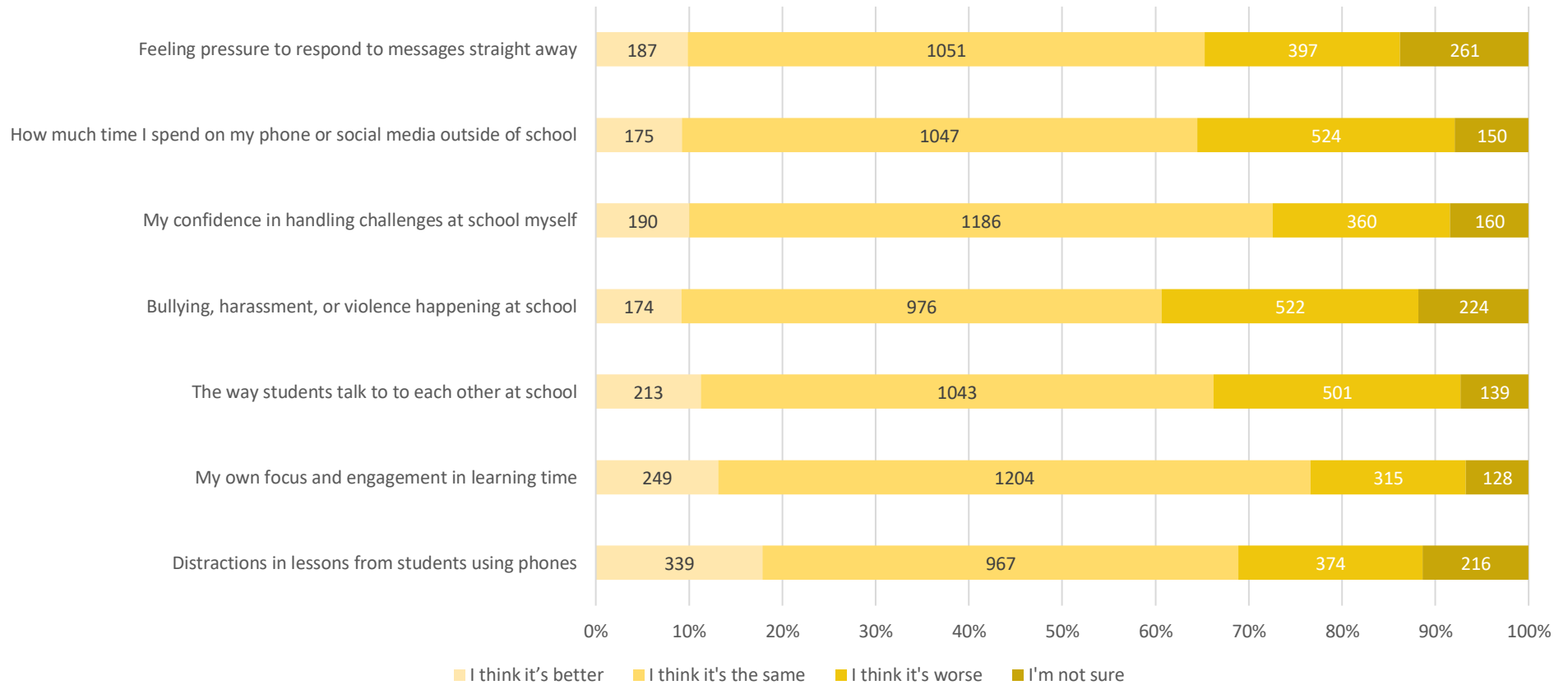
A total of 897 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories, noting many responses covered more than one category:

Creating – photos, videos, podcasts, movies to support and show evidence of learning	610
Internet searches for researching (e.g. faster than using laptop, when school wifi is down, need to access websites that are blocked by school filters)	106
Transferring - sending files/photos to self or teachers as learning evidence	98
Aps and internet programs to support learning eg translation, google classroom, reading aids	60
Specific learning areas/tasks – eg maths calculations, editing, timer for PE	232
Contact with families, support people	50
Personal use – health/fitness tracking, checking emails	58
Inappropriate or unclear response	20

Observations

Students were asked (rating scale responses) to identify any changes they had noticed about specific aspects of school life since the ban was introduced – **over page**.

Changes respondents have noticed

Aspect	I think it's better	I think it's the same	I think it's worse	I'm not sure
Feeling pressure to respond to messages straight away	187	1051	397	261
How much time I spend on my phone or social media outside of school	175	1047	524	150
My confidence in handling challenges at school myself	190	1186	360	160
Bullying, harassment, or violence happening at school	174	976	522	224
The way students talk to to each other at school	213	1043	501	139
My own focus and engagement in learning time	249	1204	315	128
Distractions in lessons from students using phones	339	967	374	216

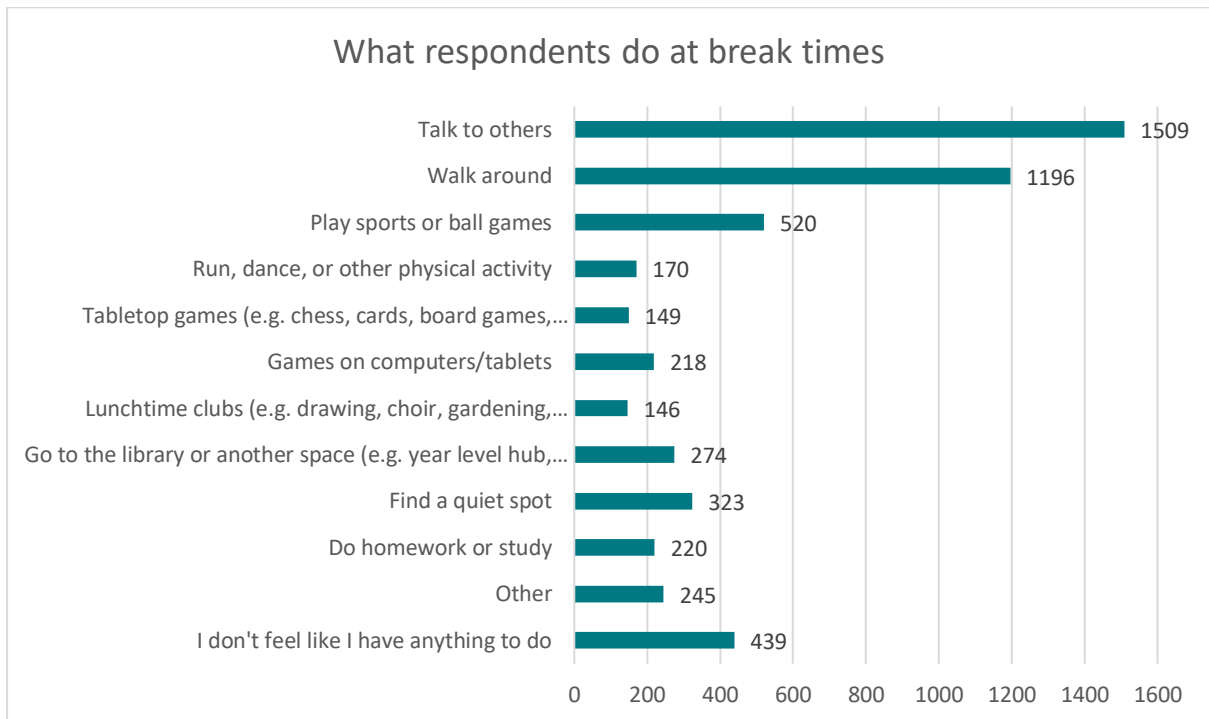Legend: ■ I think it's better   ■ I think it's the same   ■ I think it's worse   ■ I'm not sure

The vast majority of respondents reported that they had seen no change in any of these aspects of school life since the ban was introduced.

No significant trends were identified in responses from different age groups feeling that particular aspects were better or worse (variance ≤5% between ages in all categories).
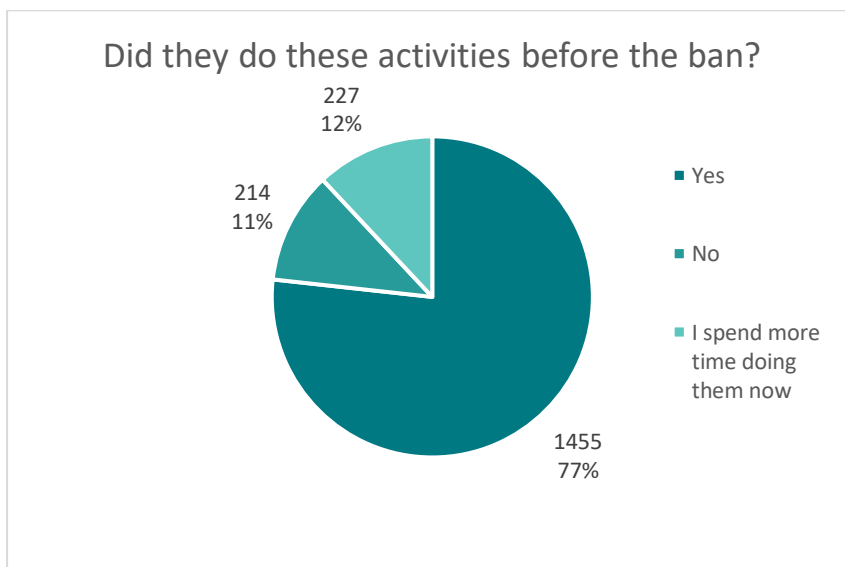
Break times

Students were asked (multiple choice response – multiple selections allowed) to identify what they currently do during recess and lunch breaks.

What respondents do at break times

Activity	Count
Talk to others	1509
Walk around	1196
Play sports or ball games	520
Run, dance, or other physical activity	170
Tabletop games (e.g. chess, cards, board games,…)	149
Games on computers/tablets	218
Lunchtime clubs (e.g. drawing, choir, gardening,…)	146
Go to the library or another space (e.g. year level hub,…)	274
Find a quiet spot	323
Do homework or study	220
Other	245
I don't feel like I have anything to do	439

It is noted that, of the 439 respondents who felt they did not have anything to do, 363 (83%) selected at least one other listed activity.

Students were also asked (multiple choice response) if they already did these things before phones were banned.

Did they do these activities before the ban?

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	1455	77%
No	214	11%
I spend more time doing them now	227	12%

29

Feedback about the policy

Students were asked (optional free text response) if they feel anything needs to be changed about the policy.

A total of 1397 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

No change/supportive of the ban	37
Make it stricter/more enforced	23
Phones should be allowed during breaks	417
Ban shouldn't apply to senior students	51
Should only apply to individuals using phones inappropriately	30
Disagree with ban/"give our phones back"	366
Disagree with an aspect e.g. using pouches, smartwatches, earbuds	94
Unclear response e.g. "yeah", "sigma"	211
Non definitive responses eg don't care, doesn't affect me, not sure	151
Should be able to use for educational purposes	15
No response	2

Sample of comments not in support of banning phones at school:

- "It needs to be revoked as phones are a major part of our adolescence and communication skills build while using phones."
- "It's up to the student if they want to use their phone or not. If they use it in class and don't hand in work on time then its their fault, pretty straight forward."
- "School feels more like a jail now where I am forced to surrender my belongings."
- "Before the whole phone ban phones were naturally put away because it wasnt a big thing to be able to go on it, but [now] its almost like theres more of a distraction because everyone is trying to find ways to circumvent the rules or just ignoring them completely."
- "Phones are essential in case of an emergency."

Sample of comments in support of banning phones at school:

- "I believe that this policy does not need to be changed […] There will be students who will go against this rule but it is a personal choice and it does not affect me or other students around me."
- "Make it more strict."
- "I feel that no phones at school help people to be more engaged in conversation, making school feel better, especially for those who need to take their minds off all their problems."
- "No I think the the policy is fine even if many people may disagree with it. Teachers could be more strict on the policy since I have seen many people at breaks still using their phones."

Sample of comments about using phones in breaks:

- "I like being able to communicate with my friends in school, not feel like its hard to contact them. Obviously, they shouldn't be allowed in lessons, but during breaktimes, there shouldn't be anything stopping us from using them. It's MY personal device that I own."
- "I believe that schools should be able to manage kids with their phone usage and allow it for responsible students. It should be a privilege that can be taken away if exploited."
- "People are finding other ways to use social media at school, I think we should go back to being able to have our phones at lunch and recess because then we won't have to check our

social media during class time on our iPads which loses our focus even worse than being able to use your phones at lunch and recess."

Sample of comments about use of phones as learning tools:

- "We should be able to use our phones because they can be a useful tool when in the classroom, especially people with learning disabilities."
- "There should be exemptions for things such as taking photos of whiteboards in class. there have been instances in classes such as maths, where there have been worked answers on the board that everyone has had to hurriedly copy down, which not only takes up time that we could have been doing work but also means that we may not copy information correctly meaning we feel flustered and stressed."
- "A phone or smart watch can be used for gathering simple pieces of information quickly while earbuds can be useful for staying focused and blocking out outside noises and distractions. I understand that there are alternatives to these devices however they are impractical to use in most situations."
- "Although I understand why this policy was created I also think that the world is growing and that the schools need to grow with it. Phones have become apart of work spaces and it doesn't teach us how to "not use our phones" it teaches how to be sneakier."

Sample of comments relating to senior students:

- "I believe this rule is completely ridiculous for those who are in older years. […] Older year levels need their phones for work, work experience, making phone calls, taking photos of work, taking notes and much more. I just feel that years 11 and 12 should be allowed access to their phones during their final years of school."
- "Most year 10 to year 12 students are working part-time jobs and will miss opportunities to work after school […] this has happened to me multiple times when my boss messaged me asking if I could work that night but because I cannot answer the phone I miss that shift."
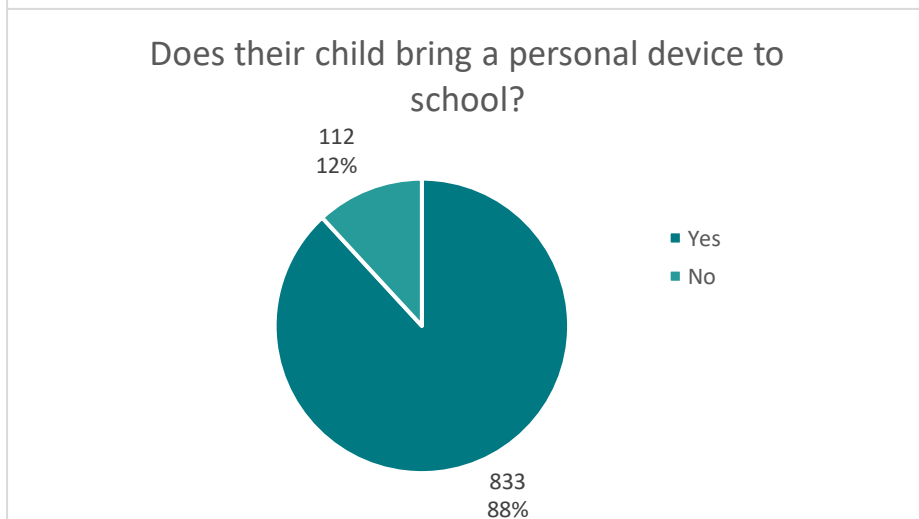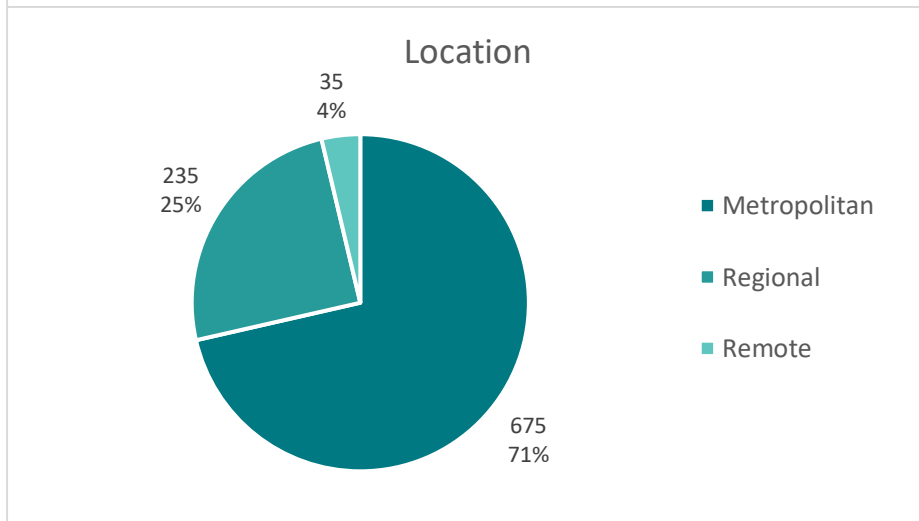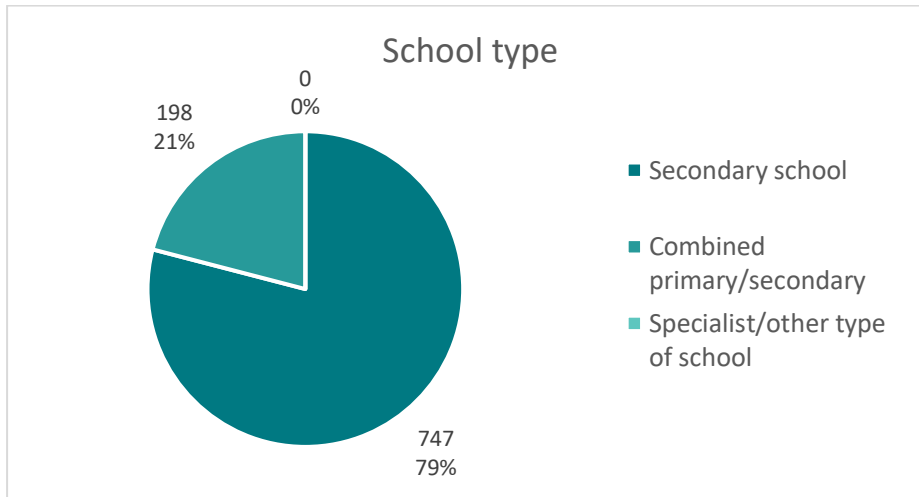
Sample of other comments:

- "I think that on one level the phone ban is great because now in class there is way less distractions. And at recess and lunch you can't pull out your phone and be anti-social, but then it was also nice to be able to pull out your phone sometimes. I mostly miss being able to take photos with friends at school.**"
- "The policy doesn't really affect me because I don't feel like I need my phone at all times but it is still impractical because if there is a personal issue you only want to talk to your parents about and not the school, you will have to tell the well-being centre the problem and for them to call your parents."
- "maybe instead of removing phones all together consider why students are addicted to the phones and why students are being so unkind and focus on what you can do to support them and say "hey, are you okay" and ask why they are acting like this."

Parent survey results

Demographics

As the survey was anonymous, parents were asked (multiple choice responses) to provide some demographic information to identify whether any trends existed in particular contexts.

School type

0
0%

198
21%

747
79%

- Secondary school
- Combined primary/secondary
- Specialist/other type of school

Location

35
4%

235
25%

675
71%

- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Remote

Does their child bring a personal device to school?

112
12%

833
88%

- Yes
- No

Exemptions

Parents were asked (multiple choice response) if their children have an approved exemption from the school to use their personal device for an exceptional reason, such as monitoring a medical condition:

- Yes: 27 (3%)
- No: 918 (97%)

Parents who selected 'Yes' were asked (optional free text response) to add comments about how the exemption is working for their children or the process of getting an exemption approved.

A total of 16 comments were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

It works well for my child/process was easy	5
Some teachers are not aware that my child has an exemption	3
I had difficulty getting an exemption e.g. time, obtaining documents	2
Some children feel singled out because they have an exemption	2
Other comments e.g. stating what the exemption is for	4

Parents' views about the ban

Parents were asked (multiple choice response) whether they believe the ban is having a positive impact for students.
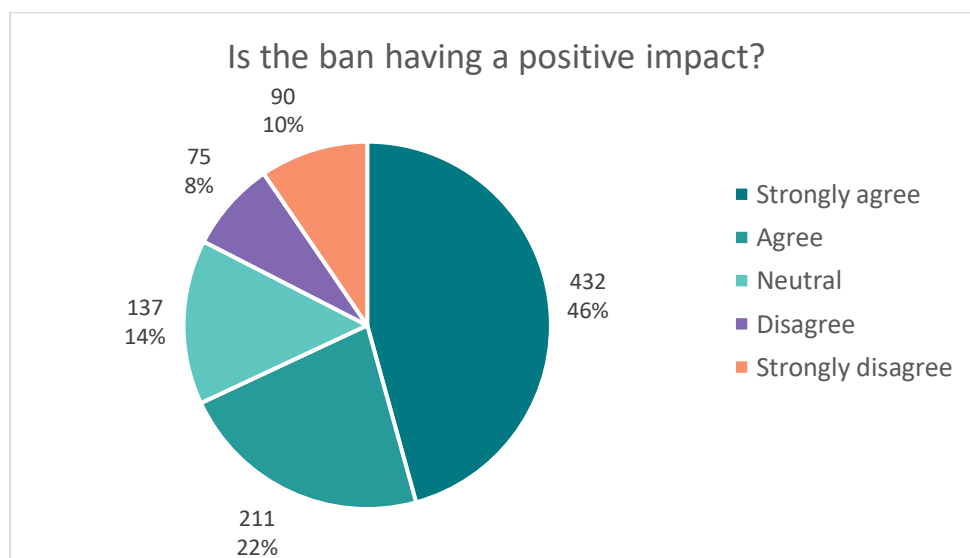
Parents who identified later in the survey that they are concerned about their child's use of social media were more likely to agree that the ban is having a positive impact (77%) compared to parents who did not have concerns (61%).
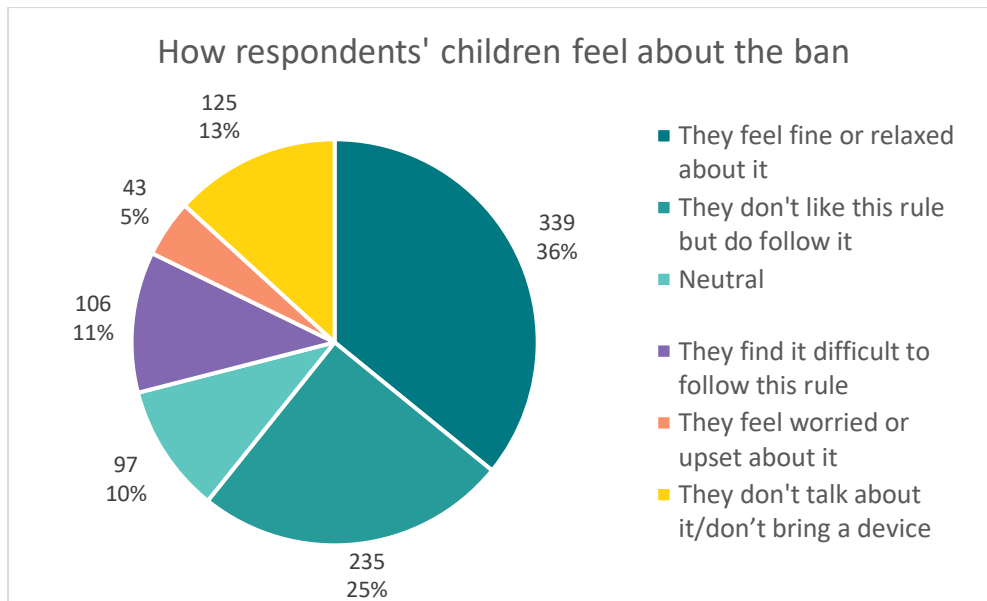
Sample of comments about whether the ban is having a positive impact:

- "Not having the constant distraction from a phone is having a positive impact. We just need kids to not have access at the times they should be learning and engaging face to face."
- "It's not monitored enough at schools as my children still contact me during the day."

- "I fully support the no phones in school policy. It's been a much needed change, and I see so much improvement in my son's social skills and interactions."
- "This rule is ridiculous and unnecessary in middle and senior years, older children need to be given the responsibility of managing their own learning and making the decision to not be distracted themselves to set them up for the real world."
- "My children's school is doing a great job of regulating phone use. The stricter rules the better. I appreciate the clear rules and expectations that are in place and so do my children. Very healthy."
- "I think it was the best decision. My son now plays basketball in his breaks, weather permitting. He says they talk more. [...] I remember going to pick him up one day and all the kids were sitting around on their phones. Now they are talking and doing what kids should do."
- "Exceptions should be made for students who suffer social anxiety. I think the policy is too strict."
- "No phones in school has been the best decision made towards children's wellbeing. It's teaching them that you can make friends and socialise without a phone. In the classroom it allows students to focus on the work as opposed to the continual flow of notifications."
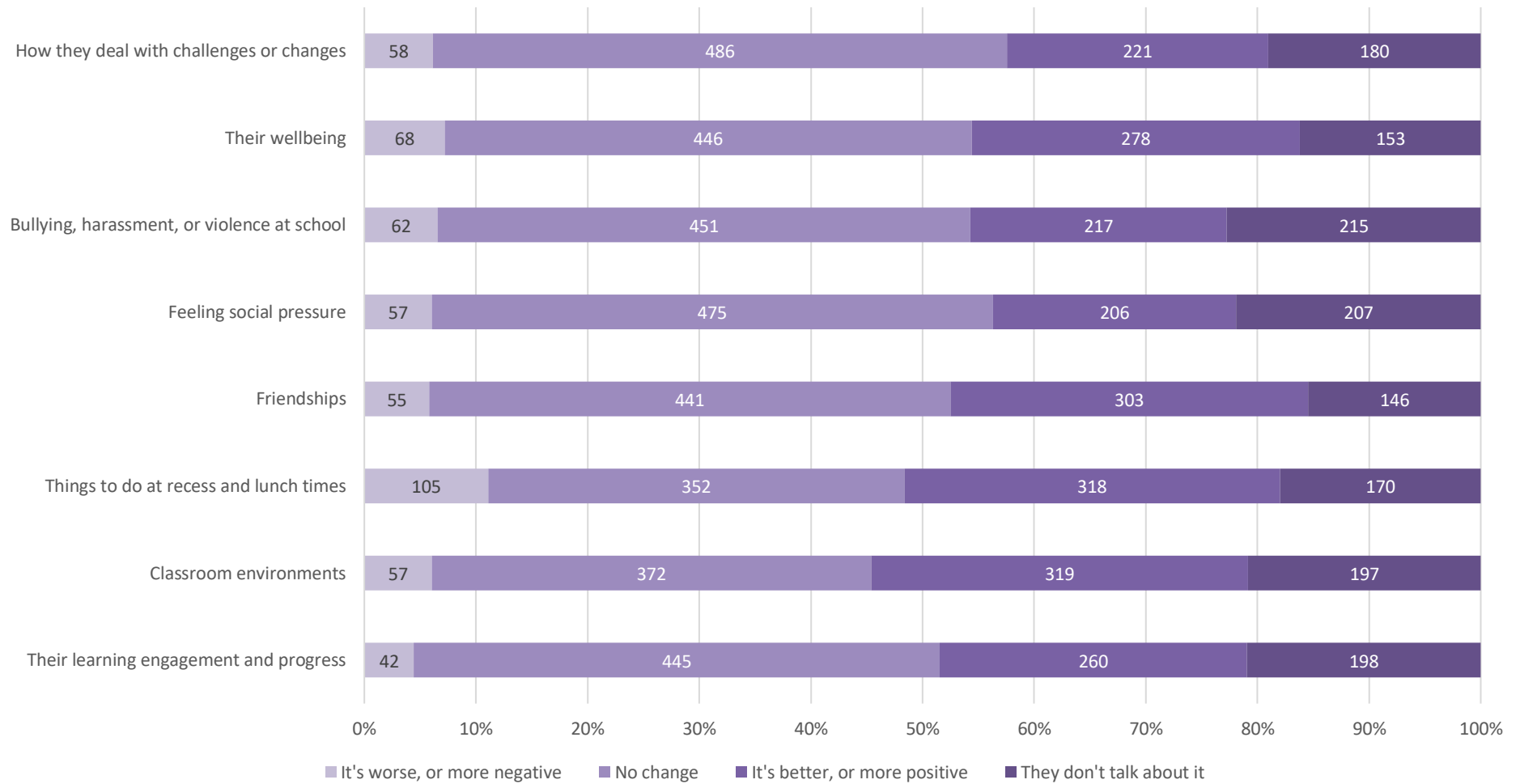
Children's views about the ban

Parents were asked (multiple choice response) how their children talk about the policy at home.

How respondents' children feel about the ban

- 339 — 36% — They feel fine or relaxed about it
- 235 — 25% — They don't like this rule but do follow it
- 97 — 10% — Neutral
- 106 — 11% — They find it difficult to follow this rule
- 43 — 5% — They feel worried or upset about it
- 125 — 13% — They don't talk about it/don't bring a device

Parents were also asked (rating scale responses) how their children talk about specific aspects of the school environment since the ban was introduced – **over page**.

Changes in how respondents' children talk about aspects of school life

Aspect	It's worse, or more negative	No change	It's better, or more positive	They don't talk about it
How they deal with challenges or changes	58	486	221	180
Their wellbeing	68	446	278	153
Bullying, harassment, or violence at school	62	451	217	215
Feeling social pressure	57	475	206	207
Friendships	55	441	303	146
Things to do at recess and lunch times	105	352	318	170
Classroom environments	57	372	319	197
Their learning engagement and progress	42	445	260	198

It's worse, or more negative ■ No change ■ It's better, or more positive ■ They don't talk about it

Personal devices at home

Parents were asked (multiple choice response) if they had noticed any changes in how their children use phones or social media at home since the ban during school hours.

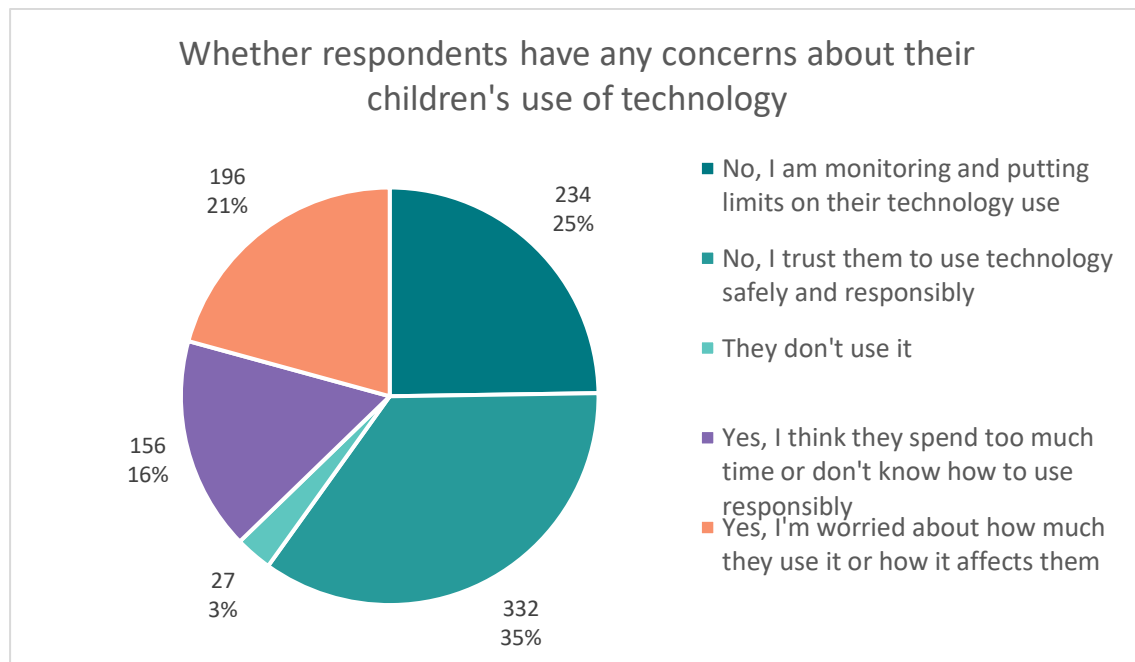How children use phones or social media at home
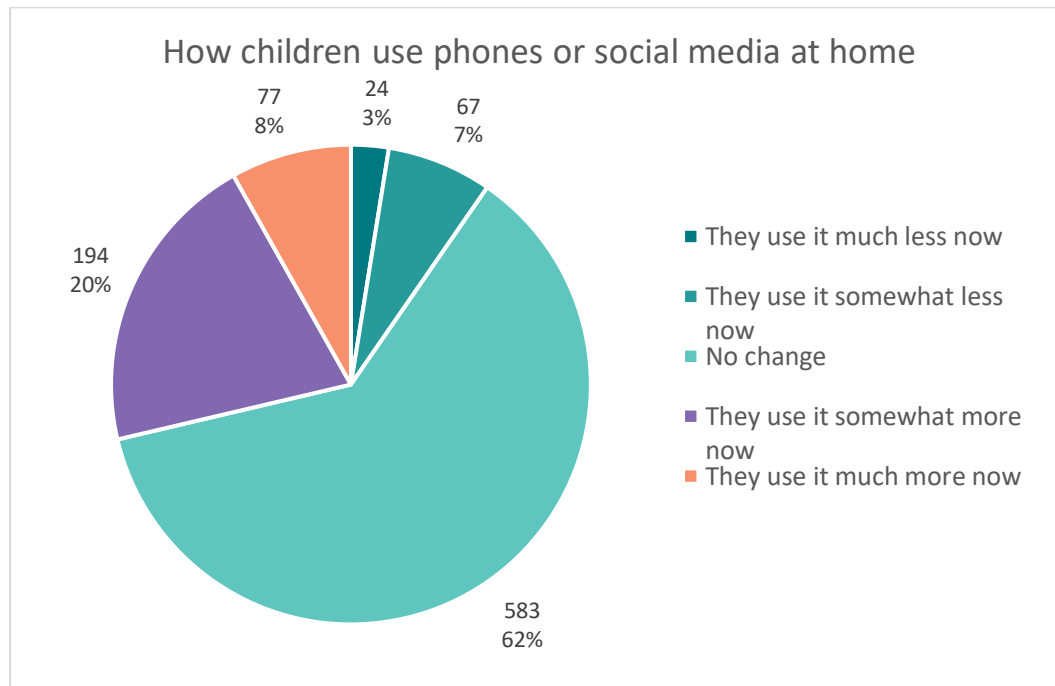
Parents who responded to the next question that they had concerns about their child's use of social media were more likely to indicate that their children use it more at home now (37%) compared to those who did not have concerns (25%).

Sample of comments about children's use of technology at home:

- "It would be great if schools could reinforce that phones are also a major distraction for homework as it's a battle at home too. School fights have definitely decreased since the ban … please don't change it!!"
- "I believe it is a parent's responsibility to ensure mobile time usage is limited and to lead by example. Interaction in person is much more enjoyable and beneficial to all."
- "We found that they are more social with their friends at lunch time and after school they actually talk to their friends on the phone rather than texting them, we only allow a certain amount of time on technology and so they make every moment count."

Children's use of phones and social media

Parents were asked (multiple choice response) if they have any concerns about how their children are using personal devices or social media.

Whether respondents have any concerns about their children's use of technology

- 234, 25% — No, I am monitoring and putting limits on their technology use
- 332, 35% — No, I trust them to use technology safely and responsibly
- 27, 3% — They don't use it
- 156, 16% — Yes, I think they spend too much time or don't know how to use responsibly
- 196, 21% — Yes, I'm worried about how much they use it or how it affects them

Sample of comments about children's use of social media:

- "It's all about educating the kids on how to use their devices and also about talking with them about the dangers of the internet and social networks. All my kids have had access and we have a very open discussion about devices regularly."
- "I speculate that a large majority of parents that support this ban have poor control or knowledge on what or how their child uses technology and don't trust them to do the right thing or have the ability to teach them balance, safe use etc."
- "Social media could well be described as superficially social...there is so much joy to be had in good face-to-face friendship!"
- "My kids are addicted to their devices and it's heartbreaking. I am very concerned for their mental health and wish we could do more […] At least the policy makes them think - it is not okay to be on my phone 24/7. Thank you!"

Feedback from parents

Parents were asked (optional free text response) if they would like to add any feedback comments about the policy (positive or negative).

A total of 425 responses were submitted. These responses were assessed and coded into the following categories:

Agree with the ban, it's necessary to limit them during school hours	130
It had a positive impact for their child(ren)	28
The ban should be expanded e.g. to other devices, social media	18
Students should be allowed to use phones during breaks or last lesson	19
The ban should be less strict for older students	14
Children and parents should be able to contact each other directly and instantly (not via school office), what if there's an emergency	26
Students should be allowed to use phones to pay at the canteen	5
Students are using their laptops/iPads inappropriately instead e.g. for messaging, gaming, bypassing network blocks	25
Disagree with the ban/feel it's an overreach by government, schools	18
It had a negative impact for their child e.g. increase in anxiety, decrease in learning opportunities or routines	21
Ban doesn't work/students are still using phones at school	39
Issues such as bullying are still happening/banning is an attempt to cover up incidents as they can no longer be filmed	11
It doesn't teach students how to use technology appropriately, doesn't prepare them for the "real world"	9
Concerned about how much time students spend on screens at school e.g. in learning, allowed to have them during breaks	8
Would like to see more education programs about cyber safety, self-regulating screen time, 'think before you post', etc	5
Felt pressure to give their child a smartphone so they wouldn't miss out socially	2
No change, not relevant to their child	17
Response unclear, other suggestion, no comment	30

Sample of comments regarding parents' views on the policy and whether any changes should be considered:

- "I believe mobile phones have a place in society, for students to use before and after school to communicate with their parents/ carer. However, I don't think they are necessary during school hours and definitely don't belong in the classroom."
- "I don't agree with the policy. It makes it extremely difficult when plans change regarding school picks up and after school activities."
- "I think phones don't need to be at schools if the parents need to contact kids it should be through the school they are there to learn"
- "The main concern I have with my children not having access to their personal device is their inability to communicate with me freely. I have always encouraged my children to reach out if they have any concerns or questions, particularly about social circumstances, stressors, or emotional regulation issues."
- "The implementation of the iPad as a compulsory learning device is more of a problem than mobile phones or smartwatches. They can still access social media, games and messaging with the iPad which makes the ban on other devices redundant."

- "I think years 10, 11 and 12 should be able to use their phones during recess and lunch or for emergencies but not during class unless the teacher needs them to use them eg taking photos for evidence for their work."
- "My children all have smart watches which they loved - they liked to challenge themselves with the fitness app - however since the ban they no longer wear their watches as they are not allowed to at school […] I think there needs to be some re-thinking around smart watches as the analogue watch is really a thing of the past."
- "It's great that children can only use their devices after school hours. They need to play, use their minds in other ways because technology use in the classroom is slowly increasing. We need to have our children ready in a technology world however, they also have to learn restraints and restrictions are good for their mental health."
- "Kids who want to get around the rules find a way. We know of kids who carry a "dummy" phone to school so that if/when they get caught using their phone, the dummy phone gets confiscated and they retain the use of their personal phone."
- "The inability to use the phone at all in school makes buying adhoc school lunches difficult, [they] have their banking in their phones for security (kids lose physical cards and we rarely have cash). Otherwise I think the ban is generally positive."

Other feedback

Overall, the observations noted by staff in the survey process were highly consistent with prior anecdotal comments from school leaders, and to the below responses from education directors and secondary principals.

Likewise, parent and student survey responses had similar sentiments to community feedback sent to the Minister or to the department's helpline during 2023.

Education Director survey

A sample of 7 Education Directors (EDs) were contacted to seek their views on how the policy is working in the secondary schools in their portfolio, with 4 responses received. A summary of their responses is provided below.

How effective do you believe the implementation has been on a scale of 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (very effective)?

ED feedback indicated that the policy implementation had been very effective, with a 4 rating from most EDs. They said it was particularly effective in sites where:

- communication to parents and families had been clear from the announcement of the policy implementation
- a united approach between schools and families was evident to students.

How frequently do you receive or hear about requests from site leaders for Education Director support with the management of the policy at their site, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (frequently)?

All EDs gave this question a 2 (low frequency) rating. They said site leaders requested either no or very little support with the policy, and it was their perception that most issues were dealt with at the site level.

Are there any benefits that you believe or have heard from other Education Directors of the introduction of the mobile phone policy?

EDs reported that the sites that had chosen lockable pouches as their storage option seemed to be quite positive about this approach, despite the financial costs.

Some EDs perceived that that there has been a dramatic reduction in incidents being filmed or 'organised' via text message or social media during the school day. They also said that this has led to faster de-escalation and resolution of issues when they do occur.

They believe a major benefit of the policy implementation is it forms part of a larger suite of measures to try and support young people with challenges affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

Are there any specific issues that you have noticed or heard about that site leaders are dealing with in relation to policy?

EDs highlighted some specific issues relating to the storage of phones. For some sites the pouches are considered very effective, but the associated costs could become an issue in the future. They commented that asking students to keep phones in their bags or lockers seems to be a little less effective.

EDs shared it had been reported to them that there had been some minor issues with students not complying and trying to find ways to 'bend' the rules, but school staff were making a continual effort to support young people to fully eliminate the use of phones during the school day.

On a scale of 1 (low significance) to 5 (very significance), how significant are the day-to-day issues that site leaders are dealing with in relation to the policy?

EDs gave a 2 or 3 rating for this question. They said that issues only increase in significance in sites when a phone has been used by a student inappropriately and the staff try to enforce the policy, which can lead to escalations, or where an incident such as a fight is filmed.

They said that, when issues do present, they are often related to inappropriate use of social media, photos, and texts etc, but not usually occurring in school time.

Secondary principals' portfolio meeting

One ED invited the policy officer to a portfolio meeting in September 2024, where 3 secondary school principals discussed the implementation of the mobile phone policy in their sites and provided the following feedback:

- **Statewide ban:** Each of the schools had tried implementing a level of local restriction in the past but received 'pushback' from community, so the department-wide policy has helped take the pressure off and made staff feel more supported to enforce the rules. All 3 schools indicated their teachers are willing to follow up on non-compliance and have strong leadership support to manage issues.
- **Storage:** Two of the schools require students to keep their personal devices in their locker. The other school opted for a lockable pouch system, finding that lockers are not practical for their context and the pouch model allows students to be responsible for their personal property.
- **Compliance:** All 3 schools found their chosen methods to be working well overall, noting that in each case students were often not actually putting their devices in the required place (e.g. keeping their phone in their pocket instead); however, students are not using the devices and it is easier to see when they do. All of the schools noted some students are using other workarounds, such as going to the toilet to use their phones, but these issues are manageable.
- **Transition period:** One school noted the preference would have been to implement the ban from the beginning of a school year but there was not enough notice after the announcement. During the transition period:
  - one school used the time to bring community on-board and help everyone prepare for the ban e.g. students to go and get a physical bank card for canteen purchases. Leading up to the full ban from term 3, the school started encouraging students to get used to putting them away in class and finding other things to do in recess and lunch breaks.

- another school had their on-site psychologist talk with all year levels about responsible use of technology and addiction, and also worked with staff around supporting students with change management when the policy was implemented.
- **Impacts:** All 3 schools felt the policy was a positive move and had observed:
  - more yard socialisation interest in lunchtime sports/activities/clubs
  - improved engagement in classrooms
  - decreased issues with students being out of class e.g. not texting each other to congregate in toilets, etc
  - less filming of incidents i.e. reducing an added complexity that leadership have had to manage in past issues.

Key stakeholder groups

All key stakeholder groups that were invited to contribute to the development of the policy in 2022 were again invited to provide feedback during the 2024 review period about how they (and their members, if applicable) felt the policy was working.

Two responses were received and are provided below, both indicating support for the ban and a view that it is having a positive impact for school communities.

Tobias O'Connor, President, South Australian Primary Principals Association

"For most part mobile phones weren't necessarily an issue in primary settings. SAPPA members have indicated little to no change for their sites and are very supportive of the policy. In particular, of the banning of wearable devices such as an Apple Watch etc. that can make calls and/or send messages. I have heard a few stories of children messaging or calling a parent or grandparent from their watch which has created issues.

Members commented that the policy is clear, and provided guidelines and implementation timelines for them to implement within their local communities. Members commented that their communities and Governing Council are supportive of the ban.

As you possibly expected, not a whole lot of feedback from us on this topic. We continue to support the ban."

David Knuckey, Director, South Australian Association of State School Organisations Inc.

"As the CE has stated, the anecdotal feedback from schools is positive [in] regard to the ban. Obviously we don't have direct evidence of the effectiveness of the ban, but in the year since it was announced [there] has been positive parent reaction to the ban.

When visiting schools and discussing this policy with parents we have heard near-universal and enthusiastic support for the ban. Parent concern about the potentially damaging psychological impacts of social media on their children now extends far beyond the school gate – but they are, by and large, grateful that schools are helping to wean their children from their phones. Feedback from schools reinforces this support and they are hopeful the ban will get kids off their phones (particularly during recess and lunch) and promote more human interaction.

We have heard anecdotal feedback that students are more active and there have been improvements in school culture, with greater socialisation. We look forward to seeing the results of
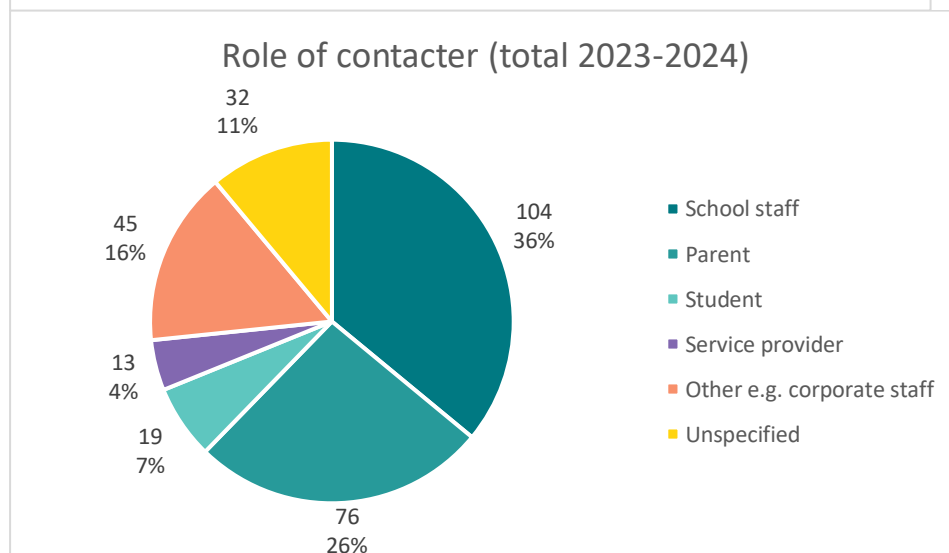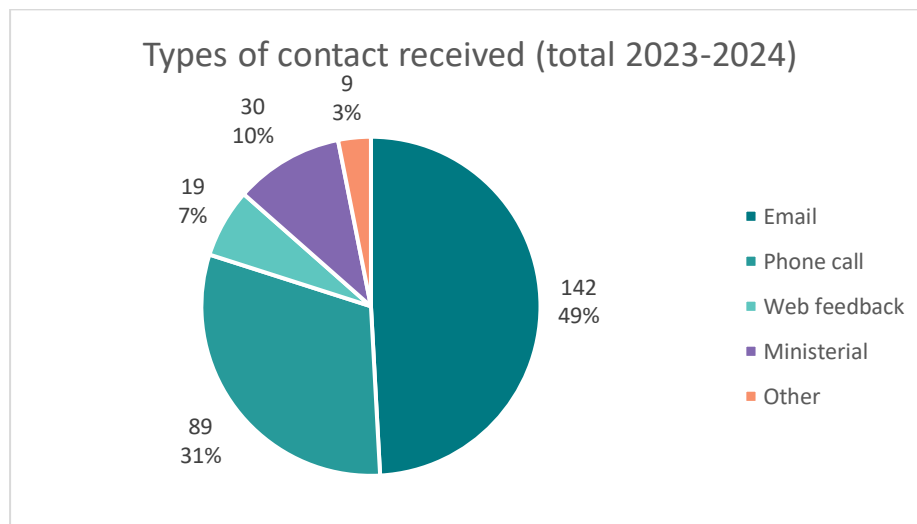
your review consultation. This ban was an ambitious action and it has been well-implemented and communicated, with little push-back from students or parents."

All other feedback

The *Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy* is subject to the department's Operational Policy Framework and regular review cycle. All questions, concerns, and suggestions received since by the policy team since its publication have been recorded.

Enquiries and feedback slowed significantly after the policy was fully implemented, with only 25 instances of contact in 2024 compared to 264 in 2023.

The below data does not include contact relating to the 1-year review nor check-in processes that occurred (via local education teams) during the term 1-2, 2023 transition period to monitor their implementation progress and offer support.

Types of contact received (total 2023-2024)

- Email — 142, 49%
- Phone call — 89, 31%
- Web feedback — 19, 7%
- Ministerial — 30, 10%
- Other — 9, 3%

Role of contacter (total 2023-2024)

- School staff — 104, 36%
- Parent — 76, 26%
- Student — 19, 7%
- Service provider — 13, 4%
- Other e.g. corporate staff — 45, 16%
- Unspecified — 32, 11%

The below graph shows the frequency of different enquiry and feedback topics raised. Some instances of contact raised more than one topic.

Topic of enquiry/feedback (total 2023-2024)
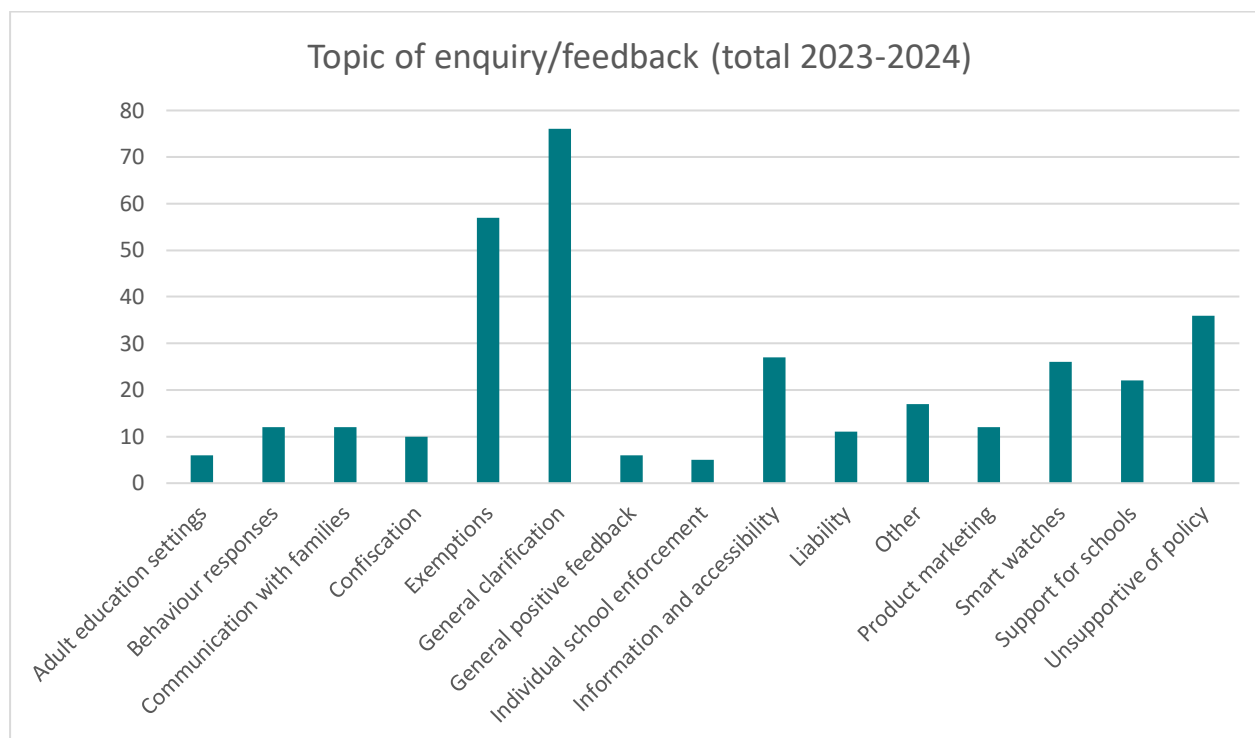
As shown, most contact related to general clarification (such as checking understanding about parts of the policy and rollout timeframes, etc), followed by queries about exemptions from both school staff and families, feedback from community members expressing disagreement with the decision to ban, webpage users completing 'this page is/not useful to me' prompts, and the application of the policy to smart watches.

Some examples of the types of enquiries/feedback are provided in the table **below.**

Topic	Details/examples
Adult education settings	Modified policies for schools with a focus on adult education
Behaviour responses	Consequences for non-compliance with the policy
Communication with families	Advice and toolkit resources for schools to communicate with families, community member concerns about how their school communicated the local policy implementation
Confiscation	Queries from schools about how to confiscate appropriately, community members disagreeing with confiscation
Exemptions	Queries from schools about managing exemption requests or how to use the teacher-led exemptions for learning etc, families seeking information about how to get an exemption for their child
General clarification	General policy questions e.g. does the policy apply to 'x', is it compulsory for schools to use the local policy template, what is the rollout timeline, why has the policy been introduced, storage options, etc
General positive feedback	Expressing general agreement with the ban or observed positive impacts
Individual school enforcement	Community member concerns about whether a school is enforcing the policy effectively e.g. grandchild is texting parent during school hours

Information and accessibility	Ease of finding and understanding the policy or supporting resources for schools, feedback submissions on webpage content
Liability	Families concerned about something happening to child's device, staff concerns about whether they'd be held liable for loss or damage (no)
Other	Any other topic e.g. other organisations looking to implement policies, unrelated topics like using headphones with laptops or staff phones
Product marketing	Suppliers marketing products for storing or managing mobile phones
Smart watches	Why smart watches are included in the policy, if they need to be switched 'off and away' like phones or if they can be worn in flight mode (no)
Support for schools	Resources and supports available to schools to help with implementing their local policies (inc. financial assistance for storage options)
Unsupportive of policy	Expressing disagreement with the ban, student/family indicating they will not follow the policy

Incident data

Critical incident reports submitted by schools (primary and secondary) that relate to mobile phones or high-level social media incidents have been released as 'alerts' to the relevant policy team since the current policy was published in January 2023.

These reports have been individually reviewed and coded against 3 categories: policy compliance, behaviour issues involving devices, and social media issues.

There has been an overall downward trend in the frequency of incidents reported, in all 3 categories, since the introduction of the policy. This trend has become more stabilised since full implementation of the policy in all schools, but still shows decreases.

Issues relating to policy compliance

Descriptions of incidents allocated to this category include:

- student becoming escalated when asked to put their phone away or denied access
- student refusing to comply with directions to put away their phone alongside other behaviour concerns (e.g. absconding, disrupting classroom)
- parent/carer heightened response to the policy.

Incidents reported - issues related to policy compliance since policy released (start Term 1, 2023 - end Term 4, 2024)
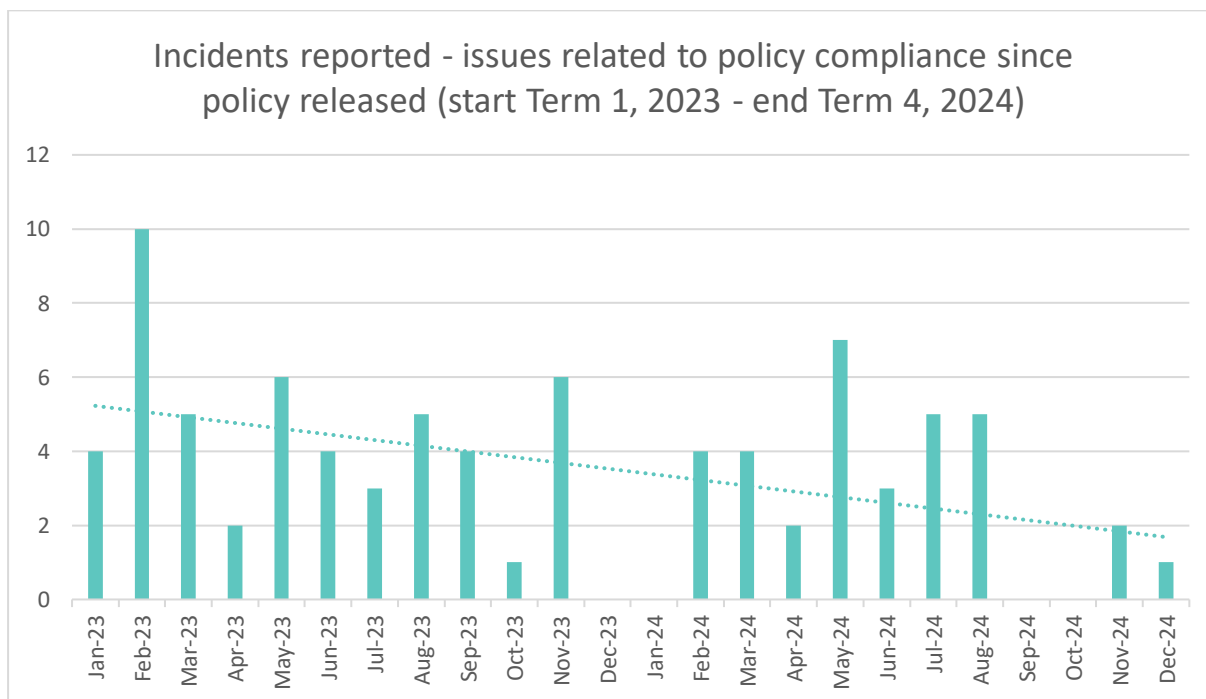
There was a 34% decrease in the number of incidents reported about policy compliance issues in 2024 (33) compared to 2023 (50).

Behaviour issues involving a device

Descriptions of incidents allocated to this category include:

- students using phones to film altercations/physical aggression (whether or not the footage was distributed)
- students taking pictures of themselves or others engaging in inappropriate behaviours e.g. vaping in toilets
- students taking pictures/footage of other students or staff without consent
- students using a device (whether personal or school technology) to search for inappropriate content or show it to others

Note: this data includes any incidents reported about these issues, including incidents that occurred outside of school or that involving inappropriate use of learning devices i.e. some are not relevant to the policy.
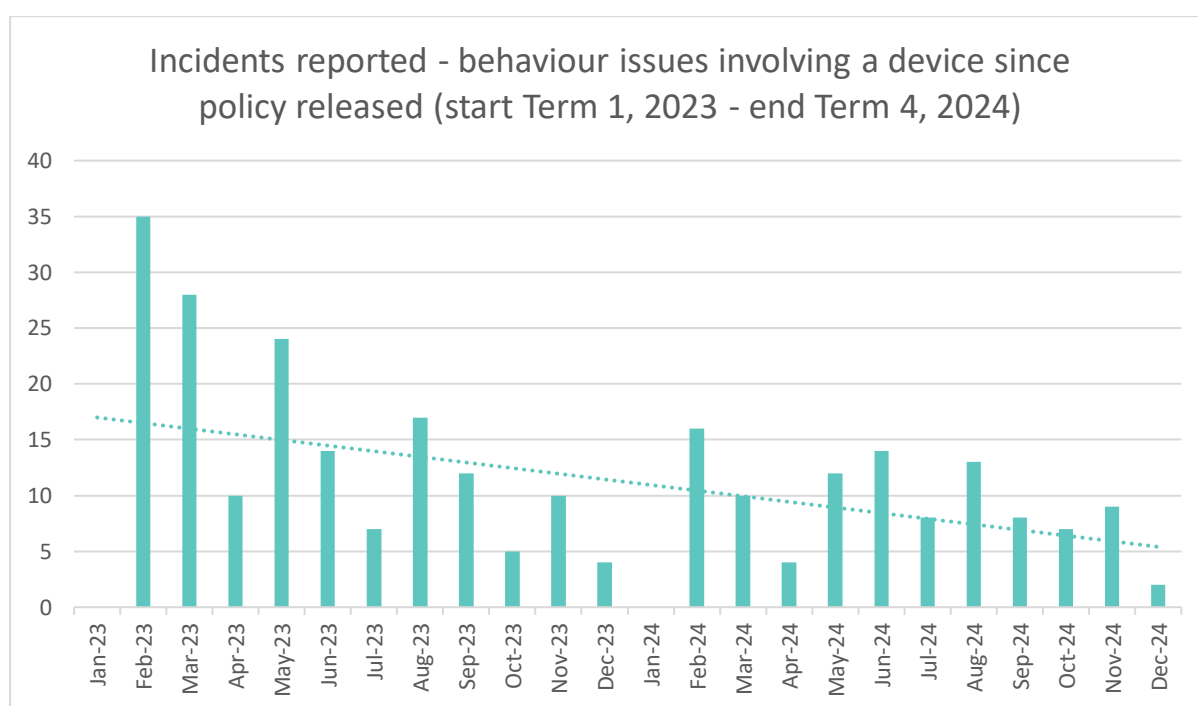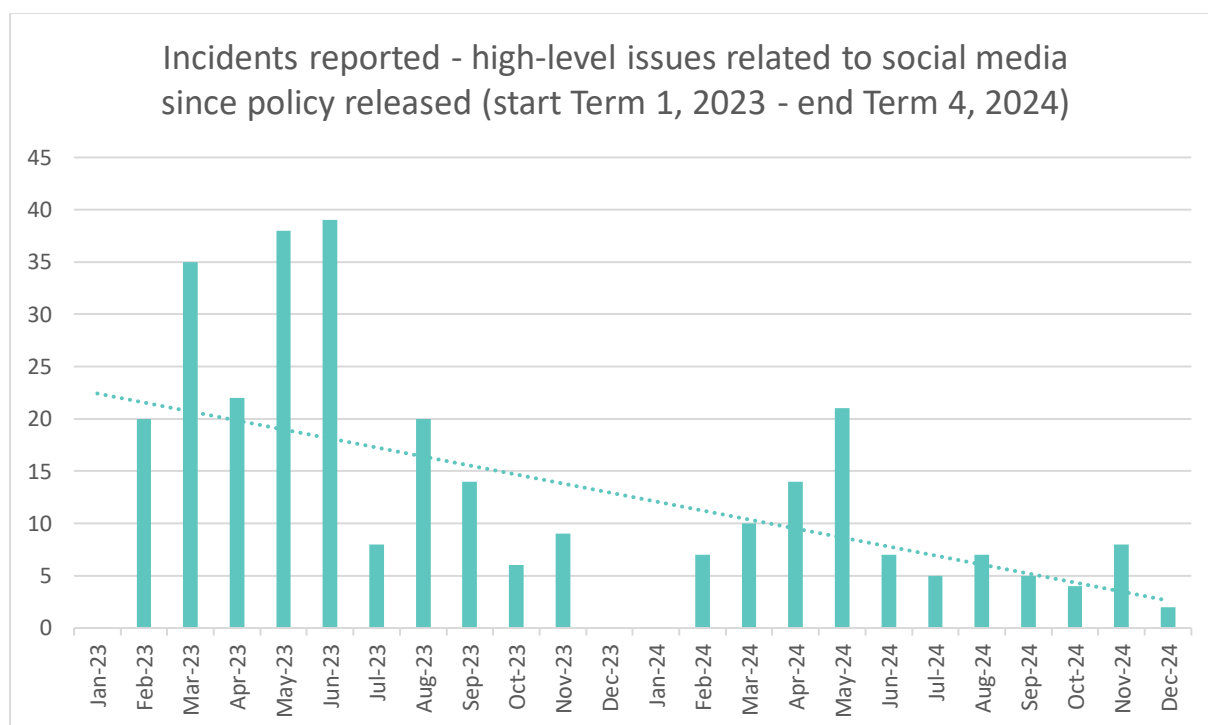

There was a 37.9% decrease in the number of incidents reported about behaviour issues involving a device in 2024 (103) compared to 2023 (166).

High-level social media issues

Descriptions of incidents allocated to this category include:

- sharing of explicit images (with or without consent)
- cyber bullying content
- threatening or inappropriate social media exchanges
- concerning online behaviour that was disclosed to the school e.g. students posting self-harm content, talking to strangers
- derogatory content posted online about students and/or staff
- fake social media profiles impersonating schools/staff

Note: this data includes any high-level social media issues reported by schools, including those that occurred outside of school, those with limited connection to the school community (for example, incidents between a student and someone unknown to the school), or incidents involving only adults such as teachers reporting a concern. That is, many are not relevant to the policy.

Incidents reported - high-level issues related to social media since policy released (start Term 1, 2023 - end Term 4, 2024)

There was a 57.3% decrease in the number of incidents reported about social media issues in 2024 (90) compared to 2023 (211).