



Emanuel School

Emanuel's approach to smartphones

Dear Parents of Year 7 (September 2024 Cohort)

We look forward to welcoming you for our New Parents' Evening on Tuesday 7th May. In advance of this event, and as your child enters the final term of Year 6 of their current school, we thought it important to take this opportunity to address Emanuel's approach to mobile phones - and specifically smartphones - and a change to our guidance for pupils entering the school in Year 6.

While this change does **not** impact your child joining or moving into Year 7, we feel there will be a number of parents who will be interested in our approach and may wish to follow.

The context to the school's approach: Disconnect to Reconnect

Over recent years, the school has been exploring the use of smartphone by young people. We have run several small-scale trials documenting the impact on mental health now titled 'Disconnect to Reconnect'. We completed our third such trial in the second half of the autumn term – this time opening it out to the whole school community – and the results have again proved very insightful and confirmed the findings of the two previous trials.

Over the 4 weeks of this trial in which participants voluntarily either reduced their social media usage to one hour a day or only to weekends, pupils reported:

- Feeling happier;
- Being less concerned with how they looked;
- Feeling less lonely;
- Building their self-esteem; and
- Improving their levels of focus and concentration.

While we accept that such results have been achieved with a relatively small sample size, we believe they indicate a larger pattern that associates characteristics of relatively poor mental health with smartphone usage and specifically in the use of social media. While we are also aware that this data from our school alone, it aligns with anecdotal evidence gathered each year at Emanuel and other schools.

We are currently conducting a fourth trial to support all pupils, but particularly those in examination years, as they prepare for their assessments.

Smart phones – our ongoing concerns

The positive outcomes for pupils taking part in Disconnect to Reconnect has led us to review whether there are further actions the school can take to support pupils in this digital world. While the school does much in the way to educate young people on the responsible use of phones and online dangers, we increasingly feel that smartphones, with their unfettered access to the internet and social media apps (many of which have age restrictions until age 13) are simply not appropriate and especially for our younger pupils. As our outcomes of the three trials have shown (and no doubt our fourth will show too), there is a link between social media use and poorer mental health and happiness.

The ability to self-regulate and moderate one's usage at younger ages is still growing, and we are increasingly seeing our young people make poor decisions online and engage in a form of communication that they would not do in person. Complicating matters further are huge social media companies with a business model that is based entirely on ever more ingenious ways to ensure users remain online longer.

You may well have seen increasing coverage of this in the media and literature more generally. We also know through conversations that many parents share our concerns about the influence of smartphones on their children.

Battersea Rise, London SW11 1HS Tel: 020 8870 4171

Email: enquiries@emanuel.org.uk www.emanuel.org.uk

A Member of the United Westminster & Grey Coat Foundation Registered Charity No: 1181012



Emanuel School

Delaying until Year 9

There are now a growing number of parents joining a movement to delay giving their child a smartphone until Year 9. Parent groups already exist including: <https://delaysmartphones.org.uk/>; <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>; and <https://www.kidsfornow.org.uk/>.

A group of Emanuel parents have created the following page ([here](#)) to provide helpful guidance and literature, advice on alternative phones and answers to common questions to other parents who might wish to follow this approach and need some mutual support. We would advise all parents in the lower school (Years 6-8) to take some time to consider the content.

The school's new approach

For our part, the school is now advising parents of those joining Year 6 for September to refrain from purchasing a smartphone for their child. Should you wish to give your child a phone to come to school we ask that it is a basic, non-smartphone model without internet capabilities. This is now our position for the reasons outlined above.

We appreciate that some parents may still wish to purchase a smart phone for their child and this, of course, is their right. We will ask that these phones are not brought to school, however. We hope our parent community will understand our reasoning here and will work with us to ensure that smartphones are not a feature of life in Year 6 from September.

We are not requesting this of parents with children already in the school, however it is our intention to roll this approach through the lower school (Years 6-8) over the coming years, and existing lower school parents who agree with this approach may wish to adopt it too.

Mobile phones and the school rules

Our current approach in Years 6-11 remains for all pupils to have any phone switched off in their lockers from morning registration until the end of the day. Any phone seen out will be confiscated until the end of the day and a 20-minute behavioural concern will be issued. In the sixth form, pupils are able to have their phones on them, but are only able to use them in the sixth form centre.

We hope the next community of Emanuel will support this bold, but important, new approach to technology use in the school.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Kothakota

Deputy Head: Pupils and DSL