

03. LETTER TO HEAD OF SCHOOL



NOTE: Please feel free to add/delete any parts where you do not feel represent your views or would commit you to more than you feel comfortable contributing (such as a presentation to interested parents). You may simply request a meeting to catch up and share your views and request support with having a school WhatsApp group for parents interested in this issue, and possibly conducting a school survey to gain more information. Please adjust the letter so you feel it reflects what it is that you wish to say and what you would like to offer the school.

Dear [X]

I am writing to you today about the issue of smartphones in the lives of children today, and specifically children at our school.

I have recently joined a grassroots movement of parents called Unplugged Rebels NZ, which sprung up off the back of a number of other similar groups from around the world in early 2024. It has triggered a global conversation about the age at which we give children smartphones. Feeling strongly about the issue and feeling there [were/are] other parents in the same situation, I [would like to start/have started] an open [SCHOOL] UR WhatsApp group which [X] parents/carers have since joined.

Technology presents many incredible benefits and opportunities, but how best do we navigate it at this critical stage of pre-teen development? We know this can be a controversial subject and there is no definitive answer – every parent wants to do what’s best for their child.

Ultimately, it remains a personal decision for each family and household. However, there is now [research](https://sapienlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sapien-Labs-Age-of-First-Smartphone-and-Mental-Wellbeing-Outcomes.pdf) <https://sapienlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sapien-Labs-Age-of-First-Smartphone-and-Mental-Wellbeing-Outcomes.pdf> showing a clear link between the age a child receives their first smartphone and mental health issues in young adulthood. The harms from excessive smartphone use, as we know, are wide-ranging – from reduced self-esteem to disrupted learning, bullying, grooming and addiction – as well as

the huge opportunity cost, the things children and teens are not doing because they are on their devices. This [article](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2024/03/teen-childhood-smartphone-use-mental-health-effects/677722/) <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2024/03/teen-childhood-smartphone-use-mental-health-effects/677722/> by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt details the huge – and not yet fully appreciated – impact of society’s move from a play-based to a phone-based childhood.

We know how much pressure schools are under and are so grateful for all the work you do to educate our children, and we acknowledge that it is parents who purchase smartphones for their children. We recognise that the school’s policy states [INSERT POLICY DETAILS, LIKELY TO BE PHONES ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE USED IN SCHOOL]. However, we would really like your support in raising awareness of this issue as we recognise that you have a crucial part to play in helping parents navigate this rapidly evolving area of our children’s lives.

To begin with we would be grateful to meet with you to discuss our idea to bring parents together on this issue. A few ideas we have to get us started are outlined below:

- For our parent group to conduct a simple survey of the whole [SCHOOL] community to find out the current smartphone situation in our school – what parents feel about the issue, when they plan to get their child a smartphone and whether they’d be interested in more information about how and why it may be best for them to delay.
- In collaboration with the school, we organise an information session for parents setting out the risks of smartphone use in adolescence, and discuss what alternative norm we might agree to for our children. We are happy to organise this, if you are willing to support it.
- We explore collaborating on new guidance from the school, recommending that children at [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] should not have a smartphone, even outside of school hours.
- If parents want a way to contact their child e.g. to confirm they are safe when travelling to and from school, that you encourage other ways to do that. For example a simpler connected device (such as a simple Nokia phone, or a watch, there are lots of alternatives some of which are listed [here](https://www.unpluggedrebelsnz.com/alternatives) <https://www.unpluggedrebelsnz.com/alternatives>).

The support of the school would make all the difference in enabling us to successfully navigate this critical issue in our community, and to begin changing the norm around when to get our children smartphones. We very much look forward to working with you on this, and hope we can arrange a meeting with you in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

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[END]

