

# News

## HEAD TEACHERS OPPOSE CALLS FOR MOBILE PHONE BAN

Nick Gibb, the minister for school standards in England, has called for a ban on mobile phones in classrooms—and for pupils to be taught about the dangers of excessive screen time.

Gibb stated, ‘Schools obviously are free to set their own behaviour policies but my own view is that schools should ban mobile telephones and smartphones inside school, and particularly inside classrooms.’

‘I believe very strongly that children should be limiting their own use at home. Every hour spent online and on a smartphone is an hour less talking to family, and it’s an hour less exercise and it’s an hour less sleep.’

‘And of course it is a lack of sleep that research is showing can have a damaging effect on a child’s mental health.’

Education secretary Damian Hinds added that it was not up to the government to enforce a ban but a decision for headteachers.

Hinds said, ‘We have a system where, rightly, we want headteachers to be in charge of schools. They tend to know the schools best and they know the kids best.’

He added that he wouldn’t support a national ban but said: ‘What I want to do is stand foursquare behind the headteacher who



bans them. 'If you think about some of the complexities—if you just have a ban, what do you do about kids who are in school but after hours? Or what do you do on a school trip? Or what do you do with the child who has particular medical needs, where they might have to make an emergency call? How do you deal with that?

'If you've got the school making the rules—and by the way schools have always made the rules, including about banning things and confiscating things—they can allow for those difficult cases and make those adjustments.

Nick Gibb said he was concerned about the dangers of device dependency 'It's worth saying that of course most schools do have restrictions on mobile phones, and in many cases a total ban, and I absolutely support the schools that decide to do that.'

In response, the National Association of Head Teachers warned banning phones in schools outright could make tackling the associated problems harder. 'Outright banning mobile phones can cause more problems than it solves, driving phone use underground and making problems less visible and obvious for schools to tackle,' said the association's senior policy adviser, Sarah Hannafin.

'Ultimately, schools work to prepare young people for the outside world, giving them the awareness and strategies to responsibly monitor their own screen use and the ability to identify and deal with any negative impacts or problematic content they encounter.'

## ● REPLACE EMAIL ● WITH AI TO REDUCE ● TEACHERS' WORKLOAD

● Teachers should not have to email outside  
● of office hours and should instead embrace  
● innovative technology such as AI to help  
● to reduce their workload, suggests the  
● Education Secretary.

● Addressing more than 800 of the world's leading  
● tech companies and start-ups, as well as school  
● representatives and international education  
● ministers, at the Bett Show in London, Mr  
● Hinds told teachers and school leaders to make  
● smarter use of technology, both inside and  
● outside of the classroom, to make sure that it  
● does not add to teachers' responsibilities.

● The Education Secretary said that while  
● education technology has the power to  
● transform education, its growth in the  
● classroom has created both opportunities and  
● challenges.

● He cited the example of email and the impact  
● it has had on working lives.

● Mr Hinds said, 'More than half of teachers'  
● time is spent on non-teaching tasks, including  
● planning, marking and admin, and that  
● workload is one of the most common reasons  
● for teachers leaving the profession. Education  
● is one of the few sectors where technology  
● has been associated with an increase in  
● workload rather than the reverse. And let's  
● think why.

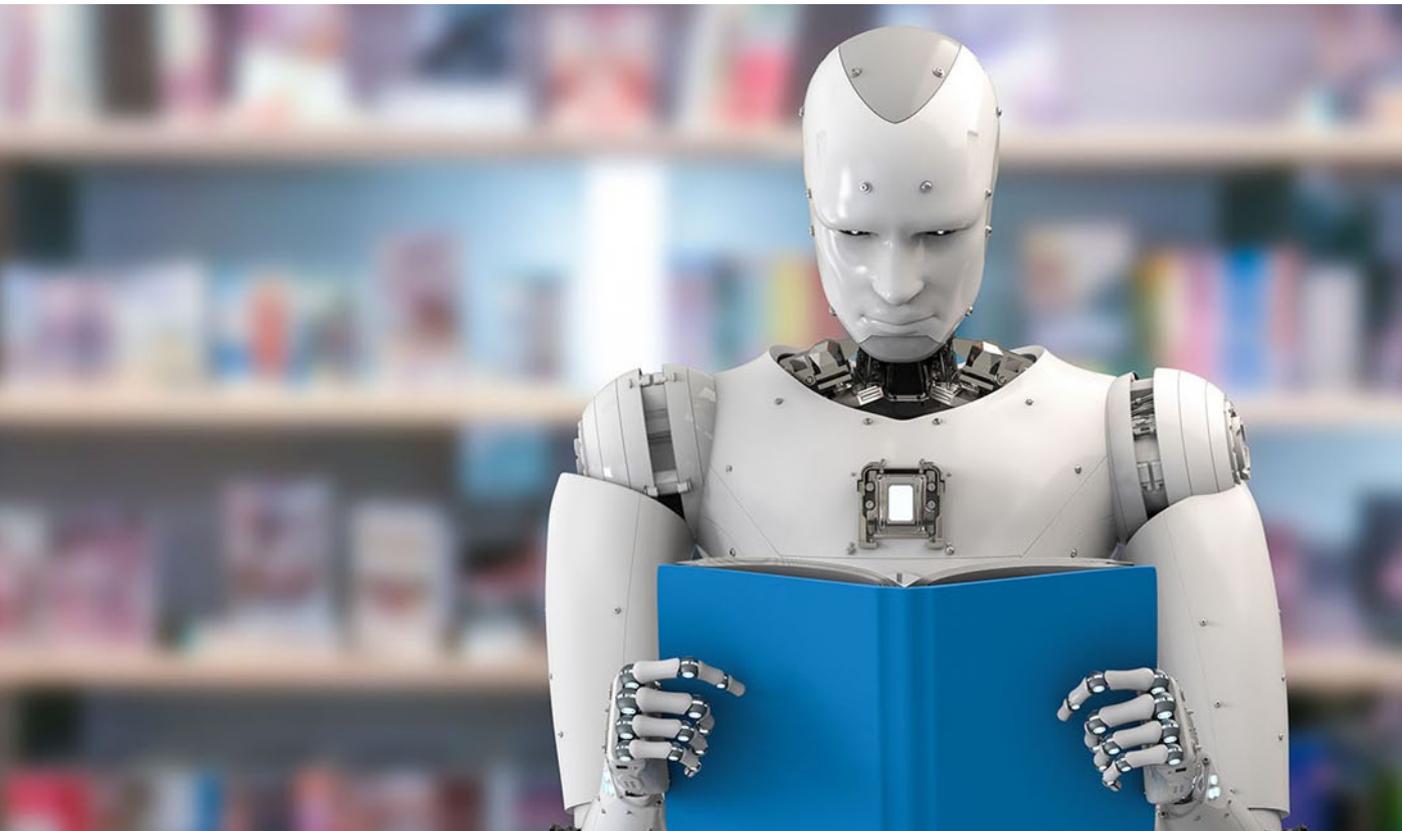
‘Back when I was at school there was an annual parents evening and a report at the end of the year. Maybe a letter home if there was a school trip. That report still happens and so does the parents evening, but email has revolutionised parent, teacher communication. Email hasn’t replaced much—mostly it has just added.

Many schools are already reviewing their school practices to reduce workload—and to those who haven’t already, I encourage them to look at what they can do to shift away from an email culture in, and into, school to free teachers up to spend more time in the classroom.’

Damian Hinds cited Bolton College, which is using an artificial intelligence to reduce the hours teachers spend on administrative tasks:

‘At Bolton College, for instance, they have used IBM Watson, an artificial intelligence programme, to build a virtual clerk they call ‘Ada’. Ada helps deliver personalised learning and assessment for 14,000 students [and] queries about attendance or curriculum content.

It has saved Bolton’s staff hours and hours of time they would have spent on admin either at college or in their own spare time.’



## NEW SCHEME LAUNCHED TO HELP SCHOOLS IMPROVE TECH IN SCHOOLS

A pilot is being set up by the EDUCATE programme, based at UCL knowledge lab, whose researchers want to work with teachers on dispelling some of the myths about, and fears of, using education technology (edtech) in the classroom.

The scheme will help teachers to make the most of the technology they already have and advise them on purchasing edtech that is effective and useful in teaching and learning.

Programme participants will also receive mentoring for up to six months, and membership of an EDUCATE alumni network for continued advice and support.

The successful implementation of edtech in schools can be blocked by a number of factors, including lack of teacher training and connectivity issues, but the hope is that this new support will show non-IT teachers how to utilise it and technologists how to best adapt their products for the education sector—because edtech can be a costly drain on school resources if not utilised correctly.

The 'EDUCATE for Schools' programme was launched at the Bett Show in London; schools are invited to register their interest in the scheme, which will involve them in assessing their technology needs and priorities against



their school's development plan.

Dr Kristen Weatherby, the EDUCATE researcher who devised the scheme, and who will be working with teachers and schools, said: 'Schools often waste valuable resources on edtech that gathers dust on a shelf or is locked in a cupboard because no one really knows what to do with it.'

'Edtech is a growing industry and will become increasingly more important in the teaching and learning process—so we need school staff to become more informed and confident consumers and users of technology.'

'From our experience of working with schools and technologists, we have learned that teachers are sometimes fearful of technology, or may not quite grasp how it can help them, or they may not know what questions to ask to ensure it meets their needs.'