

NEU Guidance for Members, Reps and Local Officers

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of mobile phones now available are smartphones which have cameras, internet access, email, games and an array of downloadable apps. Even more basic phones will still have cameras and the facility to record videos. It is common for children in both primary and secondary schools to have their own mobile phone. Research carried out by Childwise found that 44% of children aged 5-10 had their own phone and 96% of children aged 11-16 had a mobile phone.

Photos and videos can be sent instantly to other mobile phones, e-mail addresses or posted on to social media sites. Once images or videos have been posted online, it can be difficult to remove them from the internet, especially if the identity of the user is unknown. Whilst most people use their phones responsibly, a minority of school students misuse this technology for the purposes of bullying or harassing other pupils or staff. Care needs to be taken and policies developed - and where appropriate, action taken to prevent such activity.

This briefing focuses on the potential of mobile phone photography to lead to bullying and harassment of others within the school community. There are other issues that schools need to address, such as the potential for misuse of the technology by paedophiles, the vulnerability of costly phones to theft, and the potential for cheating in examinations by photographing of examination papers. These should be addressed as part of school policies on child protection, behaviour and ICT.

WHY DO CAMERA MOBILE PHONES POSE A HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE IN SCHOOLS?

Pupils can send offensive pictures, messages or videos to other children or to staff in order to upset or humiliate them. To avoid receipt of offensive content, NEU members are strongly advised not to provide their mobile phone numbers to pupils. If there is a need to contact pupils by mobile phone, a school phone should always be used.

Pupils can photograph or film fellow pupils or staff and it is easy for this to be done covertly, including upskirting. Photos can then be passed to other users, sometimes in a manipulated form, or posted online. It is extremely difficult to track down and delete such images. This is an invasion of privacy and can be extremely distressing for the subjects of the photographs. There are also websites, such as Periscope, which allow live streaming. This raises additional implications for mobile phone use, as pupils or staff could be filmed without their knowledge, with the footage being posted online in real time.

There is also the potential for mobile phones to be used to share photos or videos of a sexual nature, known as 'sexting'. The production or sharing of such images involving anyone under the age of 18 is illegal. There may have been coercion involved in the production of images, and they can be shared to embarrass or bully pupils. As with other images, they can be shared easily between peers and uploaded onto the internet and social media sites. It is important that schools have clear procedures in place to deal with sexting incidents, and any cases are dealt with as a child protection issue. More information is available in the NEU health and safety briefing Sexting, available in the self-help section of the NEU website.

A further issue of concern is the particularly unpleasant 'craze' sometimes known as 'happy slapping'. This involves pupils ganging up on victims, assaulting them and photographing and

filming the attacks with mobile phones. The use of the term 'happy slapping' is less prevalent now but anecdotal evidence suggests that the practice still occurs.

The NEU is determined to do all it can do to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of NEU members in respect of these issues. The NEU believes that employers should ensure that policies on the use of mobile phones make specific reference to the use of mobile phone cameras, and ways in which their misuse can be tackled effectively. Even where no problems have occurred thus far, it is important to establish clear rules to prevent future instances of harassment. School policies on mobile phones should link to related policies such as e-safety, bullying and harassment, behaviour and child protection. They should be kept under regular review to ensure they address current technologies and behaviours.

Such policies should be based on an assessment of risk and should include the steps to be taken both to deter phone misuse, and the action to be taken should such incidents occur. Governing bodies of individual schools should consult with staff on the most effective and workable solutions in order to best meet their needs.

Further NEU health and safety guidance on Cyberbullying, Sexting, Social Media and Online Safety is available from the self-help section of the NEU website.

OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

There are two main strategies for consideration by schools when addressing mobile phone usage.

- **An outright ban on all mobile phones.** In addition to the camera element, they are a distraction, providing games, music and internet access. Schools adopting such a policy can choose to confiscate any phones that are brought in and require that they be picked up by parents. Such an approach would also minimise the risk of mobile phone theft amongst students. If such a policy is adopted, cell phone detectors can be installed across schools or in particularly sensitive areas such as examination rooms.

Many schools now have such policies in place, although in practice such bans can be difficult to enforce because many parents feel that mobile phones offer their children an element of security and enable them to stay in touch if, for example, their child is worried about bullying; or needs to make contact in the event of an emergency. It may also be the case that staff may not wish to continually have to challenge pupils about mobile phones

- **Allowing mobile phones of all types to be brought into school** but requiring them to be turned off during lessons and placed in bags. As with the first option, the installation of cell phone detectors could help enforce the policy.

Whatever action a school decides to take, the end result must be that staff and pupils are protected from harassment. NEU members who encounter the malicious use of camera mobile phones by pupils should seek guidance from the [NEU Adviceline](#).