

CLEAR SIGNALS

As a social media ban for under 16s is being considered, heads from some of the capital's leading schools discuss phone usage with **Laura Sutherland**



Liz Kendall, the UK government's technology secretary has launched a landmark consultation on children's digital wellbeing, urging parents, guardians and young people to shape the country's next steps on children's online safety. Here, headteachers of some of London's best schools share their approaches to phone usage, how they protect their cohort from the dangers of technology, and what they think about a potential social media ban.

Andrew Hart, deputy head Academic at Francis Holland Prep

"We believe in an 'eyes up' education, where childhood is defined by lived experience, not digital consumption. Choosing to remain a phone-free school ensures our pupils' focus remains firmly on the tangible world around them. While we master technology as a tool for

learning, we prioritise social and emotional wellbeing. By removing the pressure of the virtual world, we create a sanctuary where pupils focus on what truly matters: developing authentic passions, building face-to-face resilience, and mastering real-world life skills.

"The digital void is filled by more than 80 different co-curricular clubs. So, whether mastering a new skill or playing team sports, girls are learning the nuances of social interaction – tone, empathy, and body language – that a screen simply cannot teach.

"By fostering offline passions, we empower pupils with a sense of purpose and identity rooted in achievement, rather than 'likes'."

VERDICT: BAN

Jane Lunnon, head of Alleyn's

"We do think social media should be banned for children under 16. The online risks relate

not just to grooming or criminality, but also to the increasingly reductive shaping of young people's world views and growing evidence of its impact on long-term concentration and cognitive function. Alongside that, children's time has been commodified. The issue isn't just what they're doing on social media, but what they're not doing in real life. Childhood is short; Instagram lasts forever.

"Children under the age of 16 could still have phones for all of the practical reasons parents value, without access to social media. Here, we lock away phones for years seven to ten during the school day; older pupils must keep them out of sight.

"Most importantly, we work in partnership with families through PSHCE, online safety training and open dialogue, building real digital resilience together."

VERDICT: BAN