SMART Schools+: Social Media and Adolescent mental health – the impact of UK national policy Restrictions on social media use and menTal health

This is a Wellcome Trust Funded Study, led by the University of Birmingham and by Prof. Victoria Goodyear and Prof. Miranda Pallan. This document provides information for the *Parents/Carers* of children who have been invited to participate in the study. Further information about the study can be accessed on our website https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/projects/smart-schools.

What is the aim of the study? To evaluate the impact of the upcoming UK social media restrictions for under 16s on adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

What will my child be asked to do? Your child will be asked to wear an activity monitor watch for 7 days that measures sleep and physical activity. Your child will also be asked to complete an online survey during a timetabled lesson in the presence of the class teacher and a member of the research team. The survey will take up to 40 minutes to complete. The survey will ask your child questions about their mental wellbeing, anxiety and depression, sleep and physical activity, and smartphone and social media use. Pupils will also be asked to answer questions about their social connections, and this will include connections with other participating pupils in their form group. For this part of the survey, the children will be able to see which other pupils in their form group are taking part (and they can also see that your child is taking part) – but they cannot see each other's responses.

Finally, the survey will ask your child for their age, gender, ethnicity and postcode so that we can understand more about the differences in adolescent smartphone and social media use. We will be asking your child to participate in this research at two time points – now, and in a years' time. You will receive further information of us next year when we are due to complete the second round of data collection.

Your child may also be invited to take part in a focus group discussion about smartphone and social media use, their views on the upcoming ban, their social connections, and their leisure time. This will take place with 5 other members of their class, during lesson time in a classroom and with a member of the research staff. The focus group will last up to 60 mins and will be recorded using a voice recorder.

What are the benefits to taking part? Your child's participation will help improve the health and wellbeing of future secondary school pupils by informing national policy and guidance relating to smartphone and social media use. Your child will receive a £5 amazon voucher as a thank you for their time (at each time point).

What are the risks to taking part? Any risk or harm to your child is not expected as a direct result of the research. There is, however, a small possibility that survey questions may be a sensitive issue for your child. We have therefore put in place measures to reduce risk and to ensure your child is well supported. For example, we will

- Provide your child with information about mental health and how to access support
- Observe closely, any signs of distress during the lesson and provide follow up support promptly

- Screen the survey data within 5 working days and if your child scores highly on questions related to depression or anxiety, we will feed this back to the school so that the school can action the appropriate support for your child, in accordance with their guidelines and safeguarding/welfare policy.

What if I do not want my child to take part? Your child does not have to take part in any part of the study. Your child will be provided with an alternative educational task to complete during the research lesson if you do not want them to take part.

IMPORTANT:

IF YOU ARE HAPPY FOR YOUR CHILD TO TAKE PART: You do not need to do anything.

IF YOU DO NOT WANT YOUR CHILD TO TAKE PART: Please complete the parent opt-out consent form either online [add link], or by filling in the form at the end of this document and either return it to your child's school via hard copy or email or by emailing it to us at smartstudy@contacts.bham.ac.uk. You will need to do this within 7 days of receiving this letter

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Why is this research needed?
From April 2027, social media access will be restricted for under-16s in the UK. This research will provide timely evidence on how these restrictions influence young people's digital behaviours, mental health, wellbeing, and educational experiences. By working with schools, we aim to understand not only whether the restrictions are effective, but also who benefits most, under what circumstances, and whether there are any unintended consequences. The findings will help schools, families, and policymakers make informed decisions about how best to support young people's wellbeing, learning, and development in both the short and longer term.

Additional information collected about your child: Your child's form tutor (or equivalent class teacher) will complete a survey about all pupils in your child's class. The form tutor will be asked to provide information on your child's attendance at school, behaviour in the classroom, whether your child is eligible to free school meals, whether English is an additional language, and if they are registered as having any special educational needs. We are asking for this information in order to understand more about the relationship between different pupil characteristics and smartphone / social media use. If you do not want your child to participate in this study, we will not collect data from the form tutor on your child.

We will also ask your child if they would be interested in taking part in future research with the University of Birmingham, and we will ask them to provide their email address so that we can contact them at a future date.

Will information be kept confidential? All information that is collected about your child will be kept strictly confidential. This means that your child's name will be removed from any reporting of the findings. All information will be stored electronically and securely. Only the research team will have access to the data we will not share your child's individual responses with anyone outside of the research team. However, we may alert a teacher in your school if your child answers to questions about depression suggest that you may benefit from mental health support. Electronic files will be deleted from the system after ten years. For further information on how we store data, please read our full Parent Privacy Notice, which can be accessed on our website, under the heading "Participant Information".

What happens if I change my mind about my child taking part: If you agree for your child to take part and you change your mind during the study, you can let us know at any time either by email or by contacting the school. If you wish for your child's data to be removed, you can request this up to 4 weeks after your child has completed the survey. The exception to this is if your child takes part in a focus

group discussion. If you withdraw your child from the study after they participate in a focus group, their data will remain in the study and be included in the analyses as it is not possible to separate and remove their data from a focus group discussion. By participating in this phase of data collection (pre-ban) also does not mean that you're child is required to participate in the next phase of data collection (post-ban)

What if I my child does not want to take part? Your child does not have to take part if they don't want to and this is stated clearly in their pupil information leaflet. Before starting the survey questions, your child will read a question on the tablet, asking them whether they want to complete the survey, wear the accelerometer watch and participate in focus group discussion, if they click "no" they will be directed to an alternative educational task to complete.

What will happen with the results of the study? The results will be presented in academic journal papers and at national and international conferences. We will produce blogs, podcasts, videos and infographics targeted at pupils, parents and the wider public on the study findings and these will be made available on our website and sent to your school.

For further information about the study, please visit our website
https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/projects/smart-schools.
If you would like to speak to someone about the study, please contact us:

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Thank you for considering your child taking part in our study

We can provide copies of the information leaflet and the consent form in another language on request. Please contact your child's school so that they can inform a member of the SMART Schools' Study team.