

West Lothian High school pioneers mobile free classroom

A West Lothian High school which banned the use of mobile phones in the classroom has been given the support of parents – and said it has made a huge difference.

Linlithgow Academy has had mobile-free classrooms since the spring. And Head teacher Grant Abbot recently told local councillors: “It’s made a huge difference.”

The issue of mobile phones in school is one which education bosses are facing up and down the UK, with the issue set to hit TV screens next week with the Channel 4 documentary *Swiped: The school that banned smartphones*.

That features a school in Essex which is banning mobile phones in the class – and in West Lothian that has been shown to get results.

At a meeting of the Linlithgow Local Area Committee he said: “We have been mobile free in classrooms since May. After extensive surveys we had 95% of families responding- the first time I have had that, I never get that level of response to surveys.

“I have staff telling me that change in classrooms is transformational. Students are back cognitively into lessons, there’s more dialogue, more discussion.”

Mr Abbot told the meeting that the school had opted for a very “black and white “approach.

“There’s no phones in the classroom. It should be in a bag or the wall holder in the classroom.”

If a phone is seen in class the teacher calls the office and another teacher comes to the classroom and asks the pupil to come to the office, where the pupil has to place the phone in a pouch. It can be retrieved at the end of the school day. The walk to the office also gives the chance for conversation with the pupil.

Mr Abbot said it was a process which de-escalated the potential for disruption from the start. It’s not “a suit and tie demanding a phone” from a pupil, it could be any teacher coming to class to escort the pupil to the office.

“It is the support of all teaching staff in a school of 1,300 which has made the scheme work,” said the headteacher.

Pupils are allowed to use their phones at break times and lunchtimes.

Chairing the meeting, councillor Sally Pattle said “That’s fantastic. I’ve spoken to young people who have said ‘I can’t focus in class because someone next to me is watching a film on their phone.’”

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: “Linlithgow Academy has adopted a new mobile phone policy with the aim for regulating mobile use to reduce distractions and improve learning.

“West Lothian secondary schools set their own mobile phone policy, with the majority asking pupils to ensure phones are in bags or pouches during class, unless the teacher indicates they are being used for the lesson or are required for medical reasons.

“In response to feedback from parents, teachers and students, Linlithgow Academy has implemented a new policy which formalises this approach and sets clear boundaries to help pupils stay engaged in lessons.

“Pupils are reminded of the policy at the start of each lesson, communication is ongoing with parents/carers to make sure they are onboard with the approach, and respectful enforcement of the policy is carried out, all with the aim of creating an environment where students and teachers can engage without unnecessary interruptions.”

Swiped: The school that banned smartphones is a Channel 4 documentary featuring students at The Stanway School which tackles the timely issue of the impact of smartphones on children’s behaviour with a pioneering social experiment.

TV hosts Emma and Matt Willis front the TV show that will see them give up their smartphones alongside students from Essex. The pair work with Year 8 pupils at the Colchester school, as they hand in their devices for 21 days.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter