

Midlothian parents told to stop texting their children during class time

Parents are being told to stop texting or calling their children during class time at schools across Midlothian.

Secondary schools across the county have introduced bans on mobile phones being used when pupils are in lessons but a meeting of Midlothian councillors heard it was not just youngsters who needed to curb their habits.

Elected members heard parents also had to stop contacting their youngsters during the day on their mobile devices instead being told 'in an emergency' to call the school office to get a message to them.

A report presented to councillors said head teachers at all six of Midlothian's secondary schools had worked together to set out guidelines for mobile phone use.

And it revealed plans were now underway to produce similar guidance for primary schools which will be brought in from August this year.

The report said that while secondary schools approaches differed – with pupils either being asked to put mobile devices in 'pockets' set up in the classroom before sitting at their desks, or to keep them in their bags – the guiding principles of supporting a "focused and engaging learning environment, free from the distractions of mobile phone use"

were shared.

It said general policy for schools was that mobile phones must be switched off and out of sight during class time; phones should be stored in bags, designated storage pouches, or secure locations; phones cannot be kept in students' pockets or placed on desks during lessons; phones may only be used during break and lunchtime unless a teacher instructs otherwise for educational purposes and persistent non-compliance will result in the phone being held centrally during class time, with parental notification.

However it added that while there were exemptions for medical or wellbeing issues, the policy also extended to parents and carers adding they could support schools by "refraining from texting or calling students during class times".

Councillor Ellen Scott, the administration spokesperson for education, said she had visited schools to see the policy in action and she said cracking down on mobile phone use also helped prepare pupils for future jobs.

She said: "The head teachers and staff are on it and have very good policies in place.

"The pupils are getting a break from their phones for seven periods, they are in the pockets or in their bags but I think one of the most important things we took away is that the schools are getting pupils into good behaviour with their phones.

"When they go into the workplace they know they cannot be looking at their phones all the time because employers are saying that students are coming out of school addicted to their phones."

And Councillor Scott said parents needed to learn from the guidelines as well.

She said: "One of the things though is that parents actually phone their children quite a lot during the day. This policy and guidance is for parents as well. If there is an emergency phone the school office don't just phone their (the child's) phone."

The report to councillors on mobile phone policy was for noting.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter