

Portobello parents react positively over mobile phone pilot scheme

Parents and carers at Portobello High School have said they are optimistic about a new pilot scheme that keeps students off mobile phones during the school day.

The school is the first in Scotland to have pupils lock their phones in magnetic pouches for the duration of the school day.

Edinburgh Council hopes that it will see students focus more on their schoolwork, avoiding the distractions phones can cause in the classroom.

David Fraser, the parent of a S4 pupil at the school, says he has no issue with trying it out – but wants to see how well it works before passing judgement.

The 51-year-old Scottish Government worker told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “I’m of the opinion that better behaviour comes from better parents and kids. There’s a lot of common sense that can be applied to this stuff.

“I personally have no issue with trying this. I’d hate to be a teacher these days, and anything we can do to help teachers, help quiet the classroom down is good.

“If it’s disruptive kids and it’s caused by phones and all, go for it. Let’s try it. We’ll give it a bash.

"I'm a firm believer that it needs to be given a trial, at least to see if it works or not.

"I'm not supportive of it, I'm not non supportive of it. I'll see what the proof in the pudding is first before we make any decisions.

"It took the kids by surprise, it took all of us by surprise."

The magnetic pouches were distributed to families the week before the bank holiday weekend, with all pupils carrying mobiles required to use them.

Parents could make a voluntary payment towards the scheme, but the pouches were distributed to families whether they contributed financially towards it or not.

Fraser said his daughter, who is in S3, said some students were having trouble using the pouches, which he compared to the magnetic locks on alcohol bottles in supermarkets.

Another parent, Sirin, said she was supportive of the scheme.

The mother of an S4 pupil said: "I think it's a good idea. It'll help them focus, it'll help them learn, be more social.

"They won't be tapping away at their phones all the time."

And, some parents and carers hope that the scheme can help reduce some other harms from social media.

Jackie, the grandmother of an S3 pupil, said: "It'll take the kids a while to get used to it, but once they're used to it it'll be good.

"There's too much bullying on social media with the kids nowadays. In the context of everything that's going on, they're all snapchatting one another. That'll stop that.

"I think it'll take a while to kick in with the kids, but I think it'll work."

Queensferry High School will join Portobello in introducing the pouches on Wednesday, 14 May.

The scheme will run as a trial for two years, with officials watching feedback from parents and pupils and monitoring attendance figures and other data points to understand its impact.

Labour councillor Joan Griffiths, convener of the Education, Children and Families committee, said: "I'm pleased to see Edinburgh schools leading the way in introducing a mobile-phone free school environment.

"Mobile phones in classroom settings are increasingly competing with the teachers for learners' attention and limiting access to mobile phones during the school day is only a positive thing for our young people.

"I know that schools across Edinburgh, and indeed the country, are exploring ways to manage mobile phone use, including restricting phone use during the school day.

"The new pouches provide an innovative way for our young people to have distance from their devices while having the reassurance that they are still in their possession.

"We hope that this new policy will increase focus on learning, reduce classroom distractions and help improve wellbeing."

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter