



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Parents support review into the use of smartphones in NSW schools

The peak body for parents with children in Catholic schools, the Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP), welcomes the NSW Government's review into the use of smartphones in schools.

CCSP Executive Director, Linda McNeil, says that smartphones have the potential to be harmful or helpful in schools depending on how they are used, the school's policy for their use, and how the parents and schools work together to teach students about being socially responsible users of technology.

"One of the concerning things about smartphones is that according to recent studies, the pervasive use of smartphones among children and young people is linked to an increased incidence of depression.

"Smartphones can also be distracting in school, and we've heard from students and parents that smartphones are often used for reasons other than study in the classroom.

"Parents say that they feel safer knowing their children have a smartphone, but they need to remember that they can still contact the school directly if they need to reach their children and vice versa. Having parents on speed dial during school hours can lead to over-dependence and diminish students' own problem-solving skills. However, it is understandable that parents want students to have access to their smartphones outside of school hours," Ms McNeil said.

If smartphones are used for their agreed purpose and in conjunction with the school rules and expectations, they can serve as a valued tool, particularly in secondary education.

Catholic school parent, Cheryl Murphy from Lake Macquarie says that her son's secondary school has a strong policy on the use of electronic devices in the classroom. She says that they have proven useful as an educational and self-management tool for students.

"My son uses his phone to set up reminders for assessments and to access his timetable. There are also incredible apps now that aid learning in the classroom. And for those children with special needs or for those who have trouble fitting in, when they are out on the playground all they have to do is put their headphones on and it's socially acceptable for them to want some lone time.

"The reality is that electronic devices are part of our lives now and they are the norm among secondary school students – everyone has one. The key is for schools and parents to educate students about the appropriate use of smartphones. For example, at my son's school they are taught to never post anything on social media that they would not be comfortable to say to someone directly. Those parents with children in primary school also need guidance about how and when to introduce smartphones into their children's lives," Ms Murphy said.

CCSP says that cyber-safety and cyber-bullying are top of mind and continue to cause concern among parents.

"It's critical for the whole school community to come together to educate students about the socially acceptable use of smartphones and other electronic devices at home and at school. Parents need to support the school policy and schools need to support parents too.

"The idea of a flat out ban on smartphones in schools is a decision that should be made at the school level based on the context of the school and in consultation with parents. There are many alternative options that can be explored such as switching smartphones off during school hours, keeping them stored in lockers, and regulating their use for certain activities," Ms McNeil said.

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*The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) is the peak representative body for parents with children in Catholic schools in NSW.*