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NEW NATIONAL SMARTPHONE FREE SCHOOLS RATING SYSTEM TO LAUNCH – AS LEADERS WARN: ‘SMARTPHONES AND SCHOOLS DON’T MIX’

The Unplugged Coalition is rolling out a new national school smartphone rating system over rising fears about the damage phones are doing to children’s learning and wellbeing.

The launch is backed by leading headteachers, experts and cross-party political figures, the Smartphone-Free Schools Rating will help parents and teachers take back control and protect children from toxic content during school hours.

On Tuesday 24 June, the Unplugged Coalition will launch a first-of-its-kind national Smartphone-Free Schools Rating – a bold new tool to spotlight schools’ effectiveness in tackling the digital harms that threaten children’s education and mental health.

The rating system – developed by school leaders, wellbeing experts and campaigners – gives every school in the country a clear grade: Gold, Silver or Bronze, based on how strictly they restrict smartphones during the school day.

At Gold-rated schools, smartphones are completely banned from the premises. Silver schools require phones to be handed in or locked away. Bronze schools prohibit use but allow pupils to keep phones with them.

The initiative is already gaining momentum with dozens of schools having pre-registered and a growing map at www.smartphonefreerating.org will let parents check their school’s status – and push for stronger policies if needed.

It sets a new national standard – and a rallying cry – for action on a problem many headteachers feel powerless to solve.

Jennifer Powers, Director of the Unplugged Coalition, said: “Schools with effective smartphone-free policies enjoy better behaviour, better attendance and better results. For the first time in the UK – maybe even the world – there are clearly defined standards for what makes a school genuinely smartphone-free. We’re here to support schools improve and celebrate their success. Every child deserves to learn free from the distraction of smartphones.”

This initiative comes at a critical time, as concerns about the impact of smartphones on children’s learning, mental health, and behaviour grow across the country. A recent survey revealed that more than 90% of secondary schools in England already impose some restrictions on mobile phone use – but they are not sufficiently robust to create genuinely smartphone-free schools.

Recent research shows 48% of UK adults support a full ban on smartphones in schools, while UNESCO and child-safety experts have warned of the risks to learning and development.

Max Haimendorf OBE, Co-founder of the Smartphone Free Schools Rating and Founding Principal of Ark King Solomon Academy, said: “Schools and parents are crying out for clarity

and consistency when it comes to smartphones. This new rating system offers exactly that – a simple, empowering tool to help children focus and flourish. In a world increasingly shaped by tech, this is a moment to put childhood first and schools are leading the way.”

Mike Baxter, Co-founder Smartphone Free Schools Rating and Principal of City of London Academy, Southwark, said: “We are on the cusp of change regarding children and smartphones. School leaders have seen the negative impact of these devices on children's development - they are linked to obesity, poor mental health, social isolation, bullying, access to inappropriate material, self-harm and grooming. These risks are more dangerous to our young people than the real-world risks that schools and parents control so rigorously. Across the country, schools are reviewing their smartphone policies and considering what they can best do to prevent harm and support learning. The School Smartphone Rating System provides a clear, simple framework to communicate to parents and allows schools to identify and share best practice with one another. In doing so schools can contribute to a new normal, where children are able to develop without the harms of these devices and the addictive algorithms that drive their use.”

Clare Fernyhough, Co-founder of Smartphone Free Childhood and advisor to Smartphone Free Schools Rating, said: “The movement has been developed by experienced school heads - the very leaders who see every day how unchecked smartphone use can erode learning and wellbeing. Their clear ratings spotlight the schools already modelling best practice and arm parents with the decisive information they need when choosing where to send their children. It's a simple idea with the power to change school culture for the better.”

Lawrence Fowley, CEO, Future Academies, said: “The movement has been developed by experienced school heads - the very leaders who see every day how unchecked smartphone use can erode learning and wellbeing. Their clear ratings spotlight the schools already modelling best practice and arm parents with the decisive information they need when choosing where to send their children. It's a simple idea with the power to change school culture for the better.”

The official launch will take place in Parliament Terrace Dining Room C, 3.00 – 5.00pm on Tuesday June 24.

The initiative is backed by voices across politics, education and civil society – a coalition united by one belief: childhood should be lived, not scrolled.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- A crowdfunder has been launched to support the rating system:
<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/smartphone-free-schools-rating>
- The Smartphone-Free Schools Rating categorises schools as:
 - Gold – No smartphones allowed on site
 - Silver – Phones must be handed in or locked away
 - Bronze – Phone use banned, but pupils retain phones
- Backed by senior educators, researchers and cross-party MPs
- Inspired by international best practice, including France's school phone ban