Junior School Parent Technology Survey

BRIGHTON GRAMMAR | Crowther Centre

Position Papers

Executive Report

This year, Brighton Grammar launched the Harmony Project aiming to help our boys form a healthier, more nuanced and thoughtful relationship with technology. Drawing on a whole school survey, as well as overwhelming research highlighting the negative impact of constant exposure of screens and social media on young people, we successfully implemented a change to our mobile phone policy in the Secondary School. Since the beginning of Semester 2, all boys have been expected to lock their phones in their lockers for the duration of the school day. As a school community, we have been delighted by the response.

The second phase of the Harmony Project will focus on the Junior School and how we can help shape the future technology use of our youngest students. It is interesting to note that in the survey that was completed by parents at the beginning of the year, parents of Secondary School boys reported much higher concerns than parents of Junior School boys. We believe education is essential here, as **it is far more effective to guide children's use of technology early on than to try to correct entrenched habits later.**

The Junior School Technology survey provided interesting insights into how parents are thinking about their sons' use of phones, smart watches, social media and gaming. This report summarises the areas of concern and the suggestions for improvement and support.

Concerns

Parents identified five main areas of concern.

- Time spent on screens

- Access to the internet

- Access to inappropriate content and views

- Conflict in the home about screen time/gaming time

- Impact on socialising

1. Access to the Internet

Parents identified five main areas of concern.

Most boys have access to the internet through a range of devices, with iPads being the most common. Only 9% of parents say their son does not access the internet at home. Worryingly, over a third of families do not use parental settings on their home internet which means that children are able to access adult content online.

At home:

- 80% of boys have access to an iPad

- 52% of boys have access to a gaming device

- 30% have a smartphone

- 29% have a smartwatch

- 29% have access to the family computer

2. Screen Time

Parents express concern about the amount of time their children spend on screens, though reported usage is lower than national averages.

- 40% report their sons spend 1 hour or less per day (not including television)

- 32% spend 1–2 hours per day

- 10% spend 2–3 hours per day

3. Access to Inappropriate Content and Views

Parents worry about harmful content online, though it appears that some underestimate the risks compared to research findings. Even though you must be over 13 years to have a YouTube account (and it will be banned soon), about 50% of boys watch YouTube regularly.

- Over 60% of parents think boys should not be exposed to social media until they are over 16

- 79% are concerned about views their sons are exposed to on social media

- 13% believe their son has been exposed to pornography (despite research suggesting the average age of exposure is 10)

- 12% of parents report their son has access to a smartphone or smartwatch in his bedroom

4. Conflict in the Home About Screen Time

Many studies have suggested that screen time is a major cause of conflict within families which was borne out by the survey.

- 29% of families report conflict about phone use

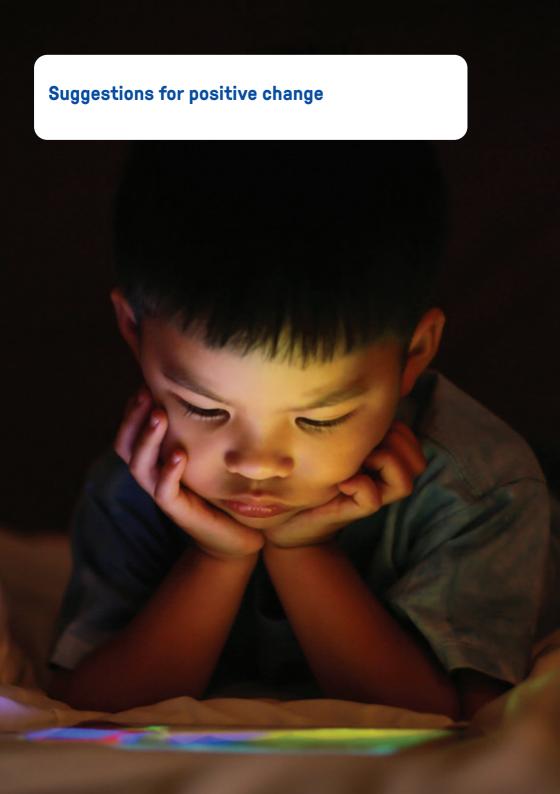- 40% report conflict about gaming or computer use

5. Impact on Socialising

Parents are divided about the effect of technology on social skills, though some see signs of concern. Parents commented that gaming and YouTube have become social norms, replacing some 'in real life' interactions.

- 7% believe their son's smartphone use has affected how he socialises

- 12% say their son has had a negative online experience

- 31% are unsure about the impact

Suggestions for positive change

1. Parents think we need to work as a community to help boys form healthy relationships with technology.

Many parents are calling for collective action in this space, with a unified understanding around acceptable use of technology for their boys. Several parents also commented on how difficult it can be negotiating technology 'rules' with other families.

- 'I would like parents to all be on the same page at each year level and agree that they won't allow their kids to have social media.'

- 'I would like to see the parent group come together and agree that smartphones will be delayed and no one will give their boys access to 18+ R rated gaming and movies. I can only see this happening if the school steps up with a code of conduct that parents can sign up to and own it.'

- 'Would love a community of like-minded families to prolong the amount of time our children are not exposed to social media, have access to a smart phone/watch.'

- 'Need to work together as a community and help give children back their childhood and out of their screens, starting with the school helping make this policy that it's not necessary to have a phone constantly on them. Education around this is so important, and adults modeling heathy phone habits [is essential]'.

2. Parents want practical information about how to monitor and regulate social media, internet and phone use outside school.

Parents need practical information about things such as how they can block or limit access to inappropriate content, including pornography. They also want information about age-appropriate Apps, how to track time online and how to navigate safety and privacy concerns.

- 'I would like more support around how to limit access to the internet. My son knows more than I do around how to circumvent the controls.'

- 'Recommendations about how to set up screen time and content limits.'

- 'More information to all parents on parental controls. Even though my son does not have a phone, his friends show him their phones and I don't know what controls they have.'

3. Parents want accurate research around the impact of phones, social media and gaming on children.

Parents want to know how to support their children to create healthy habits around technology. Many parents acknowledged that phones and gaming are a cause of family tension and they are looking for guidance around how to manage this.

- Guidance on how to set boundaries and share trends, risks, and best practices in social media use.

- 'Tips to manage [gaming] - after he plays online with his friends, it makes him cranky afterwards.'

- 'Anything to help get him off [the computer] when his time limit is up!'

- 'Help create a community where gaming after school or on weekends is not the 'expected way' to interact with friends. It's hard to stop him engaging in this behaviour when his friends are all gaming too!'

4. Parents want their children to learn to be critical thinkers and be empowered to make good choices around their phone use.

Parents were supportive of the school taking a proactive approach to teaching the boys about technology.

- 'I want the school to educate kids about the issues with social media/ smart devices and take active steps to address/combat peer pressure.'

- 'More education for the kids about why it's so harmful including explaining the neuroscience around how smart devices get you addicted to the dopamine hit and why staying off devices and social media for as long as possible is healthy.'

5. Parents are thinking about dumb phones.

Many parents are interested in learning more about dumb phones. Several leading schools in Australia are successfully trialing collective based agreements around dumb phones with the aim of limiting children's exposure to screens and the internet. This is something the school is interested in exploring with the support of parents.

- 'A school wide policy would assist with parent pressure. No smart phones or smart watches in primary school.'

- 'I am hopeful there is enough discussion on it for a solid number of Year 5 boys to instead get dumb phones.'

- 'It is my opinion that the school should help to create a culture where dumb phones are the norm.'

Conclusion

We are all navigating a digital world that most of us didn't grow up with and don't fully understand.

The survey highlights the differing views Junior School parents hold around children's smartphone use, access to social media and online gaming.

As several parents commented, if we want to change the ways our boys are interacting with technology, we need to have a collective understanding around the risks and benefits.

Parents are looking for evidence-based information and strategies and many comments reflected an understanding that a unified, community approach will be the most effective way forward.

We have an opportunity here to work together to ensure that all our boys are supported to develop healthy relationships with technology both inside and outside of school.