



KING JAMES'S SCHOOL

KNARESBOROUGH

Headteacher's weekly update – 11th December

Mobile devices

I think we would all acknowledge as parents that this has been a very challenging year for children. The lockdown we all experienced during the warmer spring and summer months was bad enough, without having to go through it again recently. We are as a society seeing a whole range of effects that restrictions have had on our young people and the potential long term impact of these, is still in its early days.

There have been concerns around the rising cases of mental health problems, along with the unknown impacts of long term separations from family and friends. All of these things have manifested themselves in a variety of different ways.

One of the aspects we have seen here at school with students, is their increased use and reliance on mobile devices. At present mobile phones and accompanying headphones/airpods are not to be used in school from the first bell in the morning (8:40am) to the bell at the end of the day (3:15pm). We feel that the lines have been blurred around this area and we would like to provide a clearer direction when we return after Christmas on Monday 4th January. Our reason for sharpening things up here, is based around some very recent research concerning mobile devices that we have seen evidence of in school.

The first concern is the negative impact on the way mobile devices affect **how our students think**. Due to the rapid, quick fire way phones provide us with information, the resulting impact is that our brains begin to not retain information as well. This is because we have not had to work as hard, to obtain the information in the first place. The exact opposite happens when we read a book for instance. Here our brain generates images in our mind which involves making connections between different parts of our brain. Students then spending then too much time on screens during school time, actually make their brains more passive. This is the exact thing we don't want when we students are learning in lessons. How many of us at home with our own children have noticed the time it takes them to re-engage with us, after they have spent time in front of a screen?

Secondly we are seeing a negative impact with mobile phone use on **how our students learn**. Poor quality sleep and an increase in anxiety and depressions have all been linked to increased mobile phone use. Recent research has shown how regular mobile phone use can have a negative impact on our capacity to give a task our full attention. How many of us in our present workplace find ourselves constantly distracted by the ping of a message or an email that moves our focus away from what we should be doing?

We are now seeing that an increased reliance from students on their mobile devices is having a detrimental impact on **our students capacity to learn**, remember information and then store and recall it from their long term memory. These are the exact skills our young people will all need to pass exams!

Finally and this is the most crucial one for us, there is mounting evidence now around how extended time on a device can impact negatively on **how our students behave**. The more time we spend

looking at a screen, the less time we spend interacting in person with others. This makes it more difficult to establish interpersonal connections and strong relationships, which are important for mental health and the health of the community at large. Before smartphones, all interaction was face-to-face, and that is a richness of communication that gets lost when you have a conversation on the phone or through texting. As we have mentioned, smartphones and other devices give information and entertainment rapidly, which then can make us less patient when we have real conversations with people in our lives. For our students during their unstructured time, the lack of face-face interaction that can happen when they are clamped to their phones, can have a detrimental effect on their mental health and well-being.

This is why we believe, now more than ever before, it is the right time for our rules around mobile devices/headphones/airpods to be tightened up and made clearer.

Starting from Monday 4th January all students, when they enter school site, will need to turn their devices off and keep phones/headphones/airpods out of sight for the whole day until the bell at 3:15pm. This includes and is especially important around corridors and social areas. The only exception will be with 6th form students in their study area and when any member of staff uses their discretion to allow students to use devices for educational purposes. Y11 students will of course be allowed to use their devices if they go into town at lunchtime but the guidance applies as soon as they are back on site.

Warm regards,
Mr P McIntosh