

Template letter for Primary School Heads



Dear [X]

We are writing to you about the issue of smartphones in the lives of children today, and specifically children at our school.

Parents at [SCHOOL] have recently joined a grassroots movement called Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) Hong Kong, triggered by our growing concern, the latest research and international conversations about the age at which we give children smartphones. Feeling strongly about the issue ourselves, we started an open [SCHOOL] SFC WhatsApp group which [X] parents/carers have since joined.

Technology presents many incredible benefits and opportunities, but how best do we navigate it at this critical stage of pre-teen development? We know this can be a controversial subject and there is no definitive answer – every parent wants to do what's best for their child.

Ultimately, it remains a personal decision for each family and household. However, there is now [research](#)

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://sapienlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sapien-Labs-Age-of-First-Smartphone-and-Mental-Wellbeing-Outcomes.pdf>

showing a clear link between the age a child receives their first smartphone and mental health issues in young adulthood. The harms from excessive smartphone use, as we know, are wide-ranging – from reduced self-esteem to disrupted learning, bullying, grooming and addiction – as well as the huge opportunity cost, the things children and teens are not doing because they are on their devices. This [article](#)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2024/03/teen-childhood-smartphone-use-mental-health-effects/677722/>

by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt details the huge – and not yet fully appreciated – impact of society's move from a play-based to a phone-based childhood.

We know how much pressure schools in Hong Kong are under and are so grateful for all the work you do to educate our children, and we acknowledge that it is parents who purchase smartphones for their children. We recognise that the school's policy states [INSERT POLICY DETAILS, LIKELY TO BE PHONES ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE USED OR SHOULD BE KEPT IN BAGS IN SCHOOL]. However, we would really like your support in raising awareness of this issue as we recognise that you have a crucial part to play in helping parents navigate this rapidly evolving area of our children's lives.

To begin with we would be grateful to meet with you to discuss our idea to bring parents together on this issue. A few ideas we have to get us started are outlined below:

For our parent group to conduct a simple survey of the whole [SCHOOL] community to find out the current smartphone situation in our school – what parents feel about the issue, when they plan to get their child a smartphone and whether they'd be interested in signing a

voluntary parent pact to not get their children smartphones (thereby reducing the peer pressure to do so). The pact approach is a tried and tested model that has been successful in other schools in Hong Kong, and is inclusive, non-judgemental, parent-led and entirely voluntary.

In collaboration with the school, we organise a workshop for parents setting out the risks of smartphone use in adolescence, and discuss what alternative norm we might agree to for our children. We are happy to organise this, if you are willing to support it.

We explore collaborating on new guidance from the school, recommending that children at [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] should not have a smartphone, even outside of school hours. If parents want a way to contact their child e.g. to confirm they are safe when travelling to and from school, that you encourage other ways to do that. For example a simpler connected device (such as a simple Nokia phone, or a watch, there are lots of alternatives listed here).

The support of the school would make all the difference in enabling us to successfully navigate this critical issue in our community, and to begin changing the norm around when to get our children smartphones. We very much look forward to working with you on this, and hope we can arrange a meeting with you in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

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[END]