

[Template email for sending to school leaders]

Dear XXXX

[I am/We are]] writing to share our concerns about what seems to be an increasingly pervasive use by pupils of personal devices and pupil-facing educational technology (EdTech) platforms in lessons and for homework.

The impacts of screentime on children's physical and mental health have been well-documented, and as parents we have chosen to limit screentime and the use of touchscreen devices at home. But unfortunately we are finding that the growing incorporation of device use and EdTech into school life and homework is undermining our efforts at home and introducing unhelpful complication and friction.

There is an increasing focus on the impacts of screentime and digital devices on children's health, wellbeing, development and academic attainment. Among the evidence that is now widely discussed in the media, in Parliament and among parents, you will hopefully already be aware of the following:

- Evidence from studies looking at screen use among children suggests that technology use is contributing to a decline in pupil's attention and an increase in distractibility.
- Pedagogical research indicates that reading from screens produces notably less effective comprehension and knowledge retention than reading from physical books, especially among children.
- Greater reliance on technology tools for producing written work is detrimentally impacting handwriting skills, leading to reduced legibility and slower fluency alongside an impairment of memory and comprehension; in contrast, handwriting has been shown to better support learning than typing, and handwriting legibility and fluency has been linked to better academic outcomes.
- Extensive research and frontline clinical evidence now connects digital device use to negative impacts on children's emotional self-regulation, eye sight, posture and sleep
- Greater use of devices and reliance on technology for carrying out schoolwork and homework inevitably increases the likelihood of pupils being exposed sooner or more frequently to inappropriate online content and to well-documented related harms arising from greater device use, such as cyberbullying, grooming and predation.

If any of this recent context is new to you, or if it conflicts with information provided to the school by, for example, vendors of EdTech products or the Department for Education, it would be very helpful for parents to understand this.

Regardless of what any research evidence can reveal about the negative implications of device-based education, however, as parents we see with our own eyes the impacts that devices and EdTech are having on our children's learning, and on our homelife. We would like to explain these consequences so that you have that context too.

In our home, for example, *[describe here your own family's experience of the issues caused by homework being set and/or required to be completed/handed in online. These might include for example;]*

- *the negative impacts of or the amount of time spent having to log on in order to find the homework*
- *difficulties of sharing your own devices at home between multiple children or if parents need to use them for work*
- *the temptation to look for other 'more interesting' distractions on the device while doing homework*
- *tensions in relationships with siblings and/or parents associated with device use*
- *difficulties in supporting/supervising homework or being unable to help solve technical issues with devices*
- *observations about your child being less interested in homework topics or appearing to understand less, or of your child being slower to get to sleep after using a touchscreen device, or of their quality of sleep declining*
- *arguments about having access to other devices (phones/gaming consoles) if online homework has normalised device use in the evenings*
- *noticing your child is rushing through homework to achieve a gamified reward*
- *noticing your child is less inclined to want to read books or is not progressing as well with academic learning*
- *Noticing an increase in headaches or eyestrain*
- *Noticing an impact on your child's attention and distractibility*

[I/We] understand that setting and marking schoolwork and homework using devices and automated platforms can create efficiencies for teaching staff, and [I/we] of course have some sympathy for that cause. But this alone cannot be sufficient to justify an inferior method for learning which, for the majority of pupils, risks producing inferior outcomes.

[I/We] hope that you will appreciate that [I/we] share these concerns in the spirit of wanting to support the school to best serve the needs of the children. [I/We] have every incentive to want to see the school and its pupils succeed, and it is for that reason that [I am/we are] becoming increasingly concerned by the intrusion of devices and technology into the classroom, and inevitably therefore also our home.

May [I/we] please make a few requests:

1. Has the [school/trust] carried out a risk/benefit assessment of using devices and EdTech platforms in the school, and if so please may [I/we] see a copy of that assessment to help [me/us] better understand the school's perspective?
2. More generally, has the [school/trust] been provided with any independent evidence that devices and EdTech platforms are enhancing learning, attainment and improvement for the general population of pupils? If not, has the school collected its own data to evidence a net benefit from these initiatives?
3. What proportion of the school's budget is accounted for by the costs of acquiring, leasing, licensing and supporting personal devices and EdTech platforms at the

school? And how does this compare to the budget for acquiring and replacing pupil textbooks?

[I/we] look forward to hearing from you and, hopefully, to continuing this discussion with you.

Kind regards,