

Chew Valley School

Insights from Smartphone Stakeholder Research

The following report summarises key findings from the smartphone stakeholder consultation conducted in February and March 2025.

Students, staff and parents were surveyed about their views on smartphones and school smartphone policy. The report is organised into two main sections:

1. Concerning school policy
2. Experiences & Beliefs concerning smartphones

The report presents findings which the researchers hope will be most useful in navigating policy dilemmas in this complex area.



Student Data
n=563



Parent Data
n=205



Teacher Data
n=44

Section 1

Smartphone policy



This first section of the report focuses on current and possible future smartphone policy at Chew Valley School.



Student, staff and parent data are compared on identical questions and common themes to illustrate how the different stakeholder groups experience the current policy and what they hope for in future policy development.



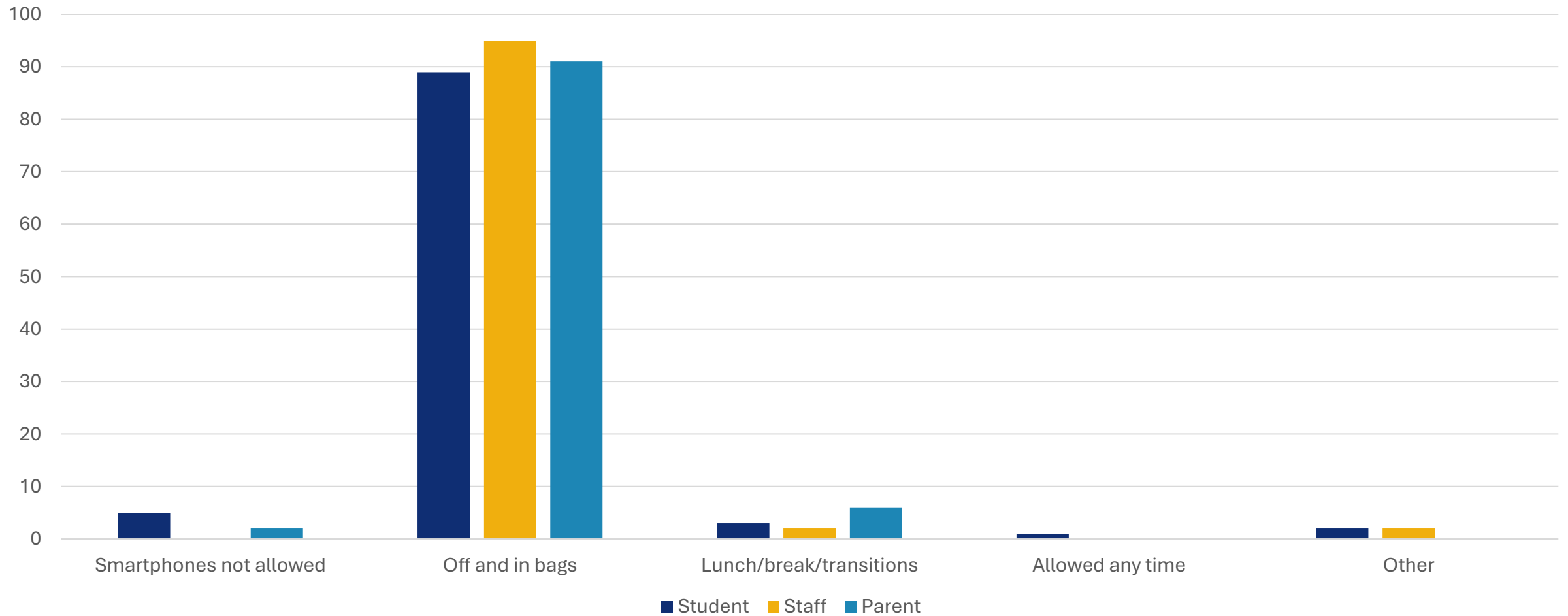
This section includes a mixture of quantitative and illustrative qualitative data.



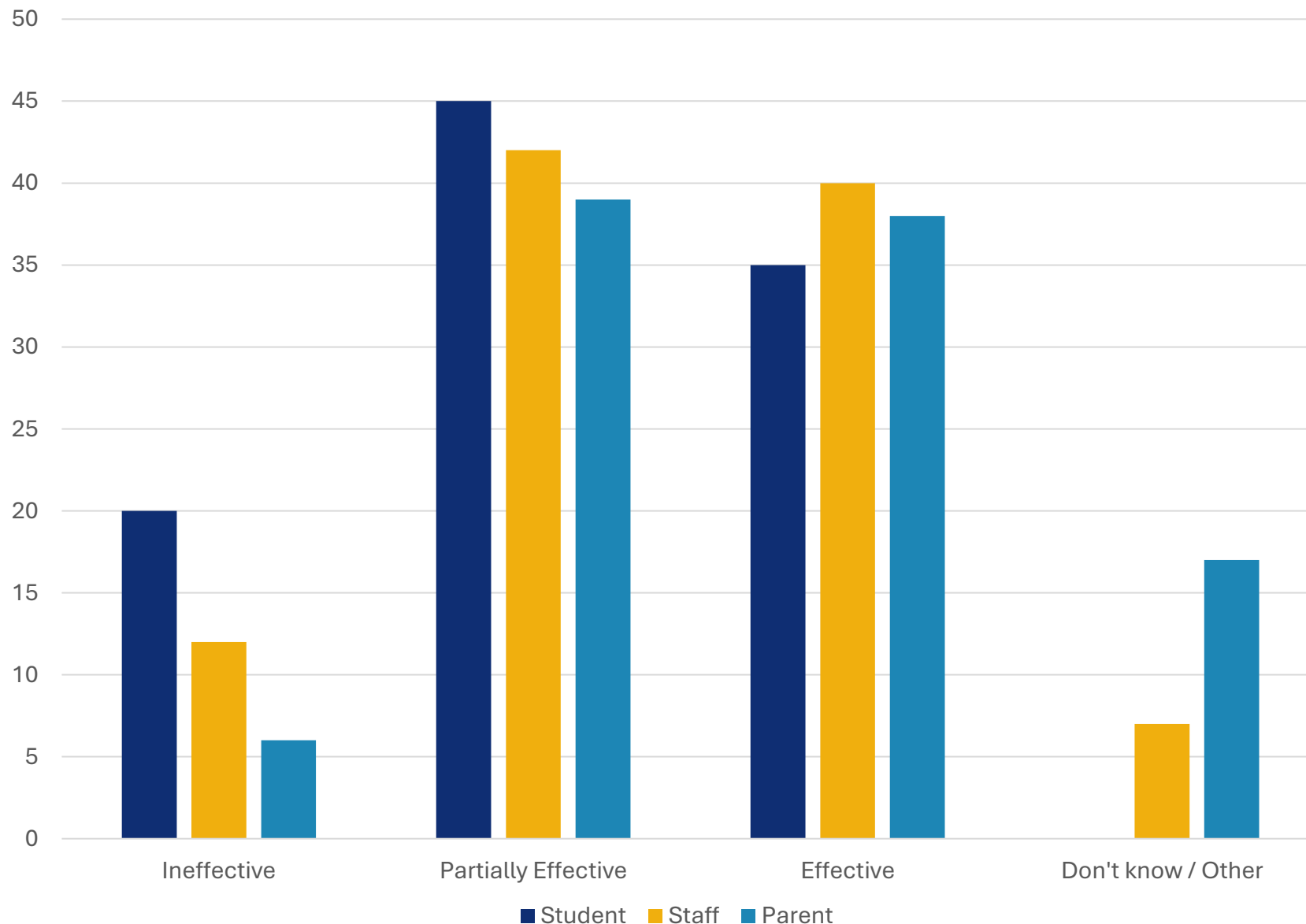
These findings are intended to support policy decision-making for staff and school leadership.

Knowledge of current policy

(To the best of your knowledge, please select the smartphone policy that you think most closely matches your school's policy)



Effectiveness of Policy



Less than half of participating **staff (40%)** believe the current policy is '**effective**' at promoting engagement and success in learning.

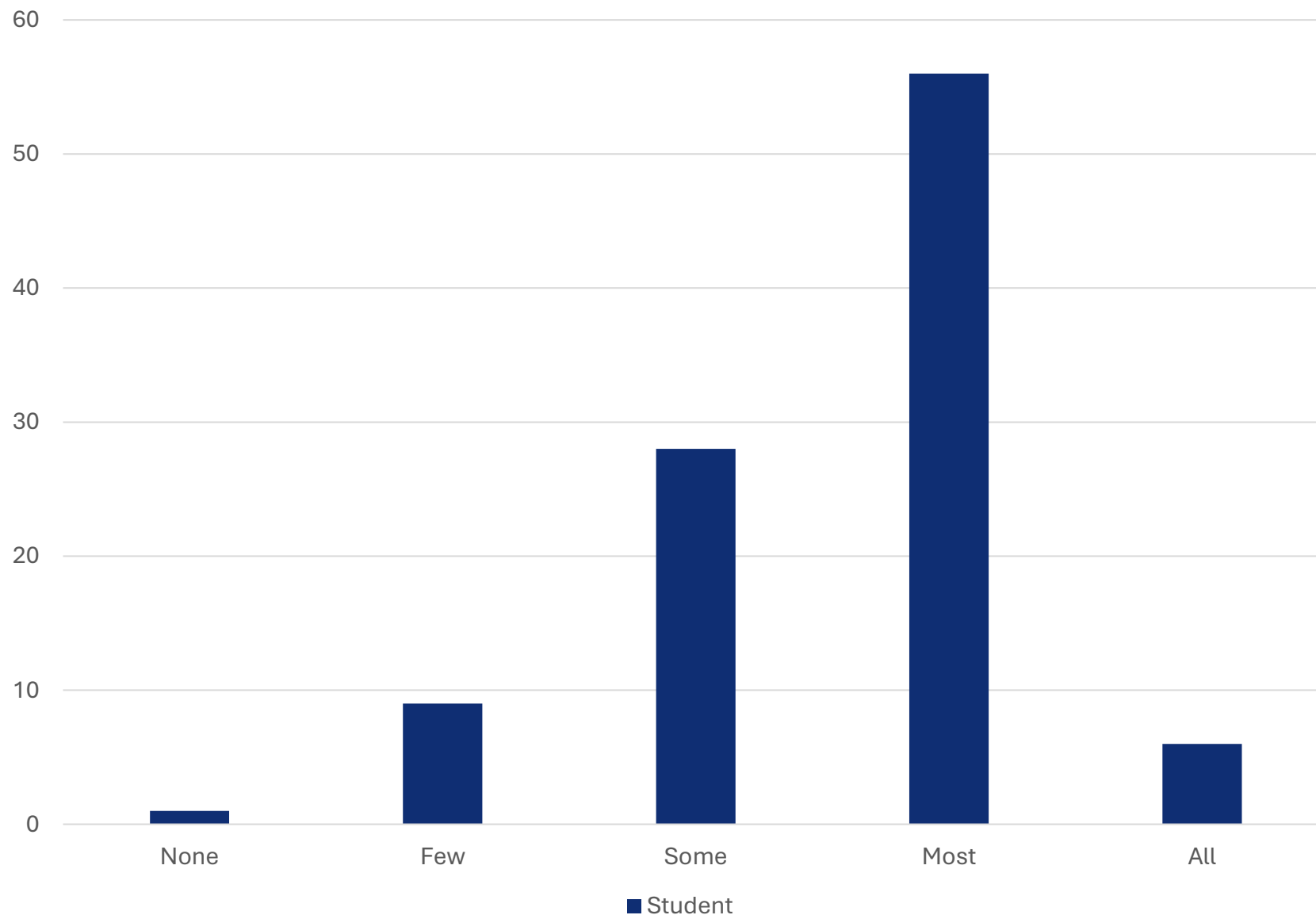
Clarity of policy

77% of staff reported that the rules regarding smartphones are '**very clear**'.

SLT support

Most **staff (91%)** are '**somewhat**' satisfied or '**extremely**' satisfied with the support they receive from SLT on this issue.

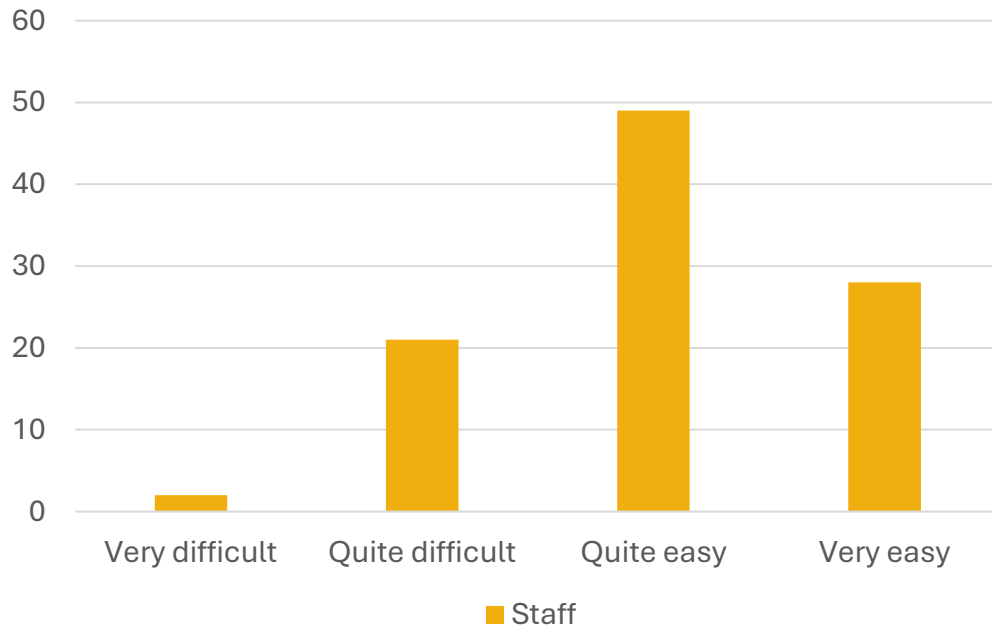
Students views of proportion of students who follow the policy



62% of **students** reported that '**all**' or '**most**' pupils follow the current policy.

When asked whether *they* follow the policy, **6%** said '**never**', **38%** said '**sometimes**' and **56%** said '**always**'.

Teacher ease of enactment

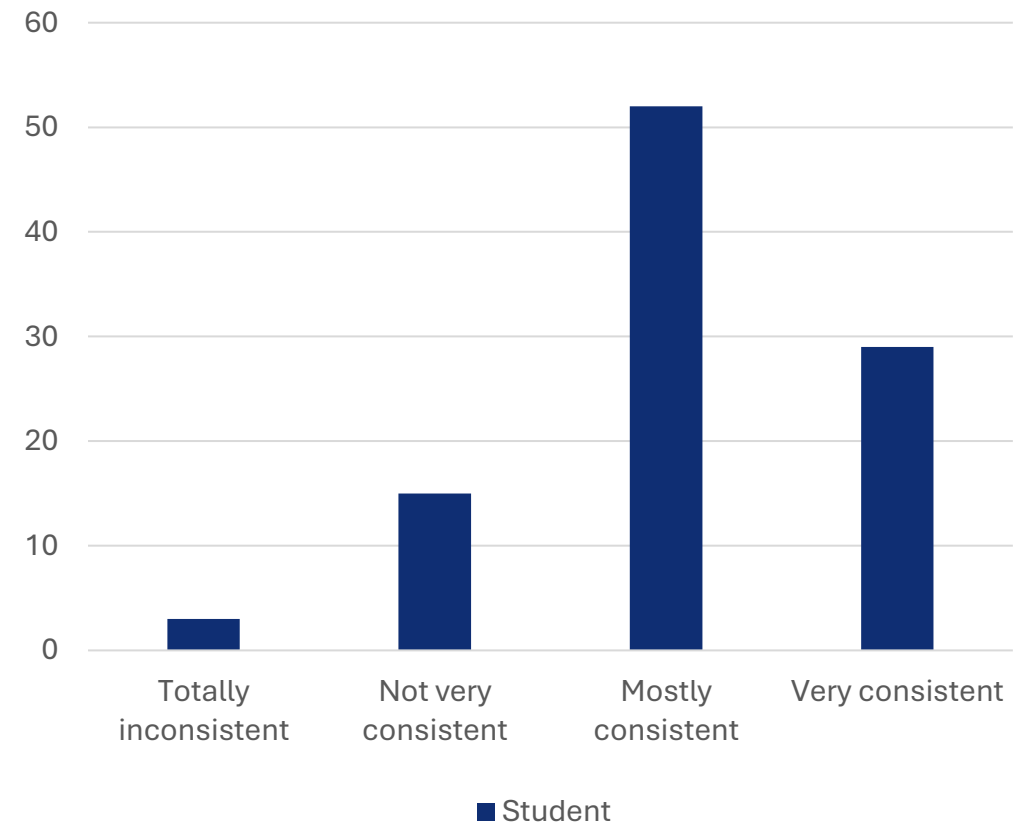


34% of **staff** reported that '**some**', '**many**' or '**most**' behavioural incidents they manage involve smartphones.

14% of **staff** reported that they deal with smartphone-related incidents at least '**once or twice a day**'. Only **2%** said '**at least once**' per lesson. More than half of **staff (51%)** said they deal with smartphone related incidents '**once**' or '**multiple times**' per week.

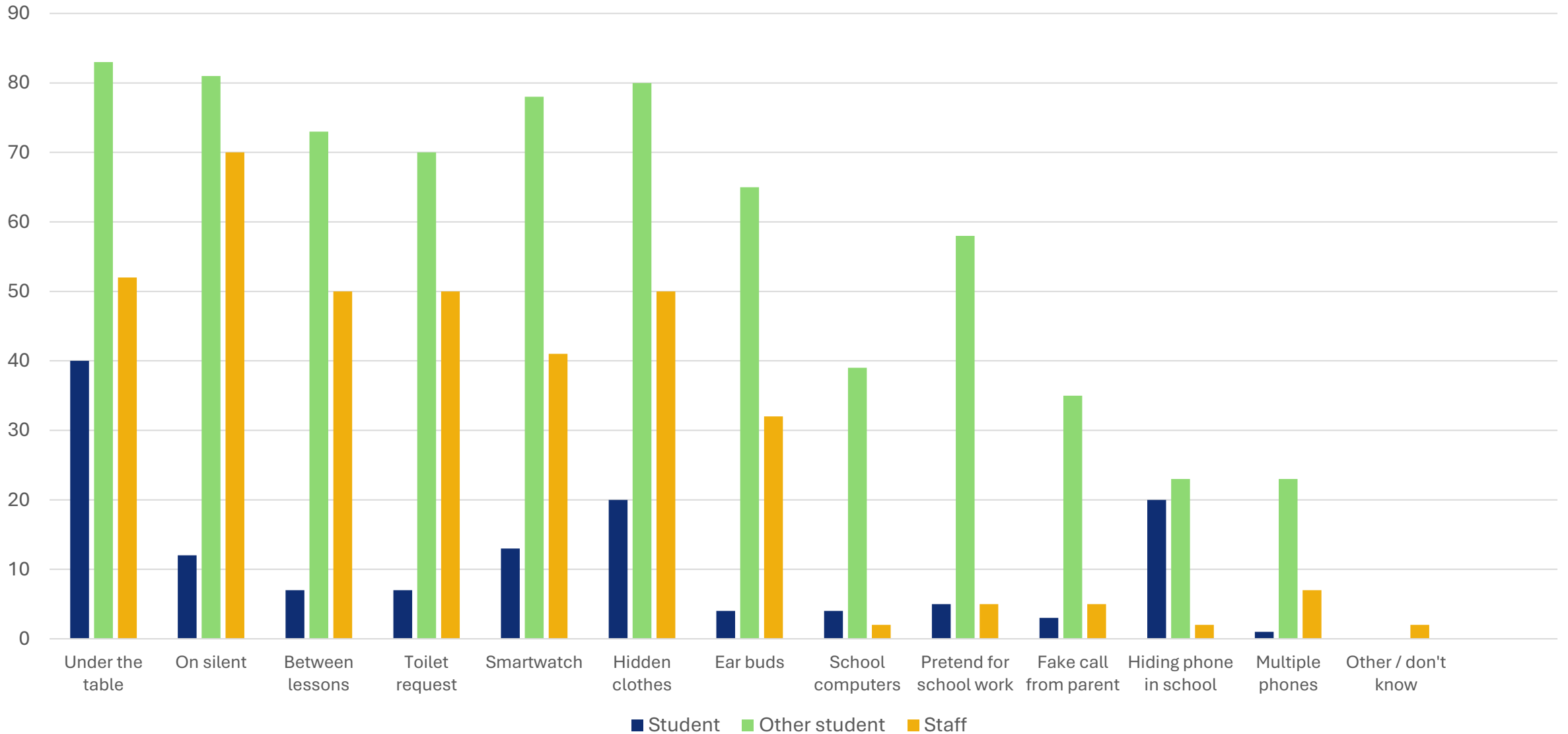
When asked how consistently staff enact the policy **81%** of **students** said '*consistent*' or '*very consistent*'. **18%** said it was '*inconsistent*' or '*very inconsistent*'.

Consistency of enactment

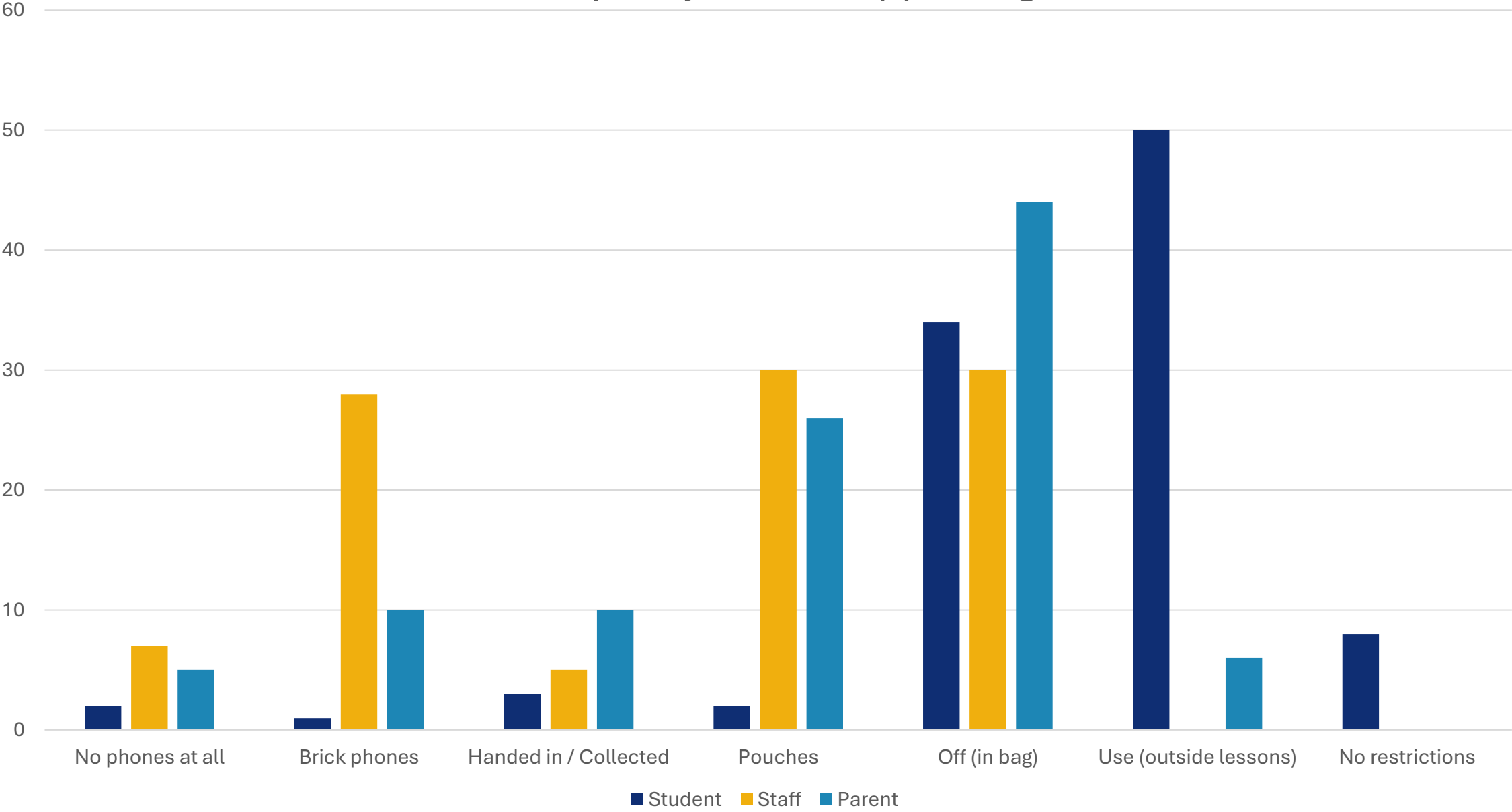


Strategies to get around policy

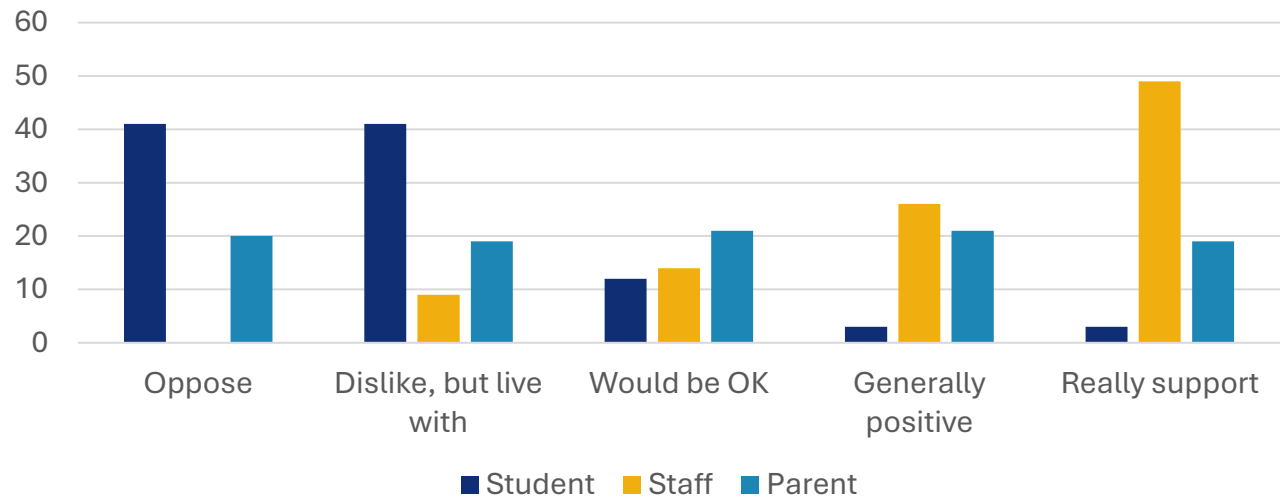
(This question asked the students about their own and other students' behaviours and asked staff about most common violations)



Which policy is most appealing?



Feelings about a ban



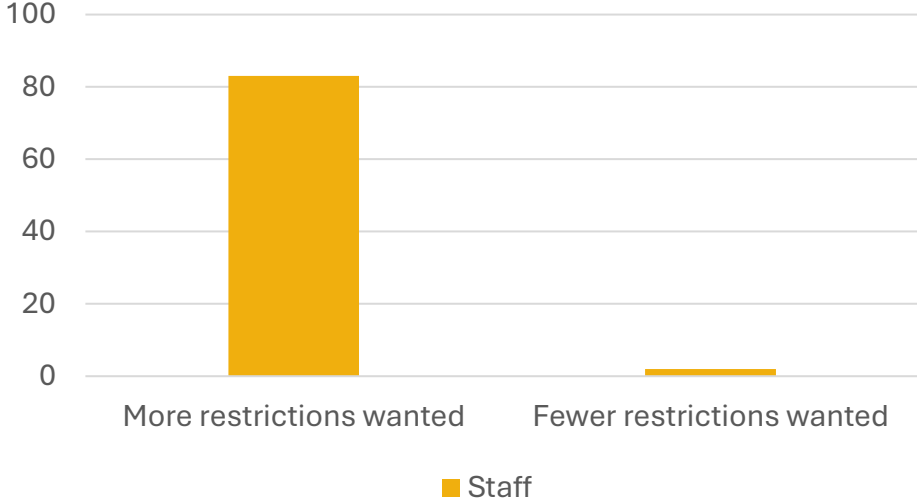
Student:
“Homework is on phones and for people who stay after school due to issues with getting home straight away would struggle if completely banned”

“Most, if not, all student home learning/ homework is set on ClassCharts AND is usually something that can only be done online {e.g. Sparx, Seneca}, which for obvious reasons can't be completed in the cover room/ cover lessons”

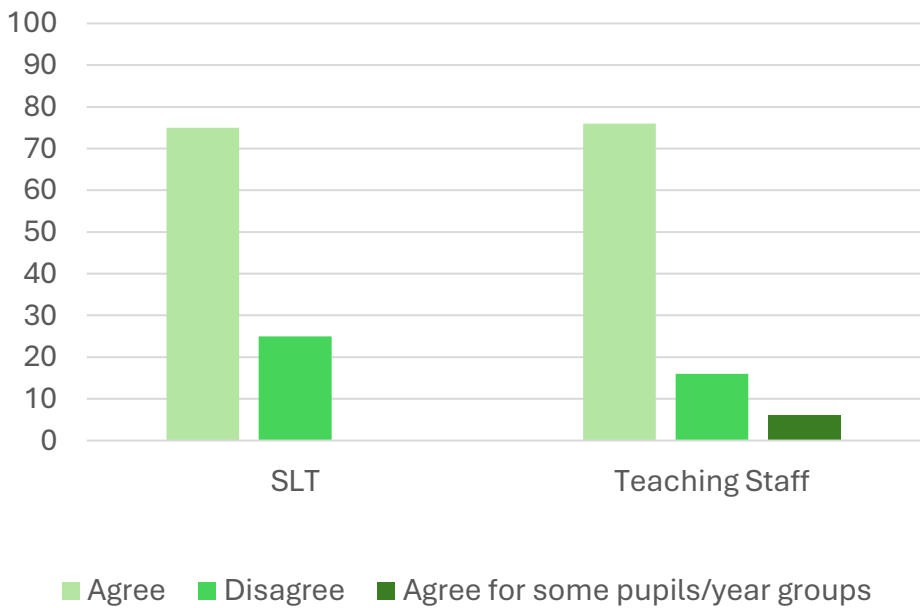
Parent:
“On occasions teachers encourage children to use their phones during school ie; to take a photograph of food tech or a photograph of a after school event. Some teachers allow them to play 'block blast' and other games during lessons. This shows inconsistency to the school policy which is frustrating”

Staff member:
“Racist language has increased as a direct result of social media - the use of phones in school encourages this language to come into school. The use of mobile phones can be observed to reduce the face to face conversations - eye contact etc - between students - in my experience- this is especially boys”

Staff beliefs



Staff beliefs about more restrictions



Summary of student qualitative responses concerning policy

1. Phones Are Necessary for Homework and Learning

Many students highlighted the reliance on smartphones for accessing online homework platforms or revision tools, especially in situations like cover lessons or after-school hours.

“Most, if not, all student home learning/homework is set on ClassCharts AND is usually something that can only be done online {e.g. Sparx, Seneca}... it’s really irritating to know that I’m sat reading or making notes just to pass the time because all of my home learning is online.”

2. Conditional or Limited Use During School Day

Students frequently suggested compromises, such as using phones at break/lunch or under teacher supervision during lessons for appropriate purposes.

“Phones should be allowed in school for certain purposes {for example, in cover, accessing home learning, or in art, using references}... having the phone face up at all times, on the desk where the teacher can see the screen is reasonable.”

3. Safety, Travel, and Emergencies.

Some students pointed out the importance of phones for safety, particularly for those who travel independently.

“Bringing smartphones onto the school grounds is vital for students who get on school busses or walk home... you can't just ban phones when you have students what travel like that.”

4. Music, Wellbeing, and Enjoyment

A few responses suggested that phones could improve wellbeing or concentration when used responsibly, such as listening to music.

“School should let us listen to music through one ear bud during lesson and let us use phones during break and lunch.”

5. Accessibility and Health Considerations

Some students mentioned medical or personal reasons for needing their phones accessible throughout the day.

“I have to use my phone quite a bit due to my condition... I use it in school and out of school for medical reasons.”

Summary of staff qualitative responses concerning policy

1. Inconsistent Enforcement Across Staff

Teachers expressed that inconsistent application of policy undermines authority and contributes to unequal behaviour management practices.

“Very few staff enforce the removal of a phone... this leads to a feeling... that you are the exception and draconian if you follow the behaviour policy.”

2. Fear of Confrontation and Reluctance to Escalate

Staff often avoid enforcing rules strictly to prevent confrontation, especially when students are otherwise compliant.

“Policy is to confiscate phone if it’s in a pocket... but not widely enforced because it’s a potential confrontation.”

3. Enforcement is Harder Outside Lessons

Enforcing phone rules between lessons, at breaktimes, or with unfamiliar students was noted as particularly difficult.

“During break time or between lessons... if it’s a child I do not know personally, it is very difficult to enforce rules.”

4. Procedural and Logistical Burdens

The administrative process of confiscating, recording, and tracking phone incidents is perceived as time-consuming and inconsistently managed.

“The process of handling and recording confiscated items is time-consuming.”

5. Pupil Noncompliance and Power Dynamics

Students sometimes defy instructions to hand over phones, undermining teacher authority and increasing stress.

“Students are reluctant and truculent... I feel it undermines my authority.”

6. Phones Commonly Carried in Pockets

Many students keep phones in their pockets, citing safety or convenience, making it hard to monitor or sanction usage fairly.

“Phones in pockets because students believe [they] will get lost or damaged.”

7. Surveillance Limits in Unmonitored Spaces

Teachers noted phones are often checked in toilets or changing rooms, where monitoring is not feasible.

“Cannot stop them checking them in toilets, changing rooms.”

8. Ineffectiveness of Current Policies

Some teachers recalled previous policies (e.g. overnight confiscation) as more effective and called for stronger, consistent support.

“The overnight/pick up at end of the week policy... I think was very effective.”

9. Equity and Access for Homework

Teachers recognised that for some pupils, phones are their primary means of accessing online homework platforms.

“Many students use their phones for homework as they don’t have another device.”

10. Social Media’s Impact on School Culture

Staff flagged social media as a powerful and often harmful influence that undermines rules and school safety.

“Social media influence... is overwhelming and creates a huge level of uncertainty.”

Summary of parent qualitative responses concerning policy

1. Safety and Communication

Many parents value smartphones for ensuring their child's safety during travel to and from school and for urgent communication.

"I'm much happier knowing my child has a phone to contact me during his journey to & from school... I would also fully support him being reprimanded if he was to break those rules."

2. Parental Management and Digital Boundaries

Parents described clear efforts to set boundaries, restrict apps, and delay smartphone ownership while recognising challenges from peer influence.

"We have regular conversations with her about online safety... we monitor often. We like that she has a phone during school hours as it allows us to feel like we can have contact with her."

3. Conflicting School Messaging

Several parents noted that although smartphones are restricted in school, many school functions depend on digital access.

"There is a lot of discussion about smartphones... but all communication is sent via ways that means a smart phone or electronic device is needed."

4. Concerns about Social Media and Mental Health

There was strong concern about the impact of social media on wellbeing, self-esteem, and peer pressure—often more than smartphones themselves.

"We are concerned about the overwhelming and mounting evidence of harm to their mental health, social skills and beyond."

5. Home Lifestyle as a Protective Factor

Active family lifestyles and strict routines were often cited as reducing the negative impact of smartphones.

"We don't experience a lot of the negative smart phone effects... our children are mainly outdoors and we see our friends in person."

6. Support for Balanced or Enforced School Policy

Many parents support phones being off during school time but oppose total bans, citing practical and developmental reasons.

“I support no smartphones in school but want to be able to track [my] child’s location... phones are needed to communicate with pupils re: possible traffic delays etc.”

7. Frustration with Inconsistency and Peer Pressures

Some parents felt undermined by inconsistent school policies or other families’ more lenient rules, which complicate parenting efforts.

“If one parent makes rules the other parents of a friendship group won’t necessarily do the same... it makes it hard to limit phone usage.”

8. Scepticism Towards Enforcement Measures

Doubts were raised about enforceability of pouches and whether locked phones teach children personal responsibility.

“We are not enabling the children to learn how to follow rules... there is no lesson if they are made to put it in a bag that’s locked.”

9. Suggestions for Alternatives or Education

A number of respondents proposed education over prohibition, including documentaries, peer-led projects, and national policy change.

“Children to be shown the documentary and debate the reasons for and against mobile phone use... Project for them to feed back to school.”

Section Summary

Students

- **56%** say they *always* follow the policy; **38%** *sometimes*.
- **62%** say most peers follow the rules.
- **81%** say rules are *consistently enforced*.
- **Key Concerns:**
 - Homework often requires phone access.
 - Phones help with *safety*, *music for focus*, and *medical needs*.
 - Suggest limited use at *break/lunch* or in *cover lessons*.
 - Some view bans as excessive: “*Phones can educate us too.*”

Teachers

- **77%** find rules *clear*, but only **40%** find them *effective*.
- **51%** deal with phone issues *weekly*; **14%** *daily*.
- **Key Concerns:**
 - Inconsistent enforcement weakens authority.
 - Safeguarding issues (e.g. filming staff).
 - Phones used for homework due to lack of devices.
 - “*Losing battle* – students hide phones or refuse to hand them over.”

Parents

- Mixed views: support *rules*, but need *phones for safety*.
- Concerned about *peer pressure*, *mental health*, *social media*.
- Many use *controls/limits*, but say others don’t.
- “*Homework requires devices – banning phones sends mixed messages.*”
- Favour *balance*: support *no use in school*, but not a full ban.

Dilemmas & Discussion Points

Smartphone policy is a major source of inconsistency, tension, and practical challenge. Students, staff, and parents broadly accept the need for rules—but diverge significantly on how they are understood, enforced, and experienced. Current approaches place strain on staff, complicate home–school expectations, and raise equity concerns.



Policy Clarity vs Daily Practice

66% of staff say phone rules are unclear before/after school; many report inconsistent enforcement.



Behaviour Management & Staff Burden

Staff describe confiscations as “time-consuming”, “confrontational”, and often avoided unless disruptive.



Parental Dilemmas: Safety vs Control

Many parents support phones for travel and emergencies but also express concern over social media harms.



Learning Systems Depend on Devices

Students and parents note most homework is digital, requiring phone access even for basic tasks.



Equity & Pressure

Some pupils and families feel pressured by peers to own phones or join group chats, despite personal or financial limits.



Student Perspectives: Practical, Mixed

Calls for phone use at break/lunch are common—but so are acknowledgements of distraction and misuse.

Section 2

Experiences and Beliefs



This second section of the report focuses on stakeholders' experiences with smartphones and their beliefs about them.



Pupil, staff and parent data are compared on identical questions and common themes to illustrate how students' view their experiences similarly and differently from their parents and school staff.

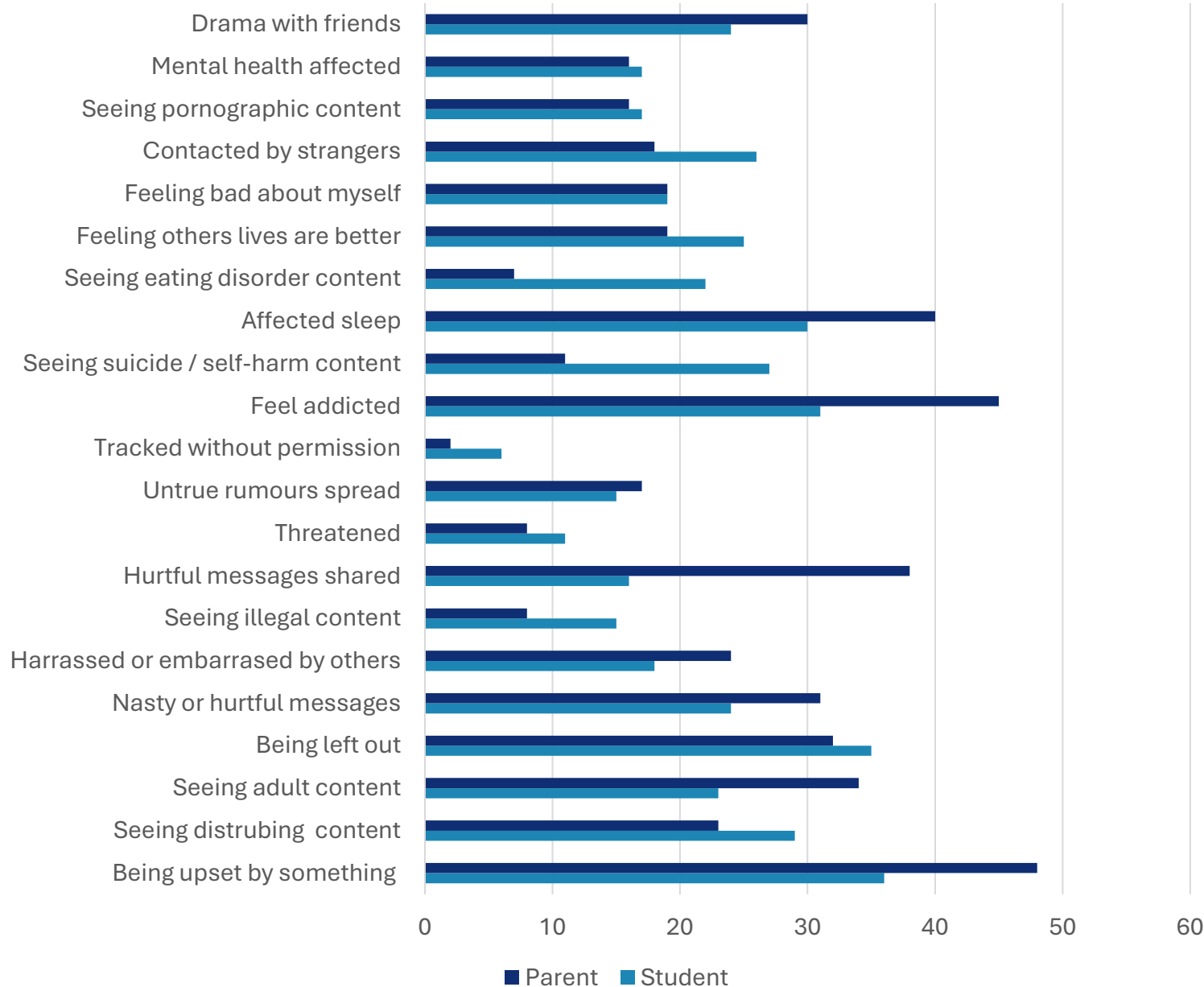


This section includes mainly quantitative data, with some illustrative qualitative data.



These findings are intended to support policy decision-making for staff and school leadership.

Negative experiences via smartphone / social media



Students tend to underestimate the frequency and range of negative experiences. **Parents** report **notably higher rates** of:

- Feeling addicted
- Affected sleep
- Hurtful messages, feeling bad about themselves, and being upset

However, there are a few experiences that **students slightly overestimate compared to their parents**:

- Seeing suicide/self-harm content
- Seeing eating disorder content
- Feeling others' lives are better

These differences highlight a **gap in parental awareness** of the emotional and social toll smartphones take, with some overconcern on extreme risks and under recognition of common daily harms.

Staff were asked about the types of negative behaviours they routinely witnessed.

The majority of **staff**, and in some cases almost all (**up to 80%**) witness the full range of negative behaviours from pupils with respect to smartphones.

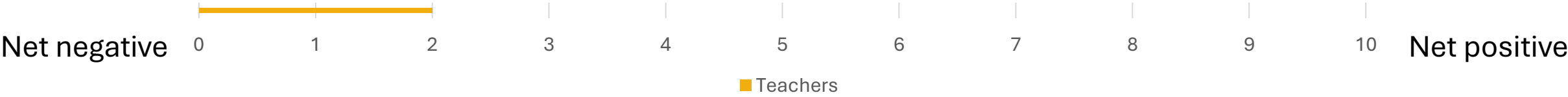
Staff: “*Students make Tik Tok videos in the changing room despite total ban*”

When asked whether, on balance, they see smartphones in school as a net positive or net negative, staff see it as more of a net negative (average 2 out of 10).

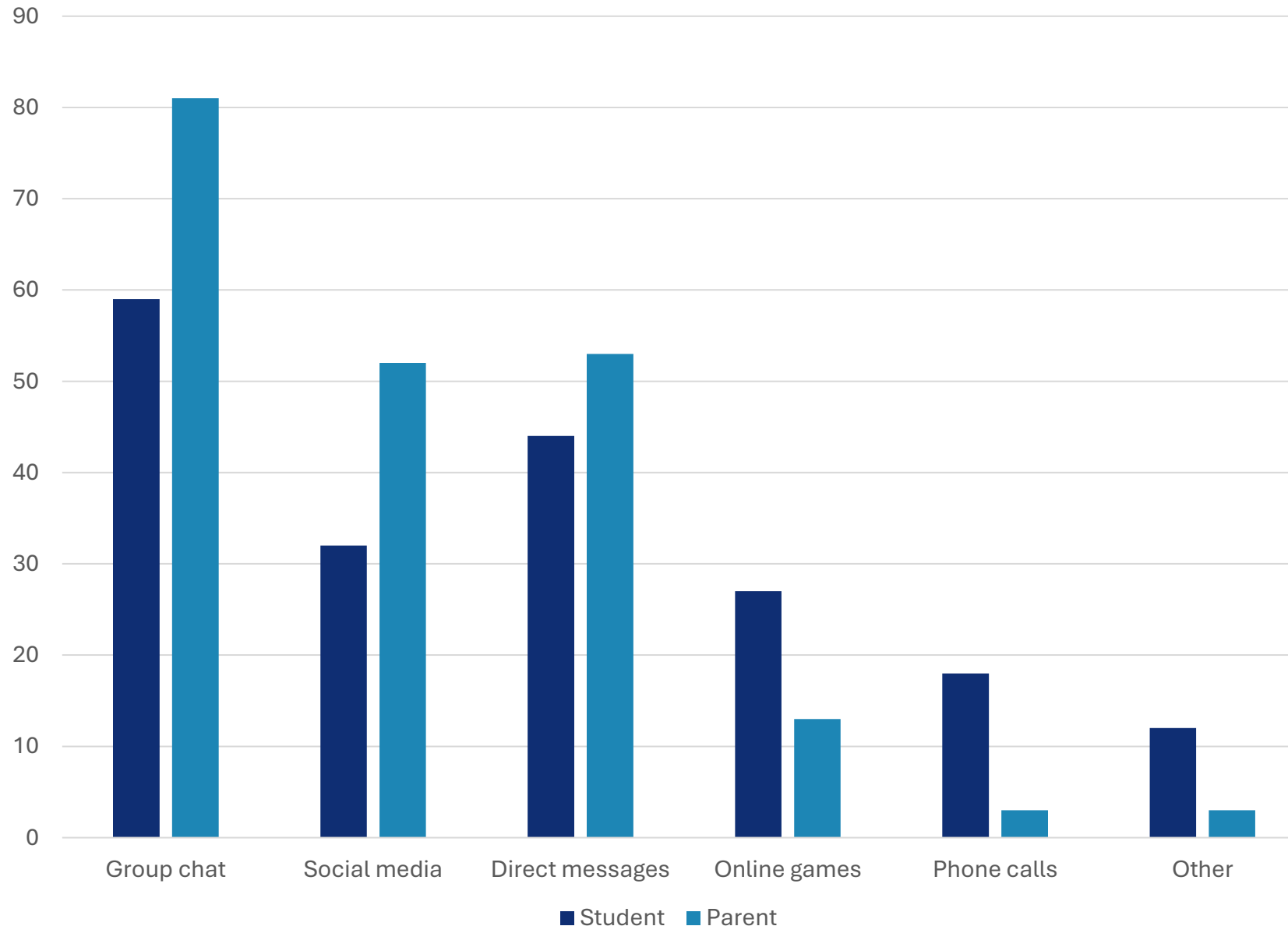
Staff witnessed



Are smartphones in school Net positive or Net negative



How do negative experiences occur?

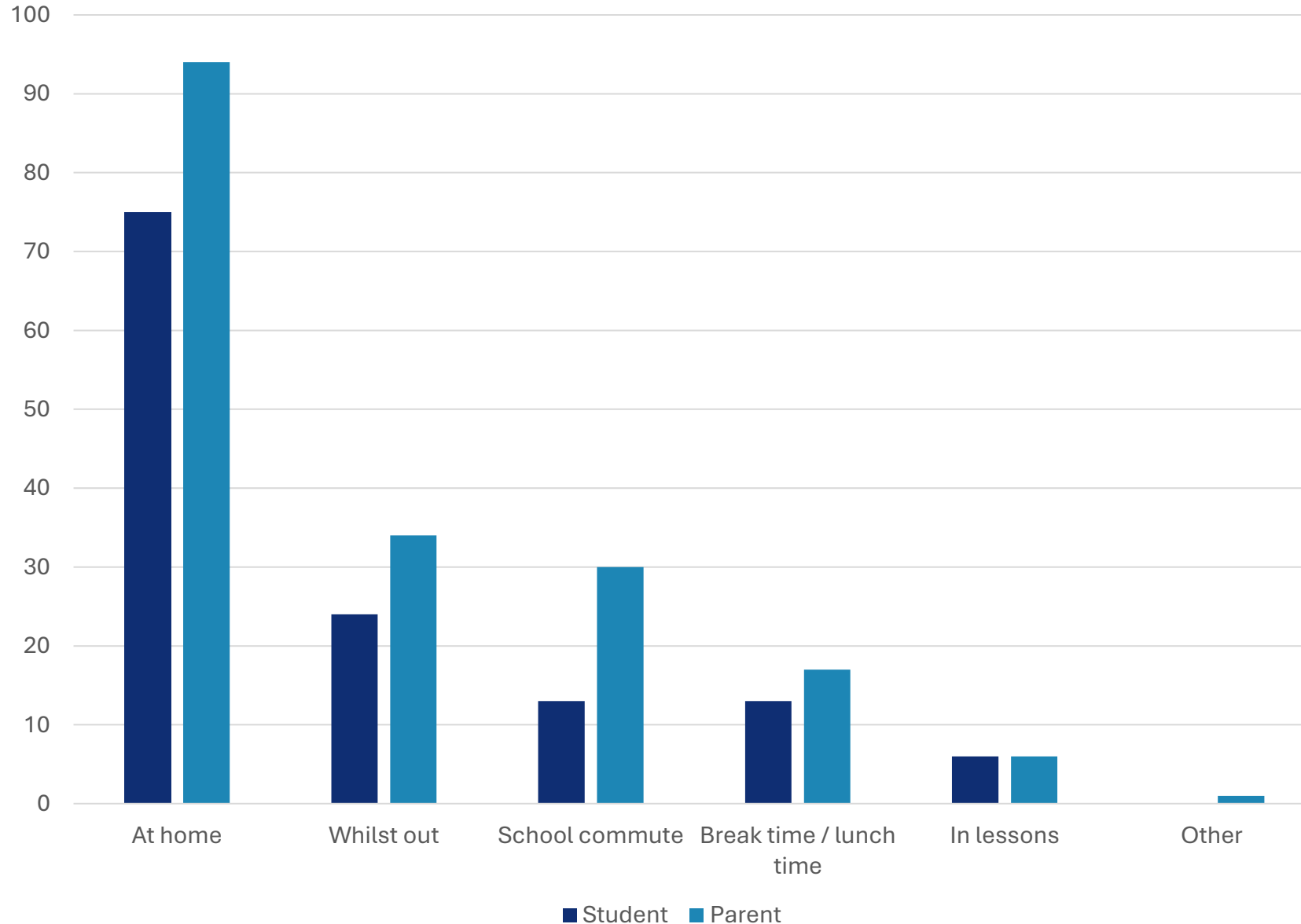


Parents and **students** agree that group chats (e.g. WhatsApp) are the most likely context for negative experiences.

However, there is disagreement about the scale of these between parents and students.

Parents seem less sure about the impacts of gaming and phone calls than **students**.

Where do negative experiences occur?

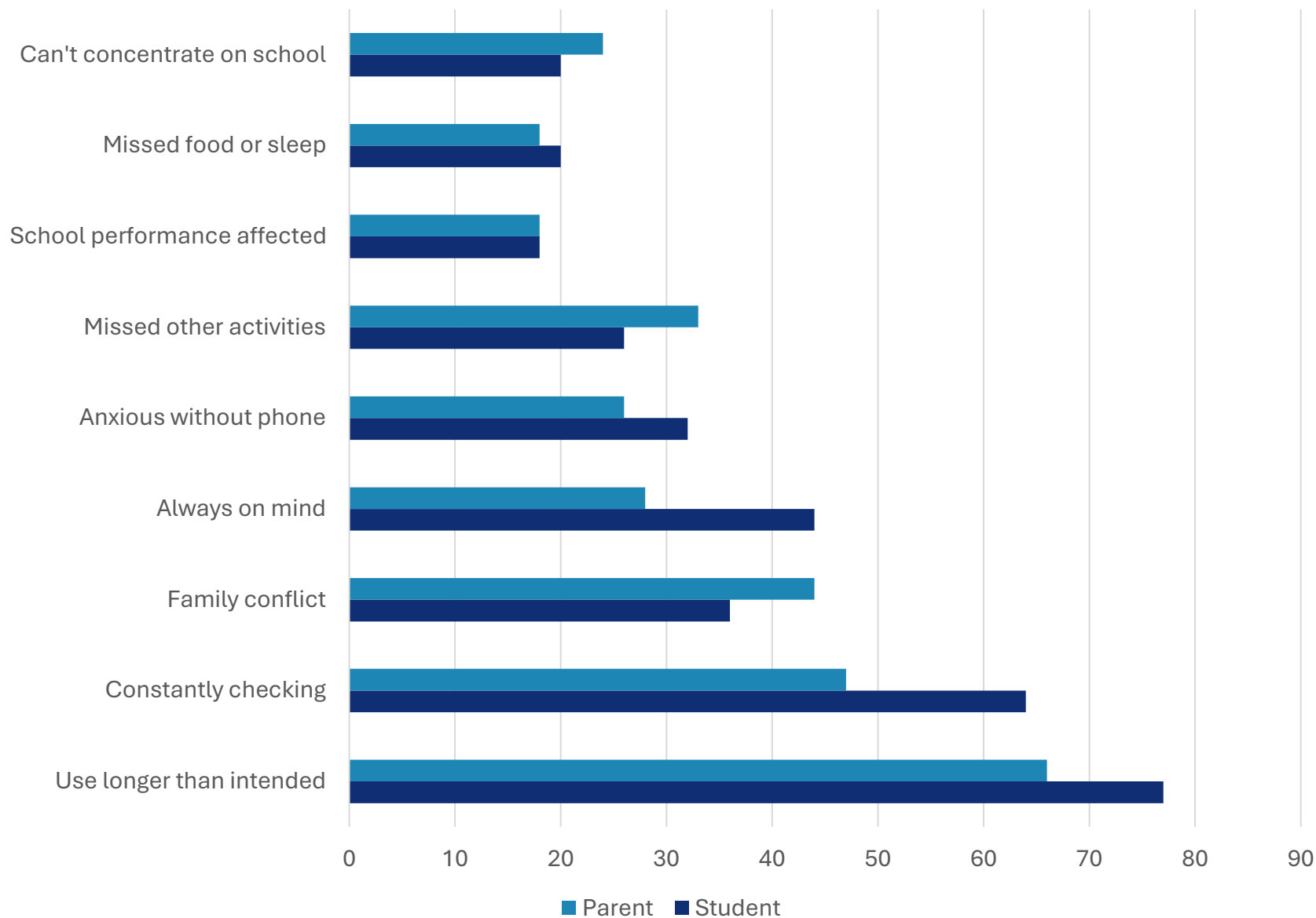


Most frequent occurrences of negative experiences are at *home*, whilst out or on the *school commute*, with at home being by far the most common answer.

More **parents** than **students** consider that it occurs more frequently in all those locations.

Combining data on when and where negative experiences occur reveals that messaging is considered the biggest problem and issues mostly occur at home or while out.

Types of negative experiences



Parents and **students** broadly agree on most categories, with the exception of *‘always on my mind’* and *‘constant checking’* where pupils estimate greater frequency of negative occurrences.

Parents are more aware of phones *causing conflict* and *other opportunities* students may be missing.

86% of **students** **‘agreed’** or **‘strongly agreed’** that they **‘have a good time’** on their smartphones.

Other relevant questions

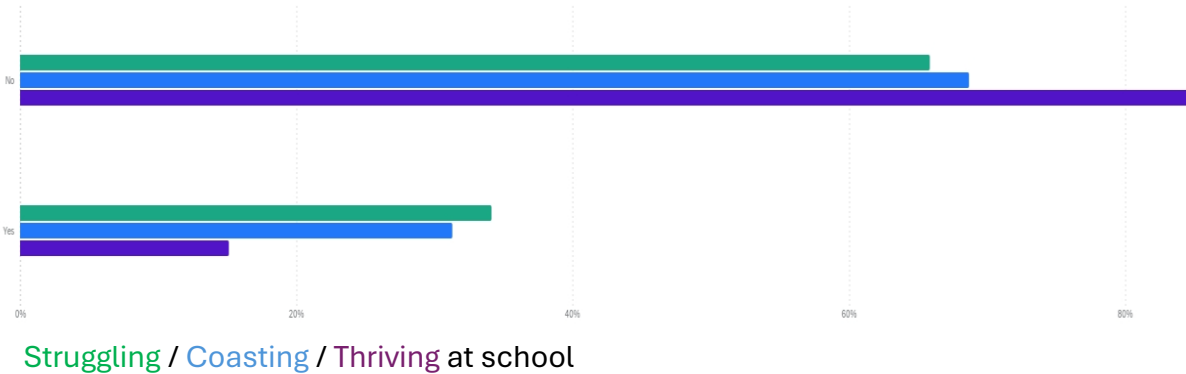
Safety featured highly in student and parent beliefs about smartphones.

74% of students **‘agreed’** or **‘strongly agreed’** with the statement **‘I feel safer with my smartphone’**.

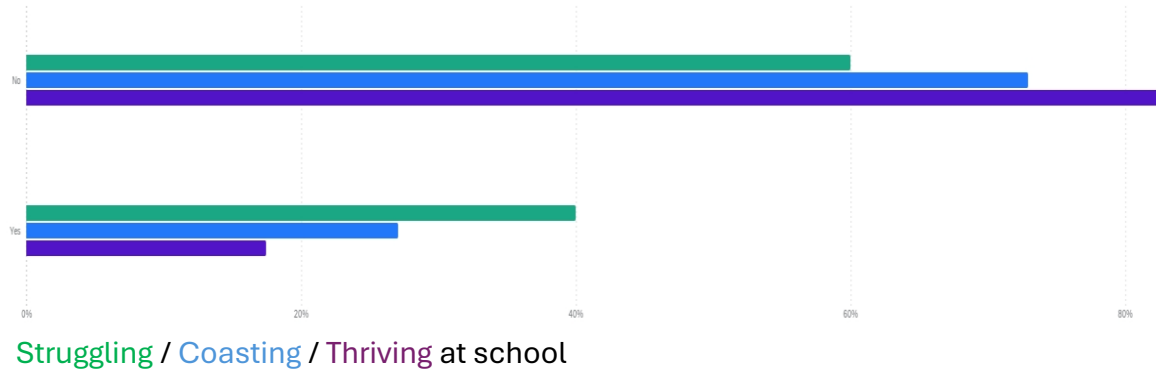
61% of parents reported that they feel their child is **safer is on their school commute** when they have a smartphone on them.

Students who report they are ‘**struggling**’ at school also report **more frequent negative experiences** on smartphones.

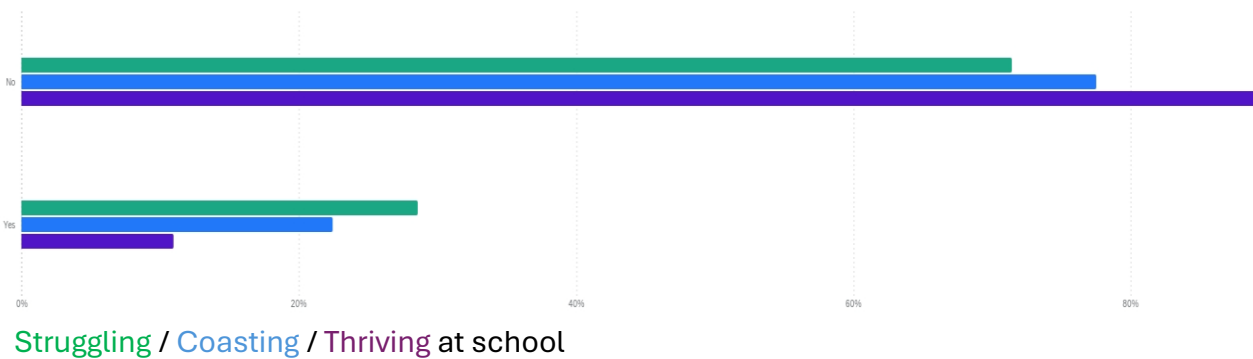
Nasty or hurtful messages were sent via smartphone



Seen adult content on your smartphone



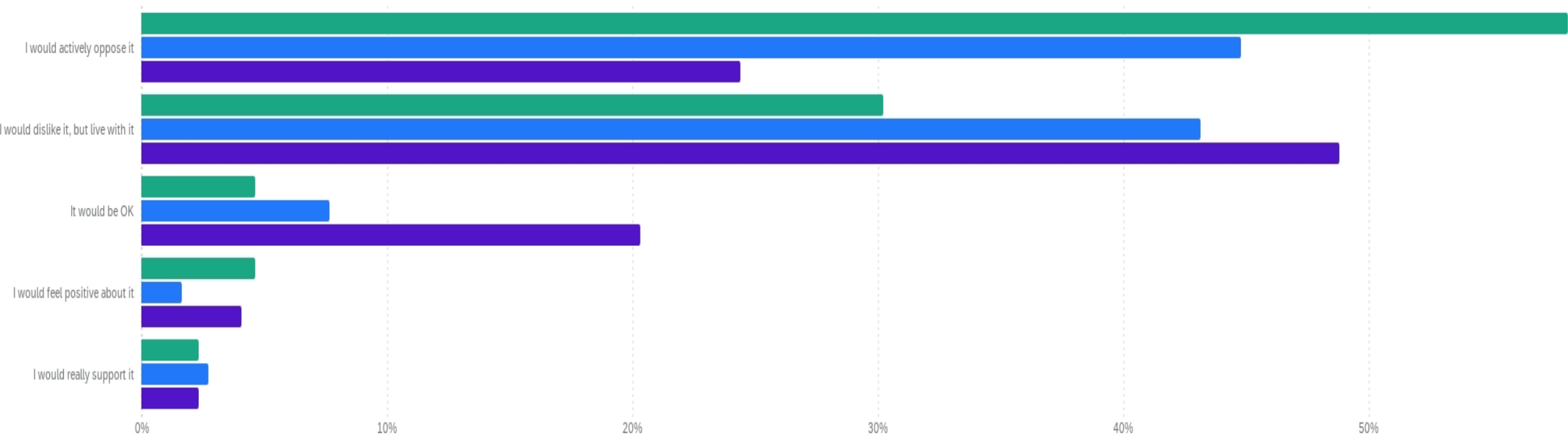
Harassed or embarrassed by others (e.g. in group chat)



Students who report to be *struggling* at school also appear to be most ‘at risk’ across many of the experience-related measures. This trend exists across all negative experience measures, also including: *concentration, constant checking, family conflict* and *school performance affected*.

Despite acknowledging they experience more negativity, ‘struggling’ students also **want fewer restrictions.**

Response to a total ban on smartphones



Struggling / Coasting / Thriving at school

Summary

Staff Views

77% say the smartphone rules are very clear, but only 40% find the policy effective in promoting engagement and learning.

91% feel supported by SLT on this issue.

51% of staff deal with smartphone-related issues weekly, and 14% daily.

34% report that some or many behavioural incidents involve phones.

Interpretation: Staff find the policy clear and feel supported, but enforcement is seen as inconsistent and burdensome. Many avoid confrontation, particularly outside classrooms or with unfamiliar pupils. The prevalence of phones in pockets and unmonitored spaces (e.g., toilets) undermines compliance. Social media is viewed as a harmful influence on school culture and pupil relationships.

Key Implication: For any policy to succeed, school leaders must address enforcement consistency, support staff in handling confrontations, and possibly revisit logistical tools (e.g., lockers, tracking systems) to reduce staff burden and tension.

Pupil Views

56% say they always follow the policy; 38% sometimes do.

62% believe most students follow the rules.

81% say the rules are enforced consistently.

Interpretation: Students generally report a moderate level of compliance and consistency, but they emphasise the practical need for phones—particularly for homework access, safety, and medical reasons. Many suggest compromises (e.g., phone use during break/lunch or in cover lessons), highlighting tension between policy restrictions and educational realities.

Key Implication: Policy development must account for digital learning needs and real-world travel/safety considerations, and consider limited, structured phone use windows that students perceive as fair and manageable.

Parent Views

High support for no-use policies during lessons, but low support for total bans.

Strong concerns about safety, mental health, and peer pressure.

Many parents use controls or boundaries, but note that other families' leniency undermines this.

61% say their child is safer on the commute with a smartphone.

Interpretation: Parents generally support structured restrictions but are cautious about total bans. Their primary concerns are safety, the need for consistent enforcement, and harmful social media use—often more than smartphone use itself. Many recognise the conflict between educational needs (e.g., digital homework) and behavioural concerns.

Key Implication: School policy should aim for a balanced, transparent approach—one that respects parental concerns about safety and communication, while working with families to address social media harms and peer pressure through education, not just restriction.



Dilemmas & Discussion Points

The consultation reveals broad agreement that smartphone use in schools needs careful regulation. However, the data also highlight practical challenges and philosophical tensions between safety, learning, wellbeing, and enforceability. Effective policy must balance clarity with flexibility, and discipline with development, in a context shaped by digital dependency, peer pressure, and safeguarding concerns.

Discussion Points:

Clarity vs Effectiveness - Why do staff overwhelmingly find the rules clear, but not effective? What barriers are preventing impact on learning and behaviour?

Consistency vs Autonomy - How can we improve consistency in enforcement without disempowering staff or creating a punitive culture?

Safety vs Restriction - Can we reconcile the need for phones during commutes or emergencies with the goal of distraction-free classrooms?

Digital Access vs Policy Integrity - How should we handle the contradiction between banning phones while setting digital homework that many pupils can only complete on a phone?

Enforcement vs Relationships - Are current enforcement strategies damaging staff-student relationships? What support or systems can reduce confrontation?

Parental Alignment vs Social Influence - How do we help parents maintain boundaries when peer norms and school policy enforcement vary?

Education vs Prohibition - Should policy shift towards developing responsible digital use through education, rather than focusing primarily on restriction?



What This Means for School Leaders

Some questions to prompt discussion:

- Are our policies aligning with daily practice—or are we operating in a grey area?
- How are we supporting staff to enforce policy consistently?
- What are the unintended consequences of phone access—or of banning them?
- Are we investing in digital alternatives if we limit phone use?
- Does the data suggest stakeholder support for a particular approach?