



Smartphone ban in schools – and what it means for students



Uninterrupted: Students at Archer Academy are among many from other local schools, like Fortismere, who have had a smartphone ban for years. Photo Adam Lawrence

Barnet Council is to be the first in the country to ban smartphones from all its 126 schools. From September, all primary school pupils will be prevented from bringing the devices into classrooms, with the rule being phased in for secondary schools. Here, Ruth A, a Year 10 student at Archer Academy in East Finchley, tells us the effects of her school's smartphone ban, which has already been in place for ten years.

Parents, politicians and education experts have been arguing for smartphones to be banned in UK schools by law due to their negative effects on young people. However, here at the Archer Academy, we have had a complete ban in place for almost a decade.

Since 2015, mobile phones with cameras and access to the internet have been banned at our school. The only devices allowed to be brought in are 'brick phones' with no camera or internet access, and these must be switched off and kept in our lockers throughout the day. There are firm sanctions in place if a student breaches the school's mobile phone policy.

This means that phone usage isn't a distraction during lessons. At lunchtimes we are free to talk and play games instead of scrolling, catching up on social media, and responding to notifications. This allows us to build closer friendships and feel more comfortable in the school setting.

Additionally, as Archer Academy is well-known for its phone-free rule, students are safer from muggings and

phone stealing when out and about, and the local police are very supportive of our school's smartphone ban.

Our school's mobile phone policy is increasingly relevant due to current debates around the contentious issue of smartphone bans in schools. Earlier this year, the government released guidance encouraging schools to stop the use of phones.

More recently, the Labour MP Josh MacAlister, a former teacher, proposed turning this guidance into law in a 'Safer Phones bill', making it a legal requirement for all schools to be mobile-free zones.

As someone who attends a smartphone-free school, I believe it is very beneficial to students' wellbeing, learning and behaviour.

Into the woods for a date with nature



Into the woods: Volunteers get to grips with nature in Coppetts Wood

By Jake Eiseman-Renyard I have been volunteering on Sunday mornings in Coppetts Wood Nature Reserve, by the North Circular and Colney Hatch Lane, since 2018. Work varies tremendously, from litter-picking and clearing invasive plants to uncovering paths, planting wildflowers and trees, putting up bird boxes and digging ponds. Like farming, what we do can depend a lot on the time of year.

Led by experts, the work can be a physical challenge but I find it great fun and extremely rewarding to make a difference to the woodland. It attracts people from all walks of life and I have learnt a great deal about nature and the history of the area from volunteering. The nature reserve itself is very varied, with wooded areas, open meadows, marshy areas and ponds.

If you're interested, you can email Coppetts Wood Conservationists at: coppettswood-conservationists@gmail.com or visit their website at: www.coppettswood.wordpress.com/volunteer

Puppet parakeets

Like East Finchley, Coppetts Wood has an annual festival. This year's festival is on Sunday 11 May and includes good food, a beer tent, great music, games and children's activity stalls. Since 2021, I have been running the popular family show 'Puppets Wood', which I also need volunteers for.

This year, its theme is the parakeets that have become so numerous in recent years. You don't need to be experienced in puppetry, as long as you're willing to learn and are able to commit to rehearsals (likely to be Saturday afternoons). Please contact me on jakeeisemanrenyard@gmail.com

Summer festival seeks your help to make the day a success

The East Finchley Festival is looking for volunteers as planning continues for the 2025 event.

The hugely-popular community festival will take place in Cherry Tree Wood on Sunday 22 June.

Volunteering roles include assistant stage managers, children's activity coordinator and parade coordinator, along with a number of smaller roles on the day of the festival itself, such as selling raffle tickets and stewarding.

The festival will again showcase some of the best local music and arts talent across two stages. There will also be arts and crafts and storytelling for younger visitors, while sports teams and clubs will provide

taster sessions for all.

Appeal to businesses

Organisers are appealing to local businesses to help with sponsorship as the event, which is free to attend, is funded entirely by donations from local organisations.

Festival sponsorship manager Catherine Stewart said: "The festival is a major day in the East Finchley calendar and we couldn't do it without support from the community and our local businesses.

"We are hugely grateful to the local businesses who have sponsored and continue to help fund the festival so we can put on the best event possible for East Finchley

"The festival has always been free to attend and we're proud to keep it that way. We'd

love to hear from any business or organisation who would be interested in helping to support us."

Along with entertainment and activities, there will be a wide range of food and drink available, while 80 local artists, crafters, makers and community groups will showcase their works.

For more information about volunteering or sponsorship, visit www.eastfinchleyfestival.org.

Did you spot the differences?

Did you spot all the differences in the two puzzle pictures we published in last month's edition. Here they all are in case you missed any.



Spot them all: The 20 differences in our festival puzzle photo are marked with white circles