

Smartphone ban embraced by European and international schools of Brussels

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By [Rita Alves](#)



Smartphones at a school. Credit: Belga/Jonas Roosens

As French-speaking schools in Brussels expand their bans on smartphones, European and International schools in the Belgian capital are also taking on the fight against too much screen time.

Last week, [a ban on the recreational use of phones](#) in French-speaking schools was approved for students of all ages. The decision comes as an expansion of the [previous smartphone regulations](#). It aims to improve the quality of education, social life, and mental health in schools.

Despite not being legally required to follow suit, many international and European schools in Brussels have already embraced similar approaches. Albeit each with a slightly different twist.

Tailored rules

Even at schools that operate under the same educational programmes, such as the four [European schools in Brussels](#) (EEB), the approaches to phones during school hours vary.

"The social fabric, cultural differences, and specific characteristics of our school community cannot necessarily be transposed to all European schools," explained the executive assistant at the European School in Laeken (EEB4), Laure Nossent, to The Brussels Times.

As a general trend, schools tend to fully ban smartphones for their younger students, while some exceptions are made for those in the last years of high school. This is the case for example

at the European School in Ixelles (EEB3), where some secondary students can use digital devices at the cafeteria.

Meanwhile, a 'no-phone' approach for all students is in place at schools like the British International School of Brussels (BISB) and the Bogaerts International School.



Credit: Belga

Lockers and bags are commonly used to keep phones out of sight during school hours. However, at the European School Bruxelles-Argenteuil, a 'no-phone pouch' is used, which is school-issued and €20. These pouches must remain sealed during school hours, and can only be unsealed by school staff.

But having smartphone rules does not mean technology is not used or discussed in schools. "[Students] will of course be accessing the online world and using their phones outside of that time. So we do find space in the curriculum to make sure that we talk about online safety," explains headteacher of the British Junior Academy of Brussels (BJAB), Francis Retter.

At some schools, smartphones are allowed in the classroom for teaching purposes. This is an approach for example at the EEB or the American school, Brussels Elementary High School (EHS). Other digital devices, like computers or iPads, are also used during lessons at some schools instead of a phone.

'Do what I say, don't do what I do'

Overall, schools have had a positive reception to the [new smartphone rules](#). "Teachers appreciate the framework it provides for managing smartphone usage in the classroom, while parents recognise its role in fostering a focused learning environment," said the Assistant Principal at Brussels EHS, Steven Smith.

Nonetheless, enforcing rules can be a challenge, particularly in schools where phone restrictions are more of a recent addition.

An example is the Bogaerts International School, where the implementation of this year's 'phone-free campus' was met with backlash from some students. "But recurrent checks and implementation of measures, such as communication to parents, lunchtime detention, confiscation of devices, etc, have helped them accept the measures," said the South Campus Head Sophia Kritsineli.



Classroom at a European School in Brussels. Credit: Belga/Laurie Dieffembacq

British school headteacher, Retter, recognises these challenges and is thankful his school had a no-phone approach from the get-go. "If a child has something and you take it away from them, that's a really difficult position to be in," he said.

In addition to it being a well-established rule, he attributes the success of BJAB's phone rules to the fact that it extends to the staff: "They cannot have [their phones] on show in their classroom. In our view, they have a key role model effect and otherwise, it's a case of 'don't do what I do, do what I say!'"

However, some parents are at times hesitant about smartphone rules. They often see the device as a way to ensure their child's safety. "On the one hand I agree but normally at parents' meetings I play devil's advocate," says Retter. "I normally give the example of myself, when I am on the metro, if I start scrolling I am completely unaware of what's around me...do you really think they're safe because they have a phone on them?"

Living in the digital world

Multiple schools indicated that, like other internal policies, the rules for devices like smartphones will likely be reviewed and adapted based on feedback and technological developments. "No school policy is ever set in stone," affirmed Laeken's Nossent.

In some cases, like for BISB, expanding the rules to devices such as smartwatches, is already being considered. At other schools, like the European school in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert (EBB2) or its counterpart in Laeken (EBB4), this is already the norm.

Regardless of how the rules develop, the digital reality of the society students live in cannot be ignored in the conception of (smart)phone rules in schools.



Credit: Belga/Siska Gremmelprez

The key is to understand what devices, like smartphones, actually offer. "It's a huge computer that they're carrying around in their pockets with access to all sorts. So we have to be really careful," says Retter.

Nonetheless, Retter, similarly to other headteachers, sees discussing and supervising the use of digital technologies as a responsibility not only for parents but also for schools. "They will be living in the digital world...We need to further their creativity, we need them to enjoy the challenge of using new technologies. But to be able to do it utterly safely."