

Written evidence submitted by Q3 Academy Langley

Academy Context

Q3 Academy, Langley opened its doors in September 2016, becoming the first brand new secondary education provider in Sandwell in a decade. The Academy presently consists of 1380 students, of whom 31.9% are Pupil Premium, 27.76% are recipient to Free School Meals and 7.56% are SEND. Our attendance and persistent absence figures have been amongst the very best in the entire country – this is particularly impressive when considering the socio-economic context of the Academy ('IDACI deprived') and the broad cultural mix of our cohort. Sandwell has recently been identified as the second poorest borough in the UK and only recently the Director of Children & Education (Michael Jarrett MBE) wrote to all parents outlining the importance of attendance and the impact of good attendance on outcomes. (<http://www.q3langley.org.uk/attend-school-for-the-best-start-in-life-sandwell-mbc/>). Further to this an NHS report in December 2022 reported that 34.8% of the population in Sandwell are obese and 70.8% are overweight.

Q3 Academy Langley

Mr Peter Lee: Headteacher and Founder of Q3 Academy Langley

"Q3 Academy Langley was the first school in the country to be built in partnership between a Local Authority (Sandwell) and an Academy Trust (Q3 Academies Trust). I believe we are reaching crisis point as a nation in relation to young people and social media exacerbated by Covid and in years to come we will view them like we do cigarettes with young people. I am shocked every time I go out for a meal and see so many families all sat across the table glued to a device not engaging in conversation. It is deeply worrying on so many levels.

That gave the start-up team a unique opportunity to set the culture for staff, students and families alike. In my time working in nine other Secondary Schools across the West Midlands I had seen the growing impact of social media and students' own devices – specifically mobile phones that had been creeping into school. Most schools "banned" but largely students subverted this and they often were brought out discreetly in lessons, playground, toilets etc. We only had 153 students when we first opened – and new team eager to do things differently meant we wanted to come up with a completely different system to eradicating this problem. After much discussion we came up with the model of handing them in during Tutor Time – and also returning at the end of the day. The unique way in which we did curriculum – with limited teachers for our new cohort inspired by the Ofsted Wasted Years (2015) report meant that logistically this could be achieved. We also designed a system that could be scaled up. It obviously isn't 100% perfect – but genuinely hand on heart we have barely none of the issues around safeguarding, bullying and issues of cybercrime that so many other schools navigate. We now have close to 1400 students here in the school – and essentially the system bar a few stylistic tweaks has not changed since 2016. Our first sets of published GCSE results place us at the top of our Local Authority and we believe for disadvantage students on cohort size puts us in the Top 10 in the UK for progress – in a borough that was named second poorest in the UK in 2023."

Table 1: Q3 Academy GCSE Results

| | KS2 Avg. | P8 | Disadv P8 | SEND P8 | A8 | EBacc | EnMa4+ | EnMa5+ |
|------------------|----------|-------|-----------|---------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 2021-2022 | 104 | +0.68 | +0.51 | +0.39 | 56.72 | 84.8% | 81.9% | 61.2% |
| 2022-2023 | 104 | +0.81 | +0.71 | +1.1 | 55.05 | 86.5% | 76% | 60% |

Table 2: Attendance Figures at Q3 Academy Langley

| | Cohort Size | Academy Attendance (National) | Persistent Absence | Disadvantaged/ Pupil Premium Attendance | SEND |
|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 2016-2017 | 153 | 98.2% (95.3%) | 0% | 97.5% | 98.2% |
| 2017-2018 | 390 | 98.0% (95.2%) | 1.3% | 97.4% | 97.5% |
| 2018-2019 | 630 | 98.2% (95.3%) | 2.3% | 97.5% | 98.0% |
| 2019-2020 | 870 | 98.0% (N/A) | 2.0% | 97.4% | 96.7% |
| 2020-2021 | 1110 | 97.5% (95.4%) | 5.34% | 96.6% | 96.1% |
| 2021-2022 | 1110 | 96.4% (95.4%) | 7.64% | 95.3% | 93.6% |
| 2022-2023 | 1260 | 95.8% (90.7%) | 9% | 96.6% | 92.1% |
| 2023-2024 | 1380 | 96.8% (91.1%) | 9.81% | 95.4% | Support (89.1%) EHCP (97.7%) |

Q3 Academy Langley: Mobile Phone and Screen Time Rationale

- All phones handed into phone boxes each morning
- All electronic devices handed into phone boxes each morning
- Phone boxes securely locked away until the end of the day, with no access to any devices during the school day
- Any student who fails to hand their phone in will face a sanction and may have the phone confiscated for a fixed period of time
- Expectations laid out to parents and students multiple times per year to emphasise the rationale behind the policy
- Family lunch every day is designed to serve the students a hot meal and encourage them to converse with peers without mobile phone distractions
- Screens are used sparingly in lessons and only for designated activities such as KS4 Coursework or use of educational software such as Sparx Maths
- The teacher is the expert in the room and the knowledge is taught 'from the front'
- Social Media is discouraged with students and families advised that the school is not responsible to 'police' social media. The majority of 'issues' surrounding social media are made the responsibility of the parents/carers. With some exceptions that the school may pick up (i.e. criminal activity, safeguarding & online bullying)
- In year 7 curriculum, we cover some of the legal safeguards regarding computer use, including overviews of the Computer Misuse Act, Data Protection Act and their implications for computer use
- Phishing, frauds and other email frauds, hacking, "data harvesting" and identity theft are discussed together with ways of protecting online identity and privacy
- Health and Safety Law is also introduced where students are made aware of dangers regarding screen time
- The rationale behind our curriculum is that when students encounter harm, they know how to respond and are able to mitigate it themselves
- Incidents can be dealt with appropriately, sensitively and effectively without 'trial by social media' as many schools face due to students recording teachers, peers and incidents

- Staff are protected from malicious or out of context recordings when doing their job and protected from invasions of privacy, memes and non-consensual recordings
- More time is dedicated to teaching and learning as teaching staff are not 'dealing' with mobile phone related issues – it also supports teaching and learning by avoiding conflict between staff and students over this issue. At Q3 Academy Langley there is rarely any conflict over devices as the culture has been set and the rationale explained to all stakeholders
- <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-mobile-phone-ban-doesnt-make-for-draconian-tyranny/>
- Part of the tutor time process involves senior staff led bag searches – this acts as a significant deterrent against students holding onto their phones as oppose to them putting the phone in the tutor box each morning
- During detentions, phones remain with the staff member that runs the detention. This expectation removes issues around things being recorded when there is a likelihood of student/staff friction
- Theft of expensive devices is nil –we've never had to investigate the theft of phones and can confidently state to parents that we won't spend our time looking into such issues should they arise, simply because students should hand devices in at the start of the day

Concerns reported to us from parents/carers and/or identified by school:

- We have seen an increase in students accessing inappropriate content (including pornography) and students are more forthcoming with disclosures, which we believe is due to this being a more prevalent issue and normalised behaviour in society
- Parents/carers report they have less and less awareness of what is being done online. Even when parents check phones, act proactively, restrict time, check apps and monitor data usage – children always find ways to work around these restrictions
- Social media concerns were the biggest issue for Q3 Academy Langley last academic year (2022-2023) with 32 concerns logged for this. Issues ranged from dangerous trends, use of platforms that were inappropriate and age restricted issues
- Q3 Academy Langley had nine reported cases of online bullying in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. However, eight of these occurred in 2022-2023 indicating a rise in the issues.
- Q3 Academy Langley had twelve reported e-safety issues reported in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. However, eleven of these occurred in 2022-2023 indicating a rise in the issues.

Pressures schools are facing:

Increasing safety concerns in the community and parents insisting that their children have their phone for their own safety. We have explained our policy to parents and pupils, and aimed to create a culture of mutual respect. We never tell pupils not to bring a phone to school. Many children use their phones on their journey, and call parents as they come through the school gate to let them know they have arrived. If there is an emergency, parents can call the reception and we will get a message to a child immediately.

- The rapidly changing technology market with parents becoming further and further disconnected from social media
- Societal attitude changing with the continual pressuring of schools for having 'rules' and the main stream media running stories for 'clickbait' when a school enforces a rule
- The increasing demand and attitude of trusts to 'digitally equip' every child – arguably a virtue signalling move, and not trust methods of teachers being experts and students making handwritten notes

- Loud, 'progressive' voices on social media who, despite evidence debunking these methods, still push and advocate for 'flipped learning' and bypassing the teacher who is a specialist and highly qualified in a particular subject area
- UN/UNESCO report recommending phones banned from classrooms due to the negative effect on children's emotional stability
- Teacher retention crisis – exacerbated by staff having their professional day and actions secretly filmed and posted online

Staff Perspective

In your experience what is the impact of screens and screen time on children/students?

- A lack of social skills.
- Keyboard warriors – unkind comments/words shared freely.
- Less likely to go outside and 'play'.
- However, a wealth of knowledge at your fingertips.
- Screens are addictive and waste a lot of time that could be spent developing other skills/knowledge.

What impact does the mobile phone policy at Q3 Academy have on the students?

- Less likely to be a victim of cyberbullying
- No distractions
- Less chance of theft
- Brilliant policy. One that another local secondary school has copied and has transformed their culture. Students are safer and less distracted.

What rules/limitations have you got in your own home?

- No devices in the bedroom. No devices half an hour before bed. Child reading and winding down. No devices until home work is done during first 45 minutes after returning from school each evening

What is your understanding on the impact of screen time on children's mental health?

- Negative mental health effects – anxiety, low self-esteem, social anxiety.
- Compulsive usage – inability to put phone down, take a step away from social media platforms.
- Apps like YouTube are addictive and videos roll on one after another and the content is not always appropriate for young children. More time on a screen means less time socialising and interacting with others. Less time developing new skills. Less time for children to develop their self-identity – know who they are, what their values and morals are, their hobbies, their different roles within the family and friendship group. This affects their self-esteem and confidence. Too much screen time can lead to low mood and depression.

Do you feel parents are adequately prepared to support their child with digital safety?

- The Academy puts out regular advice with regards to screen time and digital safety however, it is clear that parents are unaware of the risks of new social media sights etc.
- Conversations with parents with regards to safer usage and monitoring.
- In terms of managing time on devices – yes they are adequately prepared. In terms of being technologically savvy enough to monitor, filter and restrict – no parents are not adequately prepared and technology changes and advances so quickly it's difficult for parents to keep up.

Student Leadership Perspective from Q3 Academy Langley

50 of the student leaders from Q3 Academy Langley were asked for their views on the device and screen time policy at Q3 Academy Langley

In your experience what is the impact of screens and screen time on your health & development?

- Reasonable amounts of time spent can help your mood and creativity (depending on what you are doing);
- It may tire you out if you are being excessive with this;
- Can affect your sleep and physical health – may cause the body to have too much dopamine.

What impact does the mobile phone policy at Q3 Academy have on your education?

- Students feel they are able to focus more in lessons.
- Less online bullying (students have less time to do this so therefore it is not as bad as it could be).

What rules/limitations have you got in your own homes?

- Some students are allowed between 1 and 2 hours gaming time after school.
- Some have to complete homework until 6:30pm and then get their devices until 8pm.
- Some students have to complete their homework 1 hour before they go to bed.
- Snapchat not allowed for some.
- On a school day – their phone is taken at 7pm.
- Some parents check all social media.
- Some students do not have access to their devices if studies are not going well.
- Others are allowed devices at all times.

What is your understanding on the impact of screen time on children's mental health including bullying?

- Leads to being tired and groggy.
- Students identified feeling self-conscious due to unrealistic expectations shown on social media.

Do you feel adequately prepared with digital safety? What do you need to support you further?

- Gentle reminders throughout the year not just during online safety dedicated time on the PSHE curriculum.
- Re-phrase PowerPoints to make them more student friendly.
- Students feel they have sufficient knowledge and know to block and report.
- Students identified that some are more vulnerable than others and more support may be needed.

Do you feel you need phones in lessons? (Other than for coursework in Y10 & Y11/Sparx Maths etc)

- Students feel this is a definite no, as it would stop learning happening.
- Some feel that at breaks/lunches it might be ok.
- Some feel like students may end up receiving sanctions due to refusal to put phones away.

Parental Testimony

Parent A: I am the parent of two students currently enrolled at Q3 Langley Academy. Professionally, I am engaged in full-time employment in a senior role responsible for Information Technology within a global blue chip company. I provide this as to demonstrate my appreciation for the merits of technology while remaining acutely aware of its potential drawbacks.

Within my household, I have established stringent guidelines governing the utilization of screen time, contingent upon age group. The total daily screen time allowance is set at **4 hours total**, with the following provisions:

- Age 8-13: Devices are programmed to deactivate between 7:30 PM and 7:00 AM.
- Age 14-16: Devices are programmed to deactivate between 9:00 PM and 7:00 AM.

My children are subject to restrictions concerning the installation of applications, necessitating my authorization for any new installations. Furthermore, on my younger daughter's device (Aged 11), access to YouTube is restricted, permitting viewing only on shared family devices such as the TV, with the personal TV in her room being restricted from accessing this platform. Additionally, I receive a weekly report detailing the top five most frequently accessed websites.

Elevated screen time exposure in children may yield adverse effects in several dimensions, encompassing:

- **Physical Health:** Including issues like poor posture, eye strain, and even obesity.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Attributed to the blue light emissions from devices, which disrupt melatonin release, subsequently hindering sleep onset. Moreover, in the absence of the restrictions I have established, children tend to resort to device usage when waking during the night, further impeding their return to restful sleep.
- **Reduced Physical Activity:** As prolonged screen engagement often means reduced physical activities.
- **Developmental Delays:** Manifesting as impediments in social and cognitive skill development.
- **Behavioural Problems:** Studies have elucidated a correlation between excessive screen time and behavioural issues, encompassing attention deficits and heightened aggression, often compounded by content exposure as well as mere duration.

All of this can significantly impact a child's mental well-being, precipitating conditions such as fatigue, ability to concentrate, and potential concerns pertaining to the content being consumed, including violent or sexually explicit material. This also can of course lead to an elevated risk of encountering cyberbullying.

I wholeheartedly endorse the mobile phone policy implemented at Q3, advocating for the removal of phones while students are within the Academy premises and believe this should be implemented in ALL schools.

This policy stands to deliver several advantages, including:

- **Reduced Incidence of Cyberbullying:** Eliminating the potential for such incidents during the school day
- **Promotion of In-Person Interaction:** Facilitating the cultivation of vital social skills
- **Prevention of Academic Dishonesty:** By obviating the possibility of cheating
- **Enhanced Focus:** By eliminating classroom distractions
- **Decreased Incidence of Theft and Device Damage**

All the above results in less time and effort required by the school to address such issues, thereby saving valuable teaching resources.

By not overusing technology in school it also gives the child the necessary daily break required away for screens even more important for those without limits at home.

Given my professional background in technology, I am adept at implementing stringent policies within my home environment and am well-equipped to supervise and support my children in this regard. I was however particularly impressed with the educational video titled "The Digital Child," as it serves to illuminate the potential risks associated with technology to other parents. However, it is important to recognise all parents myself included are under an increasing amount of pressure to permit access to social media platforms, TikTok in particular, and extend screen time allowances. I think the Q3 policy helps ensure children are aware limits should be in place and it should not be free access.

Parent B: My daughter started year 7 in a different school (not Q3). At the time, she did not own a mobile phone as we felt it was not entirely necessary and wanted to delay such a purchase. We were only too aware of how addictive

they are and how they can be intrusive in ways that are difficult to manage. We didn't want her to be using social media either at such a young and vulnerable age.

However, we quickly found that this became a source of ridicule from her friends and fellow students. She was the odd one out and felt embarrassed and left out. As a parent this angered me because my reasons for delaying a purchase were about protecting her and yet this decision indirectly created new tensions and problems for my daughter.

We did bring our plans forward to get her a phone but did not allow any social media apps and in fact all apps required our permission using the parental controls facility. We retained full access to the phone so that messages could be monitored - both those sent and received.

A few months later she joined Q3 and it was a huge relief to know that phones would be banned during the school day. Whilst I understand that this practice may be seen as old fashioned or even wrong, I took comfort in the fact that I knew there were no distractions, or potentially harmful or abusive messages being sent to her which inevitably would affect her ability to concentrate and focus during lessons. It is very much a preventative measure by the school - prevent problems rather than deal with them after the event.

I believe that a huge amount of time is lost and wasted simply because of the distractions of a phone. This will always impact the quality of learning in the classroom. I also see huge benefits to the no phone policy in terms of broadening a child's focus and their ability to adapt and function without it - we become very lazy when we can only function through a device.

As both a parent and Governor in the school I have witnessed a very different approach to learning in the classroom that has provided structure and focus so that learning could be optimised. My daughter has thrived within this structure and has applied herself, mentored fellow students of her own accord and has excelled because so much distraction has been removed allowing staff to concentrate on teaching and bringing out the potential of the children. The exam results of the school speak volumes - a result of so many policies effectively increasing a child's ability to focus, learn and retain information. It has been refreshing to see engaging conversations take place over breakfast and lunch as hundreds of children discuss the topic of the day - they are continually learning through interactions with each other and staff and not simply retreating behind a screen.

Whilst we cannot deny the benefits of having such devices, we must be equally aware of the cost that comes as a result of their presence; lack of social/conversational skills, constant pressure of comparison and the negative impact on self worth to name a few. I would encourage any school to trial this and see the difference that it can make.

Parent C: The more screen time he gets the less he wants to leave the house, the more he struggles with social anxiety and the less talkative he gets. I do electronic free days quite often. I try to take him out as much as possible to places away from technology.

My son has to do something outside of school other than gaming/technology that does not cost a lot but he gets a lot out of. e.g. He's completed beavers cubs and scouts. Is now competing in men's hockey, sport helps him get off his phone and gets him out. Even if it is going to friends to watch rugby.

At 9 pm everything goes off, phone is out of his room. There is no excuse to have it as an alarm as I wake him up.

Screen time is detrimental. I recently took my son on holiday and he said he never needs to go anywhere again as he can just watch it on TV or in simulation games - I was not impressed. It made me more determined for him to see things and actually thanked me for a lovely holiday. We had limited Wi-Fi for the whole holiday, which was great as we learnt to play new card games, he cooked and we walked lots.

I am absolutely not prepared as a parent as technology increases, my knowledge decreases. Any misbehaviour from him, then all gaming, technology and phone are removed. Especially if I feel that it's screen time that's caused it.

The best think about the Q3 policy is that the kids can concentrate on school. They do not have to worry about who has a phone out, pictures being taken, recording or phones being stolen. They talk to each other a break times, instead of sitting on their phones.

My son thinks all this that I do is selfish. His friends can have everything on all night and access to their phones. I feel I'm in the minority and that's hard knowing how he views what I do.

Terms of Reference

- **What is the current understanding of how screen time can support and impact children's development and educational outcomes, including the effect on concentration and behaviour?**
 - Screen time is hugely detrimental to the educational development of children's educational outcomes
 - Q3 Academy Langley have minimum use of laptops in lessons and instead focussing on the teacher as the expert; use of knowledge organisers; revision guides and written notes
 - Q3 encourage use of technology for educational purposes via approved apps and programmes such as Sparx maths; Seneca and GCSE Pod – students may be assigned tasks and revision using these specific programmes and often this is encouraged to be completed as independent learning. This is to avoid losing time in the classroom with the expert
 - Q3 Academy Langley have continued to prove that every student being allocated a laptop/Chromebook is not required. Students do not use a digital device and the results and progress rank the Academy in the top 2% nationally for progress
 - Mobile phones in lessons are a distraction and in the wider school context they are also a cause of bullying, behavioural issues and safeguarding concerns
- **What is the current understanding of how screen time can support or impact children's wellbeing and mental health, including the use of social media?**
 - Screen time and social media does not support children's wellbeing or mental health
 - Q3 Academy Langley's perspective is that mobile phones and electronic devices will soon be viewed like we view cigarettes
 - The majority of issues that we deal with related to mental health or anxiety have been sparked by conversations and comments on social media or unrealistic expectations on teenagers as defined by social media
 - Q3 Academy Langley look to offer a digital detox for at least 7 hours per day for every child to better support their mental and emotional well being
 - Drives for additional screen time i.e. through use of technology in the classroom will further detriment the child's mental and emotional well being
- **How effective is digital safety education in schools, for example the PHSE curriculum, in educating children about screen time and online harms?**
 - Schools attempt to deliver effective digital safety education and teach as much as possible
 - Guidance and resources are clear for a general approach to these topics
 - The biggest difficult is the speed in which the technology and digital sector is evolving, with information and updates very quickly out of date
 - Support and guidance from the tech companies and social media platforms would be warmly received to support the curriculum
- **How can schools and parents be better supported to manage children's screen usage, for example, through age-related guidance? Could the Department for Education be doing more in this area?**
 - Support and guidance from the tech companies and social media platforms would be warmly received to support the curriculum

- **What policies and practices are schools developing to manage children’s recreational screen usage, particularly mobile phones?**
 - At Q3 Langley Academy, all mobile phones, screens and electronic devices are handed in each day – offering students a chance for digital detox; avoid distractions; focus on learning; avoid issues such as lost or stolen devices
 - All students are served a daily hot meal for lunch and encouraged to converse with peers and do not have access to devices; students are outside ‘playing’ and not on digital devices but instead conversing and getting fresh air
 - On school trips and visits – students have to hand their phones in and they also do so overnight as well. This is to encourage conversation; sensible sleeping patterns; to avoid bullying and safeguarding issues and to ensure a digital detox
 - Q3 Academy Langley encourage parents to deal with all social media issues and do not ask staff to deal with social media issues (with some exceptions i.e. safeguarding). This is to encourage parental responsibility and to ensure staff can focus on supporting students with learning and progress and not have time used up by social media investigations
 - The dangers of mobile phone use are reiterated in half termly assemblies; PHSE sessions; tutor time and all daily assemblies with the rationale explained of the Q3 Academy Langley policy

- **How is screen use as an academic tool being managed in schools, for example, in lessons or for homework?** To what extent are schools reliant on external sources, such as the use of google for education and classroom activities?
 - Q3 encourage use of technology for educational purposes via approved apps and programmes such as Sparx maths; Seneca and GCSE Pod – students may be assigned tasks and revision using these specific programmes and often this is encouraged to be completed as independent learning. This is to avoid losing time in the classroom with the expert
 - Schools are reliant to a small extent on resources such as Google Classroom to share information or complete documents and work for BTEC Courses
 - Schools using traditional and proven teaching methods, with the teacher at the front of the classroom as the expert, using knowledge organisers, revision guides and visualisers become less or non-reliant upon technology
 - If students are using laptops in lesson, they have to use responsibly and are monitored by filtering software

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