



Department
for Education



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Screen use by children aged 5 to 16

Call for evidence

Launch date Monday 8 June 2026

Respond by Monday 29 June 2026

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Introduction

This call for evidence seeks robust and clearly presented evidence to inform the development of new parental guidance resources on screen use for children and young people aged 5-16. It will also inform future policy thinking on the use of screens in schools.

Guidance on submitting evidence

This call for evidence focuses on screen use and experiences that can be influenced by parents and young people.

We are particularly interested in evidence to:

- Better understand how children use screens (e.g. purpose, timing, context);
- Identify both the benefits and risks of screen use (including play, learning, and social interaction);
- Understand how impacts vary by age, developmental stage, and context;
- Support real-world decision-making by parents and young people, and identify what works in practice to support positive outcomes;
- Understand how families manage and support screen use.

This includes evidence on a broad range of digital experiences, including social media, gaming, educational technology, and emerging technologies such as AI, smart/connected devices and interactive tools. We are interested in how screens are used and experienced, not just time spent.

Respondents should aim to:

- Clearly explain what the evidence shows and how strong it is;
- Distinguish between correlation and causation where relevant;
- Provide references or links where possible;
- Specify the age group(s) the evidence relates to.

Age groups

For Part A, respondents should provide age-specific evidence wherever possible, using the following groupings:

- 5–7 (early primary);
- 8–11 (later primary);
- 11–12 (transition to secondary);
- 13–14 (early adolescence; increasing social media use);
- 15–16 (mid-adolescence; GCSE period).

For **Part B**, respondents should similarly provide age-specific evidence where possible, but across the 4-16 years range. This is to account for suitable consideration of the usage of screens by children in reception years, who are also in school-based settings.

Where evidence spans multiple groups, please indicate this clearly and highlight any differences.

Who this is for

We want to collect evidence from individuals and organisations with a range of knowledge and expertise.

We are particularly interested in published or ongoing scientific research, systematic reviews and nationally representative longitudinal or cross-sectional studies.

We anticipate that this will include evidence from, but not be limited to:

- Research organisations and academics in the fields of child development, public health (including mental and physical health), child rights and digital literacy;
- Health practitioners;
- Charities and representatives of relevant sectors (education, health, parents, tech);
- Pedagogy and education experts, particularly with knowledge and expertise of how school practices influence children's screen use (**Part B**).

Issue date

The call for evidence was issued on 8 May 2026.

The evidence gathered from **Part A** (the use of screens by 5-16 year olds) will be considered by our 5-16 Expert Advisory Group (EAG), who will be developing an independent evidence review to inform new parent-facing guidance resources on 5-16 screen use.

The evidence gathered from **Part B** (screen time and usage in schools) will be considered by the department alongside continued engagement with the education and EdTech sectors to inform future policy development.

The call for evidence will run for approximately three weeks.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the content of this call for evidence, you can contact the team at screentime.guidance@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the call for evidence process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk, telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [DfE policy papers, consultations and calls for evidence](#).

About this call for evidence

While the government continues to closely monitor the emerging evidence base on the causal relationship between screen use, social media, broader online activity and children and young people's health, it has asked a group of experts to review the currently available evidence on the use of screens by 5-16 year olds and produce recommendations to inform parent-facing guidance resources developed by government.

This call for evidence is seeking information the group should consider when producing the new guidance. We use the terms 'parents' and 'parenting' to encompass the wide range of family and caring dynamics that may take place for 5-16-year-olds.

In the following questions, the term 'impact' should be considered broadly; for example, including development, wellbeing, social and emotional impacts, physical and mental health, and safeguarding risks.

Responses to the questions in **Part B** will be reviewed by the Department for Education and the evidence gathered will inform policy on the use of screens in schools by children in reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request an alternative format of the form.

By email

screentime.guidance@education.gov.uk

By post

Behaviour Unit
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P3BT

Deadline

The call for evidence closes 29 May 2026.

Section 1 Respondent information

About you

1. What is your name/the name of the organisation you are responding on behalf of?
2. Please tell us about your role, expertise or organisation, and why you are responding to this call for evidence.
3. Do you consent to the Department for Education contacting you via email about your response?

Please note: we ask for your name, information about your role, expertise or organisation so that we can understand the context and credentials of respondents, assess the evidence submitted appropriately, and contact you if clarification or follow-up is needed.

Yes/No

4. If you are happy to be contacted about your response, please provide your email address.
5. Would you like us to keep your response confidential?

Yes/No

6. If you would like us to keep your response confidential, please explain why.

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this call for evidence, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it confidential. If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department. The Department for Education will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Evidence submitted will be shared with the Expert Advisory Group, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Children's Commissioner's office, but personal information will not be shared without your express consent.

Privacy Notice

The personal data (name, email address and any other identifying material) that you provide in response to this call for evidence is processed by the Department for Education as a data controller in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this call for evidence. The Department for Education relies upon the lawful basis of article 6 (1) (e) of the UK GDPR which process this personal data as part of its public task, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for conducting calls for evidence as part of our function.

The Department may use internal AI tools to support the analysis of responses submitted to this call for evidence to inform policy development. Any such use will take place within secure departmental system.

Your information will not be shared with third parties unless the law allows or requires it. The personal information will be retained for a period of 12 months following the closure of the consultation period, after which it will be securely destroyed. You can read more about what the Department for Education does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter, which can be found here: [Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK](#)

7. If you would like us to keep your response confidential, please explain your reason for confidentiality.

Section 2

Part A: The use of screens by 5–16-year-olds, questions

About this call for evidence

The government is continuing to monitor the evidence on how screen use, social media and online activity affect children and young people's health. It has asked an independent Expert Advisory Group (EAG) to review the current evidence on screen use among children aged 5 to 16 and produce recommendations to inform new parent-facing guidance.

This call for evidence asks for information to support that work. We are seeking **robust, clearly presented evidence** that can help develop **practical, actionable advice for parents and young people**, particularly in real-life situations (for example, when, how and why children use screens). We are interested in evidence on **both the benefits and risks** of screen use. The terms 'parents' and 'parenting' are used to reflect the wide range of family and caring arrangements.

We are interested in the **full range of children's digital experiences**, including content, contact, conduct and commercial factors, and in both harms and benefits, such as play, enjoyment, learning and social connection.

Screen use covers a wide range of activities and technologies, including TV, gaming, social media, educational tools and creative or interactive play. It also includes emerging technologies, such as AI, wearables and smart devices.

We welcome evidence from a range of sources, including causal, longitudinal and qualitative research, as well as professional experience. We are also interested in any systematic or evidence reviews in this space. Please provide references where possible, clearly distinguish the type of evidence, and explain the strength and limitations of the evidence.

Respondents should provide age-specific evidence, using the groups 5–7, 8–11, 11–12, 13–14 and 15–16 where possible, and clearly indicate where findings differ by age.

Questions

Impacts and outcomes

1. What evidence is there on the positive and negative impacts of digital screen use among 5–16-year-olds, including effects on:
 - cognitive, language and brain development;
 - physical health;
 - mental health, emotional wellbeing and social development; and
 - broader developmental outcomes?

How do these impacts vary according to patterns of use (e.g. duration, frequency, timing, displacement of other activities such as sleep and physical activity), type of activity, and age?

Types, purposes, and design features of screen use

2. What evidence is there on how different forms of digital screen use affect children aged 5–16, including differences by:
 - device, platform or activity type (e.g. TV, games, social media, messaging, digital reading, AI and chatbots);
 - purpose of use (e.g. educational, social, creative, entertainment/ play passive/background use); and
 - platform features and design characteristics (e.g. recommendation systems, private messaging, commenting, live streaming)?

What factors are associated with greater benefits or risks?

Problematic or compulsive screen use

3. What evidence is there on problematic, excessive or compulsive patterns of screen use among 5–16-year-olds, including:
 - prevalence and indicators;
 - risk and protective factors; and
 - associations with mental health, wellbeing, self-esteem, social development and other outcomes?

Parental behaviours

4. What evidence is there on the role of parents, families and the home environment in shaping children's screen use and its impacts, including:
 - relationships between parent and child screen use;
 - parental attitudes towards technology and broader parenting approaches; and
 - parents' and children's perspectives on managing screen use.

Interventions

5. What evidence is there on the effectiveness of interventions, programmes, guidance and other forms of support designed to help parents and families manage the screen use of 5–16-year-olds?
- What factors support or hinder successful implementation and uptake; and
 - what are the impacts on children's screen use, wellbeing and development?

Inequalities differences across groups

6. What evidence is there on differences in patterns of screen use, associated benefits and risks, and effective support strategies for different groups of children aged 5–16, including:
- children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and
 - children with other protected characteristics (including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation) and differing socio-economic circumstances?

What are the implications for guidance, support and policy?

Policy and regulatory approaches

7. What evidence is there on the effectiveness, benefits, risks and unintended consequences of policy and regulatory approaches to children's digital screen use, including age-based restrictions on access to social media and other online services?

Part B: Screen time and usage in schools, questions

We are seeking high-quality research evidence and relevant pedagogical knowledge and insights to inform the Department for Education's understanding of the use of screens in the classroom. We are particularly interested in robust evidence on how screen-based educational technologies are used to support teaching and learning, including whether and under what conditions their use can lead to improved learning outcomes.

We would like to understand how approaches to screen use in schools vary by age and phase, from reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16. We are seeking evidence on the wider impacts of screen use in schools on pupils' cognitive processes, behaviour, social development, and health and wellbeing. This includes consideration of active and passive screen use, pupils' overall screen exposure across the day and the interaction between school-based and non-school screen use. This call for evidence will also consider the use of screens beyond the classroom, in terms of schools' expectations around homework and device use, and how these interact with pupil engagement when learning is set or managed through digital platforms.

We would like to understand how screen use affects different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the extent to which digital approaches can either narrow or widen existing gaps. We also welcome evidence on the factors that enable or constrain effective use of screens in schools, such as access to devices and connectivity.

The evidence received will be considered by the department, alongside input from relevant experts, stakeholders and further research, to inform the development of future policy on the use of screens in schools.

Responses should, where possible, draw on evidence and research post-COVID-19, reflecting the significant changes in classroom screen use and technology in recent years. We welcome rigorous rather than speculative findings, although emerging evidence may be considered where relevant. Please cite references where possible, clearly identify the type of evidence, and outline its strengths and limitations.

Definitions of terms

Screen use: The time spent engaging with a digital device that has a visual display, including but not limited to smartphones, tablets, laptops, desktop computers, televisions, and interactive whiteboards. This can include both active use (e.g. typing, interacting) and passive use (e.g. watching).

Screen-based activities: Specific tasks or behaviours carried out using a screen-enabled device, which could include the following:

- educational activities: e.g. completing assignments, accessing digital learning platforms, assessment tasks;

- communication: e.g. messaging, video calls, collaborative tools;
- content consumption: e.g. watching videos, reading digital text;
- creation and production: e.g. coding, writing, multimedia creation;
- administrative or organisational tasks: e.g. timetabling, submitting work

Learning outcomes: The knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, or behaviours that learners are expected to acquire or demonstrate as a result of educational activities or experiences. Examples of learning outcomes include:

- cognitive outcomes (e.g. subject knowledge, critical thinking);
- behavioural outcomes (e.g. engagement, attendance, study habits);
- socio-emotional outcomes (e.g. wellbeing, motivation, collaboration);
- digital competencies (e.g. digital literacy, safe and effective technology use);

Questions

1. What evidence is there on the factors that influence the impact of classroom screen-based activities on pupils' learning outcomes, and how these effects vary by age and phase (reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16)?
2. What evidence is there about how screen use in the classroom affects other pedagogical practices (e.g. handwriting, discussion, practical work, movement, teacher interaction) and how this varies according to age and phase (reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16)?
3. What evidence is there of cognitive risks associated with screen-based practices (such as offloading, reduced effortful processing, or overreliance on automation, including AI-enabled tools)? Please indicate which classroom screen-based practices present the most risk and how risks vary by age and phase (reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16).
4. What evidence is there regarding the optimal daily level of classroom screen use by pupils before negative impacts emerge on:
 - learning;
 - engagement;
 - behaviour;
 - health and wellbeing.and how does this vary by age or phase (reception to KS4/ age 4 to 16)?
5. What evidence is there on the impact of pupils' cumulative screen use across both school and home settings (including all uses of screens for educational or leisure purposes) on their learning, wellbeing and behaviour?
6. What evidence is there on how school policies on homework and device use impact pupil engagement, motivation, and completion when homework is set or managed through digital platforms? To what extent is this affected by a lack of access to a suitable device or connectivity?
7. What evidence should we consider regarding how different forms of classroom-based screen use affect learning, engagement, and accessibility for pupils with:
 - Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND;)
 - English as an Additional Language (EAL);
 - Disadvantaged backgrounds (including those eligible for Free School Meals);
 - low prior attainment;
 - other additional needs?



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