

## **SCHOOLS — MOBILE PHONES**

### *Statement*

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [6.10 pm]: Earlier this evening I had a chance to ask a question about mobile phones in schools. I want to discuss that a little further tonight. We recently found out that the Victorian state government is about to bring in a ban on mobile phones in schools for next year, with them to be kept in lockers bell to bell, even during lunch. This will not apply to laptops or tablets and exemptions will apply with authorised medical exemptions and for use in class work with a teacher's consent. No doubt technology is a big part of our future, but not for every second of every day. This has been the issue. Screen time needs to be limited and controlled. I am fully aware of this myself, because I am a user and at times I believe that I am also hooked on it a bit. If this is happening to me, I can imagine young people also being hooked on social media and other avenues through their phones. We need to teach kids to cope without it. I had the benefit of being able to communicate and meet with people, discuss issues face to face, one on one, and not have to send a text to a person sitting one foot away in a cafe, shop or lunch room. I was able to talk to that person because there was no other way to communicate. It is so important that the kids of today get the opportunity to communicate in that way and also detach themselves for extended periods of time. We are starting to see kids who cannot sit through a three-hour exam without having withdrawals from their technology. That is an issue because it is a part of who they are. We all know the good side of modern technology, but we are thinking human beings, not machines, and we need a break from those machines and that technology. We need kids to learn to socialise and engage with each other one on one.

Parents who want to continuously have contact with their children—we call them helicopter parents—need to cut the umbilical cord. They need to give their kids a break. They are not doing their kids any favours by parenting in that way. I think most of us can understand the commonsense of that. Teachers also need to have some control in class. Parents can always contact their children through the school's office. While kids are at school, generally parents and teachers can communicate with kids if there is anything urgent. Schools are very good in that way. If children have medical conditions, certainly they can receive exemptions, but even if they do, teachers will still need to be made aware of the conditions and how they can deal with the situation. A child having access to their phone to call their parents will in no way help them faster, because teachers are trained in this area. Teachers are more than capable of dealing with an emergency; they have been doing it for decades. I am sure it will be an enormous benefit to teachers, especially a teacher who is trying to gain the attention of their students during a 50-minute class and continually hears social media pings going off on phones, distracting kids even further. It must be very difficult for modern-day teachers. This ban would apply to only mobile phones, so let us make sure that we do not take modern technology away from schools. Tablets, laptops and other devices will still be there for learning. If for some reason a teacher needs to use a phone for a school lesson, that will be made available, but then the phones would be returned to the lockers after that class.

This will not end cyberbullying. We heard the Leader of the House talk about that, and she is right; it will not end cyberbullying, but it will be a way to limit its effect. Children who are victims of harassment could escape from that harassment for a matter of possibly five, six or seven hours during the day. That bullying will probably continue after school, and that is something that we still have to deal with. But we have to remember that while the kids who are getting bullied do not have access to their phone, the kids who are doing the bullying will also not have access to their phone. It will alleviate the problem for a time.

Individual schools have already implemented this program. The initial reaction is generally discontent. When it first starts, no-one is happy about it—not the mums and dads, not the kids, and the teachers are unsure because they do not want kids and mums and dads complaining all the time. But once it is established, the benefits are clear and overwhelming. Schools that have been doing this are reasonably happy and they believe it has been a major plus. Parents have said that the children's phone bills have declined immensely during that time. That is another consideration that we need to look at.

This is a rare worthwhile initiative by the Victorian state government. For once, I can say it has got this right. It is a great thing that all schools should be looking at. There is no reason that we could not adopt a similar policy in time. The Victorian legislation could be a blueprint. If it needs to be adjusted to suit WA conditions, that is great; we will get that time. The last thing I want to finish off with is that this could be done by the end of this year, as I believe we would get bipartisan support—and that is a way to get things through this house.