

SCHOOLS — MOBILE PHONES

695. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the Minister for Education and Training:

Today the Victorian government announced a statewide ban on mobile phone usage by all students during school hours that will take place from the start of next year. This will effectively be a bell-to-bell blackout of mobile phones unless for medical emergencies or approved classroom usage by a teacher. This includes all breaks to help encourage better social engagement.

Will the minister seriously consider introducing a similar ban in Western Australia, or at least trialling it?

- (a) If so, when will the Department of Education or minister look to take such action?
- (b) If not, why not?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

I am not opposed to a ban on mobile phones in schools, but it is not something I am currently looking to introduce. Some significant changes have been announced that will now take effect, some of them this year and some of them next year. If we look at the anti-violence measures that have been put in place and, more recently, the introduction of a third pathway for year 11 and 12 students, we will see the things that schools are dealing with and settling into now, and I want them to concentrate on those things. I am not opposed to it. There is mixed information and evidence available about the extent taking phones off kids during school hours impacts cyberbullying. It is a bit grey, because a lot of cyberbullying happens outside school hours. However, what is really positive is kids talking to each other, looking each other in the eye, running around the oval and playing games and doing things. That is definitely a positive, and being off social media is just good for your brain, whatever age you happen to be, I find. I am certainly not opposed to it. I am not ruling it out, but in the immediate term I am not making it a priority. I am interested to see how Victoria goes with it. If it is something that is wanted by schools, parents and the community, we may well consider it.

- (a) Not applicable.
- (b) The use of mobile phones in schools is a school decision. The member would have heard this morning on the ABC, for example, that a principal at a public school has made a decision that the school's policy will be no access to phones during school hours. Principals work with their communities to determine the best approach for their children. Some schools have a bell-to-bell blackout of mobile phones, and others may permit their use when they support student learning. For example, students may use an app to record and share data on a science excursion. If mobile phones are allowed, principals are required to ensure the rules they put in place minimise disruption to learning, promote respect and consideration for others, and stipulate consequences for the inappropriate use of these devices.

The PRESIDENT: Looking around the chamber, it sounds like a very interesting proposal, and one which we might give consideration to ourselves, at some point.