



## Ten arguments for banning cell phones in the Gil Vicente School Group

The effects of using cell phones in schools have generated intense debate around the world. Currently, many countries have national or state laws that restrict the use of cell phones in schools. This is the case of France, Spain, Italy, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and more recently, the Netherlands and Finland, just to name a few examples. In other countries, the law is silent on the use of cell phones throughout the school premises, but schools have the autonomy to set their own rules. This is what happens, for example, in England or the United States, where a large number of schools have restrictive rules on the use of cell phones.

Portugal falls into this second group. Despite the existence of Law N.º 51/2012, of September 5, which approves the Student Statute and School Ethics, it is considered that there are gaps regarding the use of cell phones in school facilities, but schools have the autonomy to adopt the rules that best adapt to your realities. If, in the private sector, many schools already choose to ban the use of cell phones, in the public sector this is still a rare practice. One of the known exceptions is the António Alves Amorim school, in Santa Maria da Feira, where the use of cell phones has been banned since 2017 and, more recently, schools in the Municipality of Almeirim decided to follow the same path. In many school groups, cell phones are only banned inside the classroom, as is the case at Gil Vicente, but this proves to be ineffective as there is difficulty in enforcing the rule.

Other schools have looked for intermediate ways, determining that, in the classroom, students have to place their cell phones in specific places so that they are not at hand. This solution proves to be more effective within the classroom, but does not solve the problem of widespread and excessive use of cell phones during playground. Therefore, taking into account the reality of the Gil Vicente School Group, the experience in several countries and the growing warnings from experts, the ban on the use of cell phones in school space was approved. These are our arguments:

**1. Restricting the use of cell phones at school is a fundamental step towards having a freer, livelier and more active school.** Free from dependence and alienation generated by these devices; live by providing a healthier environment and reinforcing socialization among children and young people; and, finally, active in that it will encourage the practice of sporting and cultural activities, which are so important for health;

**2. The use of cell phones has a strong destabilizing effect on schools.** Inside the classroom, it constitutes a source of distraction for students and disruption of everyone's work. Outside the classroom, it is an obstacle to the socialization of children and young people, discourages physical activity, fuels illegal practices such as image capture and cyberbullying and puts children in contact with content inappropriate for their ages;



**3. Experience reveals that prohibiting the use of cell phones exclusively within the classroom, as is currently the case at Escola Gil Vicente is not very effective.** Many children, especially the youngest ones, cannot resist the appeal of cell phones and compliance with the rule cannot be guaranteed, affecting teaching and learning;

**4. Excessive use of cell phones and other digital devices is associated with several health problems, such as depression and anxiety, vision and physical problems.** As such, the school must contribute to reducing the exposure of children and young people to these devices, rather than increasing it. It is the school's obligation to ensure healthy environments that are not conducive to the development of addictions that are harmful to health, regardless of their nature;

**5. The use of cell phones does not only affect the children and young people who take them to school, but also everyone who interacts with them,** whether because of the content they can view, the risk of being filmed, or finally their impact on the school environment and socialization patterns;

**6. Cell phones do not safeguard the safety of children and young people. On the contrary.** In addition to exposing them to the risks associated with social networks, they are a source of conflict between peers. These conflicts often spread outside the school, also affecting families and encouraging aggressive behavior towards each other or towards the school;

**7. Problems of indiscipline and violence among children and young people,** which result from the widespread and excessive use of mobile phones, force schools to divert resources that could be used for better purposes;

**8. Restricting cell phones does not prevent students from contacting their guardians or being contacted by them at any time.** The school has contact forms available that can be used by students to speak to their families;

**9. Restricting the use of cell phones does not keep students away from technology.** This is and will continue to be part of our schools and children and young people have access to computers, with internet access, and other equipment to listen to music and watch films in the Library, with longer opening hours this year. The excessive use of cell phones, as is the case today in most schools, keeps children away from using other fundamental technological tools, namely computers;

**10. Cell phones are also very useful tools and children and young people should know how to work with them. However, this learning should not be a school priority.** Contrary to what happens in other areas of education, children's natural attraction to these devices, the ease with which they master them and their availability at home makes it unnecessary for the school to encourage their use.