

# ‘Shame’ parents over phones says ‘strictest’ head

Michaela free school founder Katharine Birbalsingh warns smartphone addiction is stopping pupils revise for GCSEs

By Martin George  
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The head of a school dubbed England’s strictest has called for a “massive government campaign” to shame parents who hand their mobile phones to toddlers.

Katharine Birbalsingh, who founded the [Michaela free school in north-west London](#), said some of her pupils struggle to revise for their GCSEs because of phone addiction.

Speaking at a event organised by the Policy Exchange thinktank last night, she said: “Government should have a massive campaign – and I mean millions need to be spent on this – where on every billboard we are talking about this where if you see a parent putting a phone in front of a toddler there would be a sense of shame.

“It should not be done, because if you put that phone in front of that toddler and they will then struggle to read later, and you will say, ‘My child just doesn’t like reading’.

“No, it was because you put a phone in front of them when they were 2, because a book simply cannot compete with what a smartphone is going to do for you.”

Ms Birbalsingh warned that children are on their [smartphones](#) until 2am or 3am on school days “and then they are sleeping through the day”.

“Parents will then argue they want the smartphone because it’s a great babysitter – you hand the smartphone to the child and then the child doesn’t need looking after.

“It means that they are no longer able to play board games, talk to each other or make friends or ask questions, or be interactive in a social way.

“Of course that affects their mental health, and of course it makes them anxious and depressed.”

Ms Birbalsingh said the developers of smartphone apps deliberately make them addictive, and added: “I have children at [GCSE](#) who are saying to me, ‘Miss, I want to do my revision, I really want to, but I just can’t get off my phone’, and they’re desperate and they don’t know what to do.”

She linked smartphones to [mental health problems](#) and knife crime, warning that parents who give a 13-year-old boy a smartphone “have given them a porn magazine”.

She added: “It’s actually much worse, because the magazine doesn’t move.

“Unfortunately, on the smartphone, the things they will be seeing will destroy their innocence, and make them have all sorts of mental health problems, and join gangs, and [carry knives](#), and then we wonder why the capital is spinning out of control.

“I’m telling you, social media is our number one problem, and if government wants to help schools, that is where they should be putting their money.”