

Technology in school: information for parents

This document is designed to address any concerns parents might have about the widespread use of iPads in primary schools. There are a lot of headlines about the damaging effects of screentime on children which can lead to worries. However looking at the original research suggests that there is little evidence to support these concerns. I'll briefly review the main points here and you can contact me (see below) if you have any questions.

Screentime: Often the time children spend looking at screens – working on a computer or iPad, playing video games, watching TV – is added up to provide a measure of 'screentime'. The best available evidence [Parkes et al, 2013; Millenium Cohort study, 11,000 families] suggests that there are no links between the amount of screentime a child has and their learning, behaviour or social outcomes. The **quality** of screentime is likely to be much more important than the **quantity**.

Technology & Education:

- iPads and computers are most effective when they are integrated into learning rather than used as a treat or an alternative to 'normal' lessons.
- Good use of technology requires skilled teachers: *"technology can amplify good teaching but it can't replace poor teaching"* [OECD, 2015].
- iPads promote creative and independent learning opportunities.
- They are particularly useful to help children who are struggling keep up with their classmates .

Technology at Home:

- Quality educational TV can promote learning – try to find shows which are at your child's learning stage or link to school topics.
- Watching TV, doing homework and playing video games or apps all involve screens but they're very different things – don't feel you need have one rule for all screen uses.
- Watching TV or playing video games late at night can interrupt sleep.
- Excessive TV watching is linked to obesity – outdoor time is also important. However, playing 'exergames' like Wii Sports has beneficial effects on children's fitness.

Technology and Friendships:

- People who socialise a lot via social media also socialise a lot face-to-face: there's no evidence that screentime is replacing time spent interacting with 'real people'.
- There are no links between amount of screentime and poor peer relationships.
- Instead, using social media or multi-player online games is permitting children who may struggle with some kinds of face to face interaction to build friendships online.

Things to Think About:

- The skills required to work effectively with technology are essential in our society and we need to provide children with opportunities to develop these abilities to a high standard.
- Online safety for young people is a concern and best addressed by teaching responsible and safe use of the internet rather than limiting its use.
- Some screentime may not be educational but instead provides much-needed downtime, relaxation and shared cultural experiences.

About me:

My name is Sue Fletcher-Watson, I've got daughters aged 5 and 6, and I work at the University of Edinburgh as a research psychologist. My field is child development and I'm particularly interested in how new technology, such as iPads, interacts with children's learning. If you have questions, you can reach me via my research website www.dart.ed.ac.uk

