blackout
EDUCATION

Impact Assessment Report

January 2026

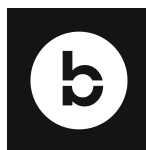**Prepared By**   The Blackout Team, lead by Sarah Gallacher

What's Inside

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1. About this document

This Impact Assessment provides a clear, evidence-informed overview of Blackout's early implementation across partner schools. It brings together indicative data, observations, and feedback from staff, pupils, and parents across a cohort of partner schools, representing the experiences of approximately 5,000 pupils in total. This helps show how Blackout is being used in real school settings and where positive impact is emerging. At its core, this assessment reflects how pupils, staff, and families experience day-to-day phone boundaries in real school settings.

The purpose of this document is to offer transparency and insight into how Blackout supports schools to reduce digital distraction, strengthen focus, and embed healthier device routines over time. It draws on data and feedback collected across the 2025 academic year, capturing patterns observed over sustained use rather than isolated moments. The findings highlight the conditions that support effective, sustainable implementation, rather than acting as a definitive or standalone evaluation.

This assessment will be updated termly as more schools progress through implementation and will continue to be reviewed and expanded throughout 2026. We are happy to share further detail with schools and partners where helpful, and to adapt reporting to meet specific stakeholder needs as Blackout continues to develop and scale responsibly.

About the evidence in this report
The purpose of this document is to offer transparency and insight into how Blackout supports schools to reduce digital distraction, strengthen focus, and embed healthier device routines over time. It draws on data and feedback collected across the 2025 academic year from a range of partner school contexts, capturing patterns observed over sustained use rather than isolated moments.

2. Executive summary

This Impact Assessment shares early evidence from partner schools using Blackout to support healthier smartphone use during the school day. Drawing on usage data, behaviour trends and feedback from pupils, staff and parents, it shows how Blackout is beginning to reduce phone-related disruption, support focus and help schools establish clearer, fairer expectations around device use.

While schools are at different stages of introduction, consistent patterns are emerging. Where Blackout is introduced clearly and embedded into everyday routines, schools report calmer classrooms and social spaces, fewer repeated phone-related issues and growing pupil understanding of why phone boundaries exist. These early findings reflect the start of longer-term cultural change, with impact strengthening over time as routines become familiar and understanding deepens.

3. Blackout impact assessment overview

3.1 Scope of schools included

This assessment draws on evidence from a group of partner schools participating in early Blackout pilots across one to three year groups. Schools are at different stages of implementation and reflect a range of school types and different ways of introducing Blackout.

3.2 Summary of purpose

Context and challenge
Schools are navigating a rapidly evolving digital landscape in which smartphones increasingly shape pupils' attention, behaviour, relationships and wellbeing. While traditional hand-in systems and blanket bans can offer short-term control, many schools report that these approaches alone do not always lead to lasting behaviour change or improved digital habits. As one partner school reflected, "Using a digital solution for a digital problem feels like the right way forward for us."

Purpose of Blackout
Blackout provides a structured, holistic way for schools to manage smartphones during the school day, while still supporting pupils to learn how to use their devices responsibly. Rather than removing ownership, Blackout helps schools create clear boundaries that support focus, reduce digital distraction and reinforce consistent expectations, while keeping essential functions such as SMS and phone calls available for safeguarding and emergencies. Blackout is designed to work alongside existing school behaviour and safeguarding policies. When schools introduce it clearly and consistently, it supports calmer classrooms, social spaces and a shared understanding of the purpose behind phone management.

How does Blackout work?
Essentially, Blackout turns smartphones into brick phones during the school day, which limits access to high-distraction apps such as social media, games and entertainment, while keeping essential functions, including emergency calls and SMS, available. Pupils are also able to manually disable the app when needed, for example, for a medical appointment or another legitimate reason, ensuring they are never without access to a fully functioning phone and retaining an appropriate level of autonomy.

When the app is manually disabled, the school's designated Blackout lead can oversee usage and functionality through the internal dashboard. This allows schools to monitor compliance and address issues when needed, while keeping safeguarding central.

The app is privacy-first by design. It does not track location, store personal content or access data on a pupil's phone. Only the minimum information required to support a school's phone policy is used, ensuring strong data protection and practicality which adheres to GDPR policies.

Purpose of this assessment
This Impact Assessment brings together early insights from live school environments. It draws on usage data, behaviour trends and feedback to understand how Blackout is being implemented in practice and where positive impact is emerging.

Scope and variation

Schools differ in size, structure and type (including state schools, independent schools and multi-academy trusts), as well as in whether they are single-sex or co-educational. They also vary in pupil demographics, levels of pupil premium eligibility, staffing capacity and digital readiness, and are often at different stages of onboarding. Implementation to date spans key secondary year groups, typically across Years 7 to 11. As a result, progress naturally varies between settings.

This assessment reflects that reality and focuses on identifying where strong routines, clear leadership and consistent communication are contributing to meaningful change. Rather than comparing schools directly, the assessment highlights shared patterns across contexts and illustrates how impact develops as Blackout becomes embedded into daily school life.

4. Methodology

This assessment draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered across the term. Data sources include usage and registration trends, high-level behaviour and safeguarding information where available, and structured feedback from staff, pupils and parents.

Insights are supplemented by in-school visits, observations and informal pupil discussions to better understand lived experience and cultural change. Evidence is reviewed regularly as implementation progresses, and findings will continue to be updated termly as more data becomes available.

Indicative early patterns

Across the pilot schools, early data shows:

- Registration levels typically increase steadily as onboarding routines embed, with pupils using smartphones alongside brick-phones or no-phone arrangements where this aligns with school policy.
- Many schools report noticeable reductions in phone-related incidents compared with equivalent periods previously.
- A short settling-in phase is common during early rollout, after which routines stabilise and day-to-day issues reduce significantly.

These patterns are consistent with behaviour change approaches that rely on clear expectations and time to embed.

Context matters

Schools vary in size, structure and digital maturity, and are often at different stages of onboarding. As with any behaviour-change approach, outcomes strengthen as routines embed and expectations become consistent. This assessment reflects those realities and focuses on identifying shared patterns of impact across different settings, rather than making direct comparisons between schools.

5. Overview of the impact areas

Early evidence from partner schools shows a clear impact across four key areas. These outcomes strengthen as routines embed and expectations around phone use become familiar and consistent.

What this means	What the data shows	Examples from partner schools
5.1 Adoption and registration		
In pilot year groups, most pupils are using Blackout as part of the normal school day, alongside clear alternatives for pupils who use basic phones or follow hand-in arrangements in line with school policy.	• Strong registration levels during early rollout • Registration increases week by week as routines embed • Clear onboarding supports consistent expectations across year groups	• One partner school has **100%** of pupils in Years 8–9 registered on the Blackout dashboard following a structured rollout. • In another partner school, **over 87%** of pupils are registered, with the remaining pupils using basic phones or hand-in arrangements in line with school policy. • In a further partner school, **over 70%** of pupils are registered during early implementation (first half-term), with alternative arrangements in place for others.
5.2 Focus and behaviour		
Phones are less visible during lessons, transitions and social times, supporting improved focus and calmer school environments.	• Clear reductions in phone-related incidents • Fewer repeat issues involving the same pupils • Improved behaviour during break, lunch and movement around school	• In one partner school, lunchtime phone confiscations reduced from **8–10 per duty to zero.** • In another partner school, confiscations reduced from **195 to 55** compared with the same period the previous year, with repeat offenders falling from **40 to 3.** • In one partner school, pupils in year groups using Blackout recorded **1** confiscation, compared with **7** in a year group not using Blackout. • In another partner school, average daily notifications during school hours for the selected focus group fell from approximately **90–120 to 7–10.**

5.3 Consistent use during the school day

Most pupils use Blackout as expected during the school day, with only a small number needing reminders while routines settle.	• A high proportion of devices remain in the correct school-day mode • Only a small number of pupils attempt to switch off the app • Issues reduce as expectations become embedded	• In one partner school, **fewer than 2** pupils per day attempted to disable the app during school hours. • In another partner school, app-disabling events have reduced steadily and now average **fewer than 4 per day**.

5.4 Engagement, communication and school culture

Pupils and staff share a clearer understanding of why phone boundaries exist and how they support focus, wellbeing and fairness.	• Positive staff and pupil feedback on the impact of Blackout • Calmer corridors and social spaces • Strong alignment with wider behaviour and safeguarding approaches	• In one partner school, there were **no in-school safeguarding incidents** involving photos or video during Term 1. • In some partner schools, **Digital Detox Days** and assemblies have been successfully delivered as part of a wider approach to digital wellbeing, encouraging reflection on digital habits and balance, with further delivery planned as this approach continues to be rolled out across partner schools. • In another partner school, Blackout was referenced positively during **inspection** as part of the school's wider phone policy.

5.5 Embedding phone policies through co-creation

Blackout has been developed and implemented through deliberate co-creation with pupils and staff in partner schools. This approach helps ensure that phone boundaries are clearly understood, seen as fair, and embedded into everyday school life rather than imposed without explanation.

Listening to pupil voice has been particularly important in shaping how Blackout is introduced and refined. In one partner school, pupil surveys with Years 8 and 9 showed strong support for a managed approach to phone use that sets clear limits without removing device ownership. 81% of pupils said they preferred a system that controls phone use during the school day, and 75% said they would like to continue using Blackout. This suggests a high level of acceptance when expectations are clear and consistently applied.

Pupil discussions in another partner school highlighted why structured routines remain important, even where pupils feel confident in their own self-control. In small-group conversations, around half of pupils reported being distracted by phone notifications during homework or independent study, with large group chats identified as a key source of interruption. Pupils frequently described phone use as habitual rather than intentional. As one pupil explained, "You just automatically pick it up, it's more of a habit than a choice," while another noted, "Even if you don't reply, it still pulls you in."

These discussions also revealed a wide variation in phone boundaries at home, ranging from unrestricted access to strict parental controls, sometimes applied inconsistently or easily bypassed. Pupils described how this led to uneven experiences and reinforced the value of a shared, school-wide approach during the school day.

Feedback from pupils and staff also helped identify practical improvements to the onboarding process. Early feedback highlighted that initial setup and occasional changes, such as switching devices or using additional parental controls, could create uncertainty for some pupils. In response, onboarding was refined through clearer pupil-facing guidance, staff-supported setup sessions and early troubleshooting. Subsequent feedback suggests this has increased confidence and supported smoother, more sustainable use.

Taken together, this evidence shows that co-creation plays a key role in embedding a phone policy that is understood, accepted and workable in practice. It also highlights the importance of a flexible, responsive approach that reflects the real digital habits of young people and continues to evolve through ongoing pupil and staff feedback.

6. What supports successful implementation

Across partner schools, the most positive and sustained impact is seen where Blackout is introduced clearly and consistently as part of everyday school life. While each school's context is different, several common factors tend to support successful implementation.

Schools see the strongest outcomes when expectations around phone use are communicated clearly to pupils and families, and when pupils understand not just what the rules are, but why they exist. Consistent routines help Blackout become a normal part of the school day rather than an additional or temporary measure.

Ongoing engagement with pupils and staff also plays an important role. Schools that listen to feedback and respond to practical questions early tend to see smoother adoption and stronger understanding over time. Clear, visible leadership and shared ownership across staff further reinforce consistency and fairness.

Finally, impact is strongest where Blackout is used alongside wider digital wellbeing education. Assemblies, tutor-time discussions and activities such as Digital Detox Days help pupils reflect on their phone habits and connect day-to-day boundaries with focus, wellbeing and positive relationships.

7. Supporting curriculum and wellbeing

The direction of the Curriculum Review, and the expected changes from September 2028, place greater emphasis on focus, digital literacy, wellbeing, inclusion and enrichment alongside academic learning. Blackout supports these priorities by helping schools create conditions for sustained attention in lessons, teaching pupils how to manage technology intentionally, and embedding healthy digital routines into everyday school life.

Through structured screen-free time, Digital Detox Days, and age-appropriate discussions about media, algorithms and online behaviour, Blackout contributes to enrichment, media literacy and digital wellbeing goals, while supporting more inclusive learning environments, particularly for pupils who find distraction challenging. In this way, Blackout aligns with the evolving curriculum focus on preparing young people not just to use technology, but to understand and manage it responsibly.

This approach also aligns with existing expectations around behaviour, safeguarding and digital resilience, as set out in current Department for Education guidance and inspection frameworks, without adding additional burden to schools.

8. Overall impact

Taken together, the evidence from partner schools indicates that Blackout is starting to support calmer, more focused school environments and more consistent expectations around smartphone use during the school day. While schools are at different stages of introduction, the overall direction of travel is clear: phone-related disruption is reducing, routines are becoming more predictable, and early cultural shifts around phone use are emerging.

Schools consistently report fewer phone-related incidents, particularly during unstructured times such as break, lunch and movement between lessons, where phones have traditionally been hardest to manage. Alongside this, staff describe steadier day-to-day routines, fewer repeated issues involving the same pupils, and a clearer shared understanding of when and how phones should be used. These changes point towards emerging shifts in habits and expectations, rather than short-term compliance.

Culturally, Blackout is beginning to help schools reinforce a shared message around digital wellbeing, responsibility and fairness. Where pupils have been involved in shaping understanding, they are increasingly able to explain the purpose behind phone boundaries and recognise their links to focus, wellbeing and positive relationships. Many schools are now building on this foundation through assemblies, Digital Detox Days and ongoing pupil feedback as part of a wider approach to digital wellbeing.

It is also important to recognise that cultural change takes time. Shifts in habits, expectations and shared norms do not happen immediately, particularly where technology use is deeply embedded in daily life. The patterns seen so far reflect early stages of change, with impact strengthening as routines become familiar and understanding deepens over time.

Overall, the evidence to date suggests that Blackout is most effective when introduced clearly, supported by consistent routines and reinforced through ongoing communication and education. In these conditions, schools report early improvements that are both measurable and moving towards sustainability, helping create learning environments that support focus, inclusion and healthier digital habits over time. Blackout's role is to support schools through this process, ensuring implementation feels manageable, proportionate and aligned with wider educational priorities.

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