



Punishments for drivers using mobile phones

*Report of pupils' views
to the Department for Transport*



Summary

- The views of 103 pupils aged 9 to 11 are reported, from four separate discussion groups in three different schools.
- Pupils identified 33 activities that are dangerous to do while driving, including things that take attention from the road, activities such as eating, drinking, reading maps and looking at oneself in the mirror, examples of poor driving practice, driving while tired, and vehicle faults.
- From a list we provided, pupils rated the five most dangerous driver activities as drunk driving, crossing a red traffic light, texting, driving with a dirty or icy windscreen, and driving with faulty lights.
- Pupils rated texting as the most dangerous use of a hand-held mobile phone while driving, followed by talking on the phone, looking at messages and then taking a photograph (especially a 'selfie').
- Pupils rated talking on a hands-free phone as the least dangerous of a list of 19 activities while driving.
- Out of 4 Government options for future punishments for using a hand-held mobile phone while driving, pupils most supported increasing both the fine and the number of penalty points given.
- Penalty points were seen as having a different and longer lasting effect to a fine – paying a fine is finished once it's paid, but having penalty points makes someone constantly worried they may eventually get a driving ban, and so constantly careful.
- Pupils agreed that bus or lorry drivers should get more penalty points than car drivers for using a hand-held mobile while driving, and that bus and lorry drivers should get a safety training course alongside penalty points for their first offence, and a fine with penalty points for their second.
- Pupils thought minibus drivers should get the same punishments as car drivers, rather than the higher punishments proposed for bus drivers.
- The children agreed that they would be encouraged to choose healthy food options if choosing them was made easier, but disagreed that drivers would be encouraged to stop using hand-held phones by having an app that switched the phone off in a moving vehicle. Because people would have to be able to switch the app off when travelling as passengers rather than drivers, children thought drivers would simply leave the app switched off.
- It is important that drivers are all told about increased punishments, otherwise the change will not make a difference.



Introduction

1. This submission is made by Pupils 2 Parliament, a project to enable school pupils to consider and feed in their views to parliamentary, government and national body public consultations and inquiries. The project has been approved by the Clerks of both Houses of Parliament to use the term 'Parliament' in its title.
2. Pupils 2 Parliament aims to bring the particular viewpoint of children and young people to those conducting inquiries and consultations - plus the uniquely fresh and often



challenging analysis that children and young people bring to the making of decisions and policies.

3. The project also aims to give school pupils the opportunity to learn about and consider key decisions being made by parliament, government and public bodies, and genuinely to participate in democracy by feeding their views into real national decisionmaking.
4. Pupils' views are independently gathered through discussions with groups of pupils led by someone from Pupils 2 Parliament, using material from the relevant consultation or inquiry document to explain the issues. We specialise in putting the issues and questions even-handedly, without leading pupils in any way or suggesting any responses. All views therefore come spontaneously from pupils, with no adult prompt.
5. This submission reports all pupil views given, without selection, comment or addition. The views in this submission are entirely pupils' own views, and nothing but pupils' views.
6. Views in this submission came from 103 pupils aged 9 to 11, through four discussion groups; one at St George's C of E Primary School, Clun, Shropshire, one at Belle Vue Primary School, Stourbridge, and two groups at Peter's Hill Primary School, Brierley Hill.



What things are not safe for drivers to do while driving?

7. Without suggesting any answers, we asked all four of our groups of pupils what things it is not safe for drivers to do while they are driving, apart from using a hand-held mobile phone. Here is the complete list of the children's answers (not in any particular order):
 - Driving without a licence
 - Crowding too many people into the car
 - Drinking any sort of drink while driving
 - Looking round at children in the back
 - Looking down to adjust the radio or music player
 - Smoking if there are children in the car
 - Drink driving (after drinking alcohol)
 - Eating while driving (this means you are only driving with one hand)
 - Turning round to talk to passengers
 - Drug driving (after taking prohibited drugs)
 - Watching the passenger's TV screen while driving
 - Driving without wearing a seatbelt
 - Sticking your head out of the window
 - Doing your hair while driving
 - Putting on makeup while driving
 - Speeding
 - Not bothering to use your indicators



- Driving too late in the day when you might fall asleep
- Writing words a car that might distract other drivers who may try to read them
- Reclining the driving seat too far so you don't have a proper hold on the wheel
- Driving on holiday without taking enough sleep
- Double parking
- Having a brightly coloured car that might distract other drivers (though a bright colour might also help them to see you)
- Hanging decorations in the car that can distract the driver
- Looking at yourself in the mirror on the back of the sun visor
- Playing the sort of music that might distract you
- Looking down to read a map
- Putting toys and other things on the top of the dashboard, because these reflect on the windscreen making it difficult to see ahead
- Putting your arm out of the window in summer
- Listening to someone saying something distracting (for example something funny), even on a hands-free phone
- Looking somewhere else than the road ahead
- Writing anything while driving
- Driving a car that is not roadworthy.



How dangerous are things drivers might do while driving?

8. The Government has asked how dangerous people think it is to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving a vehicle. For this, we used a list of things a driver might do while driving that we had written out beforehand. We read the list to the pupils, and asked them to tell us by a show of hands which things they thought were especially dangerous. They could select as many activities as they wanted as especially dangerous. We could then see what they thought was more, or less, dangerous on the list than using a hand-held mobile phone.
9. We also wanted to find out how dangerous pupils thought different ways of using a mobile phone were, so we put different ways of using a phone on the list.
10. We were clear to pupils that some things on the list were illegal, others were legal, and a few (like overtaking) were quite usual – but what we were interested in was how dangerous children thought each one was.
11. Here is our list of activities drivers might do while driving, in the order of danger given by the children, with the most dangerous first. The numbers in brackets are the numbers of pupils saying that each one is especially dangerous.
 - Driving after drinking alcohol (93 children)
 - Crossing traffic lights when they are red (90 children)
 - Texting on a mobile phone (88 children)
 - Driving with a dirty or icy windscreen (88 children)



- **Driving if they know their lights aren't working properly (81 children)**
- **Talking on a hand-held mobile phone (79 children)**
- **Speeding (78 children)**
- **Looking at messages on a mobile phone (78 children)**
- **Driving if their tyres are worn down (77 children)**
- **Taking a photograph with a mobile phone (71 children)**
- **Smoking (69 children)**
- **Driving when very tired (54 children)**
- **Overtaking (42 children)**
- **Driving when angry (39 children)**
- **Driving with only one hand on the wheel (18 children)**
- **Eating food (16 children)**
- **Listening to music or the radio (9 children)**
- **Talking to passengers (9 children)**
- **Talking on a hands-free mobile phone (6 children)**

12. The children rated texting on a mobile phone while driving as the third most dangerous thing on the list, after drunk driving and crossing a red traffic light. Out of the different ways of using a hands-held mobile phone while driving, they rated texting as the most dangerous, followed by talking on the phone, then looking at messages, and then by taking a photograph.

13. Some said there were different dangers from using a phone to take a photograph – taking a “selfie” while driving was much more dangerous than taking a photo of the view, because you would be concentrating on posing for the selfie rather than on the car or the road.

14. Talking on a hands-free mobile phone was rated the least dangerous of the 19 things on the list.

15. It was made clear that driving with only one hand on the wheel did not include taking a hand off the wheel when this was necessary – for example to change gear or use the handbrake – and did not apply to a disabled person one-handedly driving a car with adapted controls.

16. The things each rated by over half the children as especially dangerous to do while driving were; drunk driving, crossing a red traffic light, texting, driving with a dirty or icy windscreen, driving with faulty lights, talking on a hand-held mobile phone, speeding, looking at messages on a hand-held phone, driving with worn down tyres, taking a photograph on a phone, smoking, and driving when very tired. Overtaking was next on the list, rated as especially dangerous by 42 out of the 103 children.



Pupil vote on Government options

17. Using the information in the Government’s consultation document we explained the punishments of penalty points and fines, and the use of safety training courses, for



people caught using their hand-held mobile phones while driving. We also explained that the Government wants to reduce the numbers of people using hand-held phones while driving, to get more people going on safety training courses for their first offence, and to get tougher with drivers caught more than once. We told the pupils the reasons the Government had given in its document for and against putting fines up and giving more penalty points each time.

18. We then put the Government's four options for future punishments to each of the pupil groups: no change, putting the fine up from £100 to £150, putting the penalty points up from 3 to 4 for car drivers and 6 for bus or lorry drivers, and putting both the fine and the penalty points up. We did not tell the pupils which option the Government itself favoured until they had finished voting.
19. 103 pupils cast their votes on the Government options. Pupils voted by putting tokens into money-box ballot boxes. Each pupil had one vote, to cast for one option.
20. The option with most pupil support (33 votes, just over a third of the pupils) was putting up both the fine and the penalty points.
21. The second most supported option (with 26 votes) was putting just the fine up.
22. Just putting the penalty points up, and making no change to the present punishments, each got 22 votes from pupils.
23. Pupils made a number of comments on the options, and why they had chosen the option they did. Giving both a bigger fine and more penalty points was seen as the most likely to be effective. They thought there should be a bigger fine (even though they knew that last time the fine had been put up, it hadn't led to a big reduction in drivers using hand-held mobile phones). But adding penalty points meant that even after paying the fine was done and in the past, drivers would still be worrying constantly about getting more penalty points and risking being banned from driving, and this would make them less likely to use a mobile phone again while driving. As one pupil put it, "if people get penalty points it deters people to stop, whereas when a fine is paid, it's gone".
24. Pupils also said that a fine wouldn't make much difference to someone with a lot of money, but penalty points adding up towards a driving ban would punish people equally, however much or little money they had. Worrying about building up more penalty points would also help to stop people who couldn't really afford to pay out fines from getting more fines in the future.
25. In one group it was suggested that drivers could possibly earn reductions in the number of penalty points on their licences if they were seen to be driving well.



Should drivers of lorries and buses lose more penalty points for using a hand held mobile phone while driving those large vehicles?

26. We explained that the Government is proposing to change the law so that bus or lorry drivers would lose more penalty points than someone driving a car, for using a mobile phone while driving. We explained that this is because a bus or lorry crash could cause more injuries and damage than a car crash. Some pupils thought that although this made sense, a car crash could easily cause as many injuries as a bus or lorry crash, and that a major bus crash was very likely to kill the bus driver.

27. Pupils strongly agreed, by 58 votes to 9, that lorry and bus drivers should lose more penalty points than car drivers for using a mobile phone while driving. Not all our groups voted on this question.

28. Some wanted to make it clear that someone who has a bus or lorry driving licence should however only get the higher penalty points if they were caught using a mobile phone while they were actually driving a bus or lorry – not if they were driving a car at the time. The fact that you worked as a bus or lorry driver should not make any difference to your punishment for doing something wrong while driving your car.



Should bus and lorry drivers get a training course rather than a fine for their first offence?

29. We explained that the Government wants to get more drivers doing road safety training courses, and to give a bigger punishment to lorry and bus drivers who keep on using their mobile phones, even when they've been caught once.

30. If the Government does put up the penalty points for using a hand-held phone while driving, lorry and bus drivers would get 6 penalty points and so only two chances before they are banned. We asked pupils whether they agreed that as well as getting penalty points, lorry or bus drivers should go for a safety training course instead of a fine for their first offence?

31. Pupils in those groups who voted on this question strongly agreed, by 37 votes to 4, that bus or lorry drivers should get penalty points and a road safety training course for their first offence, rather than penalty points and a fine.



Should minibus drivers caught using a hand-held mobile phone get the 4 penalty points car drivers get, or the 6 penalty points bus drivers get?

32. The pupil groups who voted on this question voted by more than two to one (by 48 votes to 20) that minibus drivers should get the same number of penalty points for using a mobile phone that a car driver would get – not the higher number of penalty points it is proposed that a bus or lorry driver would get.



Making it easier to do the right thing.

- 33. The Government consultation document says that drivers might be more likely to keep to the law about things like using mobile phones if doing the right thing is made easier for them. It says this would be like getting children to eat more healthily by making it easier for them to choose healthy food. It says that if children are offered fruit and vegetable choices *before* being offered other things to eat, more of them will choose to eat the healthy fruit or vegetables. We wanted to find out whether the children in our pupil groups agreed with this.
- 34. We asked 45 of our pupils to tell us whether or not they agreed that *they* would be more likely to choose healthy food like fruit or vegetables if this was the sort of food they were offered first, before less healthy food.
- 35. Over half, 28 out of the 45, said that they *would* be more likely to choose the healthy eating option, if they were offered this first to make it easier to make the healthy choice.
- 36. 10 said being offered the healthy food first wouldn't make them any more likely to choose it. 7 said they didn't know whether being offered the healthy option first would make any difference to the choice they made.
- 37. We then told the children the Government is thinking of ways of making it easier for drivers not to use their hand-held mobiles while driving. It is possible to make phone apps that will shut the phone down when it is in a moving car, lorry or bus (though you would have to be able to switch the phone back on again if you are a passenger in a car, bus or train). We asked pupils whether it was worth developing this sort of app to make it easier for drivers to keep to the mobile phone law.
- 38. Pupils didn't on balance think this sort of app would help to put drivers off using their hand-held phones while driving. Again, 45 of our pupils voted on this.
- 39. 24 of the 45 voted that such an app was not worth trying, compared with 18 who voted that it was at least worth trying. The others didn't feel they could vote either way on this.
- 40. The main reason for voting that such an app was not worth trying was that being able to switch the app off meant that drivers would simply leave it switched off while they were driving.



Last word

- 41. The last word of this report goes to the pupil who asked how the Government would make sure that all drivers knew about the changes in punishments once they were made – because there was no point in putting the punishments up if lots of drivers don't know about it until they get caught.



42. I am grateful to the Heads and staff of the schools for the chance to hold these discussions with their pupils. I am especially grateful to the members of staff in each school who worked very hard taking detailed notes of each of the views given by each of the pupils. And above all I am very grateful to each of the pupils themselves for their thinking, votes and views.

Dr Roger Morgan OBE

Pupils 2 Parliament

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