

Reviewing your drug and alcohol policy

A toolkit for schools



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1. Introduction

This toolkit aims to facilitate the process of developing or revising a school's drug policy, making it an effective tool to safeguard the health and safety of pupils and others within school, and helping children and young people to be confident in making healthy choices outside school. It is available online from www.mentoruk.org.uk/resources/schools/toolkit, including the appendices in Word format so these tools can be easily used and adapted by schools. Other useful resources referred to in the text can also be downloaded from this page.

The toolkit aims to be comprehensive but is not intended to be prescriptive: schools can choose to use only the parts which they find most useful, and are encouraged to adapt the materials to match their needs.

At the centre of the toolkit is the September 2012 updated guidance from the Department for Education and the Association of Chief Policy Officers. The DfE and ACPO drug advice for schools states:

“School staff are best placed to decide on the most appropriate response to tackling drugs within their school. This is most effective when:

- *it is supported by the whole school community;*
- *drug education is part of a well-planned programme of PSHE education delivered in a supportive environment, where pupils are aware of the school rules, feel able to engage in open discussion and feel confident about asking for help if necessary;*
- *staff have access to high quality training and support.”*

Schools are strongly advised to have a written drugs policy to act as a central reference point for all school staff. Schools are encouraged to set out in this drugs policy their role in relation to all drug matters, including the content and organisation of drug education, and the management of drugs and medicines within school boundaries and on school trips.

This advice for schools includes a suggested framework for a school drug policy. In addition to the areas included in this framework, schools may wish to include more detail on the drug education programme, for example:

- aims and objectives;
- curriculum overview, and when it will be taught;
- how teaching approaches will develop pupils' skills, attitudes and values, as well as their knowledge;
- how the needs of all pupils will be taken into account;
- provision for vulnerable pupils and those with SEN and how issues of pupils' diversity will be addressed;
- the use of external visitors;
- how drug education will be monitored and assessed.

The school drug policy carries out several functions. It can:

- clarify the legal requirements and responsibilities of the school;
- reinforce and safeguard the health and safety of pupils and others who use the school;

- clarify the school's approach to drugs for all staff, pupils, governors, parents/carers, external agencies and the wider community;
- give guidance on developing, implementing and monitoring the drug education programme;
- enable staff to manage drugs on school premises, and any incidents that occur, with confidence and consistency, and in the best interests of those involved;
- clarify the support available to pupils whose own drug or alcohol use, or that of a family member, is causing concern, including screening and referral or signposting to external agencies;
- ensure that the approach to drug education, incidents involving drugs, and pastoral support are all consistent with the values and ethos of the school;
- provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the school drug education programme and the management of incidents involving illegal and other unauthorised drugs.

A school's drug policy can be more than a reference point in case of incidents: it can drive a proactive strategy for prevention of drug and alcohol misuse, and early intervention. For this to happen, there needs to be:

- support from the senior leadership team for a proactive approach;
- a policy based on input from the whole school community including pupils, parents/carers, staff, governors and partner agencies, with an understanding of their needs and views; and
- an ongoing process for monitoring the policy's implementation and evaluating its success.

'Drugs' or 'drugs and alcohol'?

When we refer to 'drugs' in this toolkit, this also includes alcohol, tobacco, medicines, volatile substances (e.g. aerosols, solvents, glue or petrol) and new psychoactive substances ('legal highs'). 'Drugs and alcohol' can be used instead, since this may make it clearer that it is not just illegal drugs which are under discussion. In either case it is important to include a definition, as above, in the school drug policy and in any consultation documents.

2. Consultation

Principles of consultation

The advice to schools from DfE / ACPO states that schools should develop drug policies in consultation with the whole school community including pupils, parents/carers, staff, governors and partner agencies. What does that mean in practice?

It is important that the policy is 'owned' by the school and reflects its principles, so while a good policy from another school can be used as an exemplar, it is not a good idea to borrow a policy wholesale.

The process of developing a school drug policy can be as valuable as the final product: asking questions, clarifying what terms mean, sharing viewpoints and debating priorities all help build the participants' understanding of what is involved. Consultation can improve the content of the policy, making it more relevant. Also, those who feel they have been consulted are more likely to feel committed to the underlying principles, making the policy work in practice.

A good starting point is a working group that includes the different groups who will be affected by the policy, including pupils where this is age-appropriate. However, this does not mean that the full diversity of opinions within the school can necessarily be represented by a few people, and so further consultation – with staff, parents and pupils – is a good idea. This might take the form of a survey or focus groups. There are also important partners outside the school to be consulted: the local authority, the police, and perhaps other schools or local services (see section 3).

Setting up a working group

One person will generally be responsible for writing the final policy. It is important to involve a member of the Senior Management Team in the process of reviewing your drug and alcohol policy. Other key people you may want to include:

- school drugs coordinator
- PSHE coordinator
- teacher responsible for pastoral support/behaviour
- a governor with special responsibility for this area
- parent representative(s)
- pupil representative(s)

Having pupil representatives on the working group is more likely to be feasible in secondary schools. In primary schools, pupils' opinions can be included in the process by other means. Pupil representation might come from the school council. Depending on the experience and confidence of parent and pupil members of the group, the power and status imbalance may be a barrier to their active participation.

Tips for ensuring that everyone can participate:

- Be clear whether pupils and parents are there as individuals or to formally represent the views of a wider group, e.g. the school council.
- Ensure that pupils/parents have a chance to speak, without putting them on the spot.
- Having two pupil (or parent) representatives rather than one can help build confidence.

- Ban jargon.
- Keep paperwork short and simple.
- Make sure pupils and parents who are acting as representatives get papers in time to consult other people.
- Ensure the names and roles of everyone on the group are clearly explained.
- Think about what else people need to know in advance about how the group will work: for example, how many meetings there will be, how to get items on the agenda, anything that needs to be kept confidential.
- Ensure that meetings are held at convenient times.

Wider consultation

One of the first people to speak to should be the relevant advisor in the local authority. They should be able to put you in contact with a police officer responsible for working with schools in the area, and with specialist services who can support your pupils. See section 3 for more details.

Don't forget non-teaching staff within the school, for example the school nurse. If premises staff such as cleaners and caretakers find drug-related paraphernalia on the school site, are they confident in dealing with this according to the policy?

Even if you have included staff, parents and pupils on the working group, one or two individuals cannot speak for all the diverse viewpoints that make up each group, so wider consultation can be valuable. Are there particular subgroups you might be interested in? For example, staff with responsibility for drug education or those with pastoral responsibilities. Who might be considered 'hard to reach'? Sometimes these groups might be important to involve, e.g. pupils at risk of exclusion, where drug use is known or suspected.

Key questions about consultation:

- What information do you want to find out? (see below)
- What is the best way to consult them, e.g. a focus group or a survey?
- Planning the stages of the consultation (see section 8)

Ensure the review of the drugs policy is publicised so anyone who wants to contribute can do so.

Targeting consultation: What do you want to find out?

- What is essential to know?
- What would be useful to know?
- What would be interesting – but wouldn't actually affect the school's policy and practice?

Don't ask for views if you can't or won't do anything with them – make clear what you can change and what you can't. To avoid wasting people's time, the focus should be on the essential, with a few useful questions, and nothing included which is unlikely to be useful. However, there should be some space for open responses (e.g. "What do you think is the biggest problem...?" "What else would you change...?") as sometimes unexpected issues emerge.

Next steps

Sections 5, 6 and 7 contain more suggestions for consulting staff, parents and pupils. There is also a consultation framework in appendix A.

3. Local support for schools

Local authority

Local structures for supporting schools vary and may be undergoing change, for example as local authorities take on responsibility for public health from April 2013. However, through your local authority you should be able to find the appropriate person who commissions and supports young people's drug services and can give advice to schools.

Key questions to ask include:

- Is there any advice available such as a model policy, or advice on effective drug education?
- What local data is there relating to young people's alcohol and drug use and other local knowledge?
- Does the local authority have a strategy for how schools can help in reducing demand for alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs?
- Who is the best person to talk to in the local police force?
- What local organisations are there which provide treatment and support for children, young people and families and/or contribute to school drug education?

Police

The police may have three distinct roles in relation to drugs.

- Advisory: trained officers with responsibility for liaising with schools who can provide informal advice
- Investigating circumstances where an offence is suspected and the possibility of charges arise
- Specialist support of the curriculum

There is likely to be a local protocol for drug-related incidents in schools. The Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance for police working with schools and colleges, *Joining Forces* (2006), lists the following issues that a local protocol should address:

- When can schools be confident they would have police support for managing an incident internally?
- When should schools inform police about an incident?
- When should schools consult police as to how to proceed and whether police involvement might be helpful or necessary?
- When should the police be involved, owing to the seriousness of the incident or following other incidents?
- When should police initiate their own warrant-led investigations at school or with school pupils?
- How will risks to the health and safety of pupils and staff be assessed and managed?
- How should the risks from drug paraphernalia found on school premises or grounds be managed?

- What will happen if drugs are found on premises, but not in the possession of a particular individual?
- How will pupils be questioned about their suspected possession of illegal drugs?
- How will drug incidents be recorded and followed up?
- How will suspected illegal substances be stored for identification and/or disposal by police?

Schools may wish to discuss further with police:

- how preliminary advice could be sought on an incident without divulging the details such as the pupil's name;
- when it would be appropriate to inform police but no further involvement necessary;
- when a pupil's name can be withheld and when it should be divulged to the police;
- sharing information about inappropriate sale or supply of tobacco, alcohol or volatile substances

The school's drug policy should allocate responsibility for making these kinds of decisions.

Neighbouring schools

What can you learn from neighbouring schools' approach to drugs? Is drug education co-ordinated across primary and secondary schools to ensure consistency and building on previous learning?

Local drug and alcohol services

Clear referral protocols and communication routes should be established between schools and agencies providing support to children and young people around drug and alcohol. The school should be confident that it can identify need and refer or signpost to appropriate services where necessary:

- Targeted prevention / early intervention for young people who are identified as at high risk of substance use and who may already be experimenting.
- Specialist services for young people whose drug or alcohol use is frequent / escalating or is otherwise believed to pose a risk of harm, because of the age of the child or young person, the substance used (for example volatile substances).
- Specialist services for children and young people who have complex needs or whose substance misuse is causing current harm, requiring a specialist or statutory integrated response, which may be focused around safeguarding.
- Services to support the children of drug and alcohol misusers. These might be 'young carers' services.

Community

Outside the school, there may be other members of the local community who can contribute to discussions about the school's drug policy, for example the parish council or park wardens.

4. Working group activities

Scope of the review

One of the first tasks of the working group will be to decide on the scope of the review. Is an in-depth review needed of the school's response to drug incidents, or of drug education?

Key questions:

- Does the policy include all the elements within the framework in Advice for Schools?
- Have any concerns been voiced about the school's drug education provision, response to drug incidents or the support provided to pupils at risk?
- Have there been any significant policy changes at local or national level?
- Does current practice reflect the written policy?
- How far does drug education provided match up to best practice guidance? It may be useful for the PSHE coordinator to complete the checklist (appendix B) to assess the extent to which action may be needed.
- Have there been any recent reviews or consultations about PSHE provision, behaviour policies or supporting vulnerable pupils?

While other issues may come up during the course of the review, these questions should help clarify priorities for the working group and wider consultation exercises.

Purpose of the school drug policy

In the current drug policy, is it clear what its purpose is, including how it reflects the whole school ethos and the whole school approach to health? Could the wording be improved to make this clearer to everyone, both inside and outside the school?

Rights and responsibilities

An exercise which can help clarify the school's approach to drugs is to create a 'rights and responsibilities' table for pupils, parents, teachers and the school management. This activity can also be used with focus groups of parents, pupils or teachers. It may involve considering:

- What are the school's responsibilities as an employer?
- Do the rules around drugs and alcohol for pupils, staff and parents reflect a consistent approach to drugs? This is significant in demonstrating to pupils that these restrictions are important rather than arbitrary.
- What do pupils have a right to be taught in school drug education?
- If parents have concerns about their children, would they be expected to communicate these to the school?
- What support do teachers need in their role as drug educators?

Review of the current policy

What evidence is there to show how well the current policy is working? For example:

- records of drug incidents
- issues raised in SMT, staff, governors' meetings
- repeated drug-related breaches of school rules
- the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions
- outcomes for pupils referred to specialist services
- assessment of pupils' learning in drug education
- monitoring of teaching
- feedback from pupils and teachers on their drug education

Review of drug education

Appendix B in this toolkit is a table which can be used by the PSHE education coordinator to identify areas for improvement. He or she can then share this with the working group, suggesting the most important priorities for action and any alterations that may need to be made to the written policy.

Drug incident scenarios

A list of possible scenarios can be found in appendix C. Would it be clear from the current policy what teachers should do in these situations? Are there any that would create particular dilemmas?

When this policy is reviewed again, what evidence will we need to find out if it's working?

This activity draws on the earlier one of reviewing the current policy, since this may flag up whether types of information that would be useful are not currently collected. How would you know whether the school's management of drug-related incidents has been successful? Is it worth investing in a regular survey to understand young people's drug use? Is the monitoring and evaluation of drug education adequate?

Drafting the new policy

This will need to draw on both discussions in the working group and findings from any wider consultation exercises. Once the person leading the review has drafted the policy, a final meeting of the working group is needed to review the policy.

Dissemination

If pupils, parents and teachers were consulted about the policy, it is important both to share the final policy and also to explain what changed as a result of consultation – and what didn't and why.

Staff are likely to have limited time to engage with the new policy, but even a brief discussion in a meeting can be valuable in making the policy 'real'. This may mean giving an overview of the policy, then focusing on one or two important changes.

5. Consulting teachers and other staff

All school staff can potentially be affected by whether the school has a clear and effective drug policy, and so should be consulted. However if the school's drug education is being reviewed, it may be worth doing a more detailed survey of teachers responsible for delivering this. There are suggested formats and questions for both of these in appendix D.

If there is sufficient interest, a focus group of teachers could also be held. Exercises suggested for the working group (section 4) could be used as a starting point to plan this.

6. Consulting parents

Parents/carers have a crucial role in preventing young people's problem use of drugs and alcohol. Young people are more likely to avoid this when:

- family bonds are strong
- there is strong parental monitoring and clear family rules
- they can talk openly with their parents/carers.

Schools can support parents in helping them talk to their children about difficult issues such as drugs and alcohol, while parents also need to support school drug education and rules around drugs. They should be encouraged to support their child's learning at home, for example through shared learning activities.

Parents/carers could be involved in reviewing the school drug policy through:

- representation on the working group
- questionnaires
- parent/carer focus groups
- drug awareness evenings

Parents/carers of primary-age pupils will need to understand the importance of starting drug education from an early age, and that it includes learning about medicines, volatile substances, alcohol and tobacco.

Many schools hold drug awareness sessions for parents/carers. Strategies that help increase attendance include:

- combining with a pupil performance or assembly, for example, where pupils demonstrate what they have learnt through their drug education
- offering drug awareness as part of a broader parenting or communication programme
- holding sessions in community settings or within organisations representing particular ethnic groups
- inviting parents/carers into school to learn alongside their children

An event such as this would be a good opportunity to consult groups of parents about the school

drug policy – alternatively, the review of the school drug policy would be a good moment to consider whether the school does enough to engage parents in drug education and consult on whether parents would find a drug awareness event useful.

Surveying parents

Schools might wish to carry out a survey of parents entirely on this topic. Alternatively they might wish to add a few relevant questions to another survey.

Example questions:

- What do you think the school's drug and alcohol policy should try and achieve?
 - Keeping children and young people safe.
 - Teaching them life skills
 - Enforcing the school rules and supporting laws on drugs, alcohol and smoking
 - Other...
- Do you think your children understand the school's rules on drugs and alcohol?
- Would you like information to help you in talking to your children about alcohol?
- Would you like information to help you in talking to your children about drugs? (*illegal drugs, 'legal highs' or volatile substances (sniffing glue, gases, aerosols or petrol)*)

Discussion ideas for a parent focus group

Do pupils get consistent messages at home and at school about alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs? If not, why not, and could the school do anything about this?

Does the school respond appropriately to breaches of rules related to drugs, compared to disciplinary action for breaches of other school rules (for example theft, violence or bullying).

Is it more important to have fixed sanctions for certain offences, so pupils are clear where they stand, or to be able to be flexible according to circumstances?

How could parents access support if they were worried about their child's behaviour?

How should the school support children where there is known to be a problem with drugs or alcohol in their family?

What rights and responsibilities do parents, teachers and pupils have relating to the school drug policy? Should parents have to sign a copy of the policy?

Further reading

The Drug Education Forum report on engaging parents in drug education can be downloaded from www.mentoruk.org.uk/resources/schools/toolkit

7. Consulting pupils

Pupil consultation on school drug policies is included as a requirement both within the 'Advice to Schools' and the previous government guidance from 2004.

Many of the basic principles of consultation are the same whoever is being consulted, whether pupils, parents or teachers, but it can be particularly challenging to ensure consultation with pupils is meaningful and not tokenistic.

What is the difference between consultation and participation?

These are much-debated terms, but are used here as follows:

Consultation – adult-led, children and young people asked for their opinions (generally refers to one project)

Meaningful pupil consultation:

- Non-trivial (some significant aspects are open to change)
- Everyone gets a chance to have their say.
- Pupils understand why they are being asked to give their views and how these views are taken into account.
- Pupils are kept informed of the changes being made as a result of their input, and if particular ideas have been rejected, they are told why.

Participation – includes opportunities for pupil-led activities in addition to consultation (can describe one project or the whole democratic ethos of a school)

Meaningful pupil participation includes the principles listed above, and in addition:

- Pupils can initiate changes rather than having the areas of work always set by adults.
- Pupils get a chance to influence 'core' aspects of the school (e.g. teaching and learning, school rules and policies)

Schools which have a culture of pupil participation, with the structures and processes already set up, will find it easier than others to secure pupil input into a particular area, such as the school's drug policy. There are many resources available to help improve pupil participation in schools (see the end of this section for some of these).

Benefits of consulting pupils on the school's drug policy

There are general benefits of involving pupils in decision-making (for example self-esteem, skill development and attachment to school), In addition, giving children and young people a say in the school's drugs policy can:

- improve the policy, making it more relevant to pupils' needs;
- help pupils understand the school's approach to drugs and the reasoning behind this;
- bring up important learning opportunities about drug issues; and
- give greater legitimacy to the rules in the eyes of pupils.

Needs assessment and consultation.

To teach drug education effectively, teachers will want to have some idea of the children or young people's pre-existing knowledge, beliefs and experiences relating to legal and illegal drugs. This also gives valuable context to the overall school drug policy. However, this is clearly a very sensitive area to enquire into. There are methods (such as draw and write or 'jugs and herrings') that can be used in the classroom where pupils' drawings and explanations can give a picture of a class's understanding of 'drugs'.*

Another method is running an anonymous survey. Because of the challenges of wording sensitive questions appropriately, designing questionnaires and analysing the results, it may be preferable to use a model which has been tried and tested or external specialists.

Pupil consultation can then complement either of these, with questions that are less personally intrusive.

Pupils can be consulted through:

- representation on the working group
- the school council
- a focus group
- a survey
- classroom activities

It may be useful to refer to the framework for consultation in appendix A.

Pupil survey

Appendix E contains sample pupil surveys. Pupils can be involved as researchers: identifying questions that need to be asked, carrying out the survey and analysing the results.

Exercises for a pupil focus group

Priorities for drug education

Pupils get together in pairs and rank a list of statements from most important to least important to learn about. Examples are listed below, some more suitable for older pupils.

Pairs then join together in fours and agree on a common order. As well as collecting these, each group of four feeds back their top three priorities and why they chose these, as well as any reason they thought an issue was unimportant.

Rank – most important to least important to learn about for pupils your age

- School rules about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Laws about young people and drugs
- What most people your age do – and whether it's different from what they say!
- Impacts of drinking alcohol – what are the risks and benefits right now
- Effects of drinking alcohol in the long term

* further information available at www.mentoruk.org.uk/resources/schools/toolkit

- Impacts of smoking right now
- Effects of smoking in the long term
- Different types of illegal drugs and their effects
- Risks of sniffing glue, gases or petrol
- How to manage social situations where others are drinking or taking drugs and you don't want to.
- How to stay safe when you're out and keep your friends safe.
- Where you can get help if you are worried about yourself or someone you know.
- Effect of alcohol & drugs on sex and relationships, and keeping yourself safe.

Rights and responsibilities

Explain the purpose of the school's drug policy, for example "to keep everyone safe when they are at school, and to help our pupils be confident in making healthy choices outside school."

Explain that to make this happen, pupils, parents and teachers all have responsibilities, but also have rights / reasonable expectations of others. For example, teachers, have a responsibility to give pupils accurate information, but might need training to make sure that their knowledge about teaching drug education is up to date.

Pupils can then use graffiti sheets or post-it notes to collect ideas about rights and responsibilities for each group (pupils/teachers/parents).

Pupils at risk of exclusion consulted about school drug policy

Case study from Southwark LEA cited in Drugs: Guidance for schools, 2004

A Year 10 tutor from a secondary school sought advice from the LEA to work with a group of pupils at risk of exclusion; the group contained both confirmed and suspected cannabis users. It was decided that the pupils would be approached and asked if they would participate in a focus group to discuss the school's drug policy. This would enable them to become aware of the possible consequences of their behaviour and allow their views to be considered as part of the policy review process.

A number of issues were discussed that were relevant to both the school and to the pupils. They discussed the issue of informing parents/carers when a pupil is found using cannabis at school and agreed that this would be a deterrent if it were policy. The pupils also gave suggestions about how young people should be questioned by the school and what support could be offered.

This exercise increased the pupils' understanding of school rules and the consequences of breaking them as well as reinforcing the school's concern for their well-being. It enabled the pupils to feel that their views were valued.

Further reading

More resources on pupil participation are available from www.mentoruk.org/resources/schools/toolkit

This toolkit has been produced by Mentor with funding from the Department for Education. Mentor is the only UK-wide charity dedicated to preventing alcohol and drug harms to children. Mentor supports schools and local authorities to pursue best practice in drug education through provision of practical resources, and supports the implementation of promising prevention programmes.

The content of the toolkit reflects the experience of Mentor and our colleagues in schools and in organisations which offer advice and support to schools. We hope that schools will get in touch with their experiences of using our resources: you can contact us at resources@mentoruk.org

Mentor
1st floor
67 – 69 Cowcross Street
London EC1M 6PU
resources@mentoruk.org
www.mentoruk.org.uk

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Author: Claire James