

Drug Advice for Schools

The Department for Education and Association of Chief Police Officers have [published](#) joint guidance for schools to help them manage drug and alcohol incidents, inform them about their legal powers they have (particularly around searching pupils and confiscating contraband) and to help them develop a drug policy.

The DfE say that the new guidance replaces the 2004 guidance, however, it is not as broad as in the past; with the advice on the scope and approaches they might use in educating their pupils about drugs having been omitted.

We wait to see whether this will be addressed by the current review of PSHE education which is due to report shortly.

Key messages

Schools are advised to:

- Develop a broad drug policy (in consultation with the whole school community) which will include sections on how drug education will be organised and the content of the programme, management of medicines and of incidents (including those occurring on school trips), and links to the wider behaviour policy.
- Appoint a senior member of staff to have responsibility for the policy.
- Establish links with local statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure support is available to pupils who may need additional support.

Searches

The guidance makes clear that schools should not consider the legal status of a substance as a hindrance to confiscation, and says where the legality isn't clear the substance should be treated as a controlled drug.

While it isn't obligatory for schools to record searches they are advised to do so, nor is it obligatory to inform parents either before or after a search has taken place.

The Police

Schools are advised to agree with the police a protocol for working together. This should include how they will deal with any drugs found on the school premises. The guidance on how schools should deal with suspected controlled drugs is similar to the 2004 guidance. They say that schools should:

- ensure that a second adult witness is present throughout;

- seal the sample in a plastic bag and include details of the date and time of the seizure/find and witness present;
- store it in a secure location, such as a safe or other lockable container with access limited to senior members of staff;
- notify the police without delay, who will collect it and then store or dispose of it in line with locally agreed protocols. The law does not require a school to divulge to the police the name of the pupil from whom the drugs were taken but it is advisable to do so;
- record full details of the incident, including the police incident reference number;
- inform parents/carers, unless this is not in the best interests of the pupil;
- identify any safeguarding concerns and develop a support and disciplinary response (see below).

Sniffer Dogs

The guidance makes clear that ACPO's advice is not to use sniffer dogs in schools where there is no evidence of the presence of drugs on the premises.

Tackling Drug Issues

The guidance suggests that the most effective strategies for tackling drugs will include:

- making sure the response is supported by the whole school community;
- drug education is part of a well-planned programme of PSHE education;
- pupils understand the school rules and are made aware of the national helplines;
- staff have access to high quality training and support.

Discipline

Schools need to have their own procedures to manage behaviour, they are advised that exclusion "should not be the automatic response to a drug incident and permanent exclusion should only be used in serious cases."

Early Intervention

The guidance suggests that schools will want to make needs assessment of pupils with the view to identifying those who will most benefit from drug education, those who may also require targeted interventions, and any that may need more specialist services.