



16 February 2024

Dear Parents and Carers

We are writing to update you about an important national issue regarding drug taking amongst young people in particular. This letter is a joint letter from all the Secondary Headteachers in Hertfordshire as this issue is a societal problem that is happening on a daily basis in our communities and enters our schools as a result. It is therefore not restricted to individual schools and not just a school problem.

Whilst all our schools have long-standing rules and guidance regarding drug taking which follow DfE guidelines, the purpose of this letter is to make you aware of matters and to share information in order to do the best we can to keep children safe from drugs.

'Vaping' and the rise of E Vapes has become a significant public health issue, and we have all been working together with Hertfordshire County Council, the Police and other agencies who all remain increasingly concerned about the rise of 'vaping' amongst young people across the county and in all schools.

This is particularly the case regarding the use of the following:

- Vape pens
- Liquids and oils
- THC

Some of these are currently legal and some are illegal, and the difficulty is being able to observe and know the difference between the two. Synthetic illegal substances can often be odourless and very difficult to detect due to the nature of chemicals used. They can also appear to be quite innocently named. It seems to continue to be a fad or fashion for young people to experiment with vaping, particularly at parties and whilst in park areas with their friends.

One of the problems with vaping is that pupils sharing a 'vape' often have no idea what they are actually inhaling, which is potentially very dangerous in itself. To vape from someone's pen is extremely dangerous – one simply does not know the safety of what is being vaped, and it is therefore extremely risky. The risks are heightened as some of these substances can cause extreme behaviours and reactions, and the national press covers sad stories on a regular basis of young people either dying or being seriously affected by such drugs misuse.

It may be helpful for parents to know that we are told vape pens, liquids, oils and other such paraphernalia can be legally purchased online and can also be purchased via Amazon, Ebay and other accounts. We encourage you to monitor your child's online purchases closely as these accounts are often set as 'private' and can be hidden. If you see a change in your child's behaviour, sleep or eating patterns we would advise you to speak to your child about your concerns and to search their room for any vape pens, liquids, oils and other such paraphernalia.

With regard to Birchwood High School, we have significant penalties for any vapes found in school. (Please be aware that any vapes found to have illegal substances, such as THC added, would usually lead to permanent exclusion). Please see our Behaviour Policy on our website for more details.

We all recognise the importance of educating our pupils when dealing with drugs related issues and constantly adapt and review our curriculum and assembly plan and work with external agencies to keep abreast of changes and issues.

At Birchwood High School, this has included:

- PSICHE units of work on Drug misuse, substance abuse, peer influence and healthy lifestyles.
- The effects of drugs and smoking is covered in our Science lessons from Key Stage 3 and in our GCSE PE curriculum.
- Assemblies on the physical and mental health dangers of drugs, smoking and vaping.
- Assemblies on the law in relation to drugs, smoking and vaping.

Below are some services which may be of use if you are concerned about your child.

Talk to Frank is an educational site for young people and their families with lots of help and advice on all topics related to illegal substances. Their website is user-friendly with advice and education to help and support. Telephone 0300 123 66 00 or visit their website: www.talktofrank.com.

Drugwise offers information on drugs, alcohol and tobacco and have an A-Z of drugs explaining what they are and how they are used: DrugWise

The Mix provides information and support for the under 25s covering a range of topics. You can use their helpline or webchat from 11am-11pm daily. Telephone: 0808 808 4994 or go to www.themix.org.uk.

All schools in Hertfordshire are committed to working with parents and carers to ensure that our young people are making informed and safe decisions.

Yours sincerely

Hertfordshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers