



Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to share with you some recent concerns I have for the safety and wellbeing of our young people. As a Headteacher and a father myself I urge you to read this letter to the end. Over recent weeks I have become increasingly concerned about the use of e-cigarettes (vapes) in our community. Whilst this is an issue that you may believe does not affect your child directly, I want to share some information that will hopefully highlight the dangers for everyone and enable me to galvanise your support in moving forward.



Vapes have very quickly become part of youth culture, and whilst the proportion of our learners who are known to vape is reasonably small, there is a risk for all. You might (like I used to) be of the belief that these are better than smoking normal cigarettes, but I have learned that this is not the case. One reason is that we are finding increasing numbers of young people acquiring 'vapes' from the illegal market. These are often initially cheaper than high street prices but can be laced with LSD, GHB, MDMA (ecstasy), ketamine, kratom, opioids, including fentanyl and marijuana (THC/CBD). **I have seen first-hand that vapes bought in this community have had adverse effects on our young people.** If you become aware of this, please report directly to trading standards or the police via a 101 call or online log.



Before the Christmas break the school had to call ambulances for a number of learners who had vaped an unknown substance in the park before school. Last week another learner reported feeling unwell after buying his first vape. In discussions with our learners, I am alarmed by how many appear confident about what is contained in their e-cigarettes whilst in reality they have no certainty at all. The negative effects of vaping could easily be felt by any of our learners, even if it is their first experience. Seeing some of our learners going to A&E in the week before Christmas with heart rates in excess of 200 bpm, terrified me as a Headteacher and a father. Whilst this incident did not happen on the school site, I am under no illusion that it could, it is for this reason that I write so directly and openly to all parents and carers.



Even a vape that isn't laced with noxious substance can have the effect of altering the mood of someone who becomes addicted, making them more anxious and perhaps irritable. We believe that the increase in case load for our pastoral and wellbeing staff is partly attributable to this new trend.



In school we will do all we can to educate our young people and to ensure that they are able to make healthy choices, but the work needs to be done in partnership with home and the wider community. My greatest concern in school is how a minority of our learners use the toilet facilities. It is impossible to police what happens inside a toilet cubicle, and whilst all toilet blocks are staffed at the door during social times and monitored carefully, the challenge is significant. Toilet blocks cannot be manned during lesson time; this is one reason that we discourage leaving lessons to visit the toilet. I know that the behaviour of a small minority who use our toilet facilities is not good enough. It troubles me that some learners tell me that they would rather not use the facilities at all and opt instead to wait until they get home. Recently I have placed a ban on a number of disruptive students from using the toilet blocks. These students must instead request access to the first aid toilet at the school reception.





In order to keep our school community safe, I will continue with the measures detailed below that your children are already aware of:



1. There is a strict one person per cubicle rule. If any learner is seen to leave a toilet cubicle with another student there will be a sanction. It is likely to result in suspension from school.
2. Toilet use out of lessons is restricted to emergencies only. Learners using toilets during lesson times is tracked to look for patterns and abuse of the system.

I would also like to draw parent's attention to the school's Physical Intervention and Physical Search Policy – <https://www.westhoughton-high.org/wp-content/uploads/Physical-intervention-Policy-WHS.pdf> We will use the guidance outlined in this policy where we have suspicions of vapes being brought into school.



We ask for your support. Please talk to your child about the content of this letter. Please also regularly check their bags and pockets for e-cigarettes. It is a worry for me that so much of the time of school leaders and other colleagues is devoted to managing the vaping / toilet behaviours of a few when we are so determined to improve the quality of education offered for all. However, when there is a genuine risk to safety this must be a priority for us all.



Yours sincerely,



Mr N. S Coe
Headteacher

