

Dear Parent / Carer(s),

Important information for ALL parents

I am writing to you following a city-wide meeting of all secondary heads where we shared a collective concern, like many other schools across the country, about a recent spike in incidents involving student vaping.

You will notice that this letter contains very similar information to that which we sent out to you last term, however, ALL schools in Plymouth have collectively agreed to send this letter to all parents in Plymouth. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the wider issue of vaping by children and young people and provide some facts and information about where you can get support. It is also to alert you to possible repercussions if your child engages in vaping on school property.

We take this issue very seriously due to the negative health effects vaping could have on young people and often find that our parents/carers may not be aware of the risks around vaping by this age group.

The increase in vaping prompted us to do more research and we want to share our findings with you. We also want to highlight the dangers of illegal drugs that some young people have been vaping.

General Information.

- In the UK, the proportion of 11 to 18-year-olds who vape doubled between 2020 and 2022. That figure has continued to rise – particularly with the frequent portrayals of vaping as cool and fashionable on social media platforms.
- Vaping by young people mainly involves nicotine, which is highly addictive.
- Unregulated vape devices and products may contain other toxic substances which are concerning.
- The liquids that are vaporised come in many different flavours and might even smell fruity. For example, many of the flavours of these liquid concentrates, or 'vape juices', are sweet and even have names such as cinnamon roll, marshmallow, grape, strawberry, bubblegum, lemonade and cookies.
- Whilst vapes help people to stop smoking it is not risk free. A key prevention message for young people is, if you don't smoke or vape, don't start.
- Vaporizers/e-cigarettes come in all different shapes. Some common styles we see look like a thick pen, a stylus for an iPad, a flash drive, or a small flask with a round chimney coming off the top. The devices are very small and can easily be hidden on a person or blend in with normal backpack items.
- Like cigarettes and alcohol, it is illegal to sell vaping items to people under the age of 18. However, students report that they can purchase these devices from some shops, online or from older siblings, friends, or other adults such as family members. It is also an offence for anyone to purchase vapes for anyone under the age of 18.
- Many young vapers simply aren't aware of the potential pitfalls with risks including use of unregulated products that may contain toxic ingredients and also, possible future nicotine addiction.
- There has been an increase in use by some young people of vaping illegal drugs. Most often this is thought to be THC liquid (from cannabis), or it could be other synthetic drugs. There is no control over what is actually in these vapes or how strong these drugs are.

- THC oil is a thick, sticky yellow / brown liquid chemical from the cannabis plant.
- THC and synthetic drugs used are illegal in the UK.
- Students can overdose on THC used in this way very easily causing them to become unwell very quickly. This can lead to medical attention being sought or even being taken to hospital as a precaution as this can be very worrying. Most of these effects go after an hour but this is a concerning experience for the young person and also those witnessing this situation and / or trying to help.

Parents / carers who vape

The evidence for the positive benefits of vaping is strong BUT is almost wholly linked to stopping smoking using regulated devices and products. Evidence of the health harms of smoking is clear and is associated with earlier death or loss of healthy years of life. By switching to vaping adults who are dependent on nicotine or who have respiratory illness / associated illness can improve their health significantly. Many of us have family members who we have seen benefit from swapping from smoking to vaping. Virtually all the evidence for this comes from research on adults NOT children. Vapes are not harm free and for young people to start vaping carries risk. Additionally, there has not been enough research looking at brain development and other consequences of vaping to children and young people from vaping. We do know that substances including nicotine can have an effect with brain development in childhood and youth. It is therefore important that until evidence suggests otherwise that we help our children understand that vapes are for helping adults to stop smoking and continue to avoid smoking, and that for young people still growing (all through secondary school) they should be avoided.

School

Vaping is prohibited in behaviour policies across secondary schools in the city, including Stoke Damerel, and will be subject to sanctions.

At Stoke Damerel we have taken positive steps to ensure that students are kept safe, which include assemblies, curriculum collapse sessions, PSHE lessons. We also ensure that adults are present and visible in all areas of the school both during lessons and at breaktimes, and that during lessons students using our toilets do so responsibly and not in groups.

Possessing, sharing, supplying and using a vape containing THC or a synthetic drug (illegal drugs) on our school site is a serious breach of the law and will not be tolerated. THC or any other illegal substances are not permitted on this, or any other, school site.

We encourage you to have a conversation with your child about this topic, and to contact us if you are concerned about your child. If your child needs some support or wants to discuss this with someone in school, please direct them to the safeguarding team.

It is important that you **ensure** that your child is aware of the following:

- Students must not bring any type of vape to school. Doing so will lead to confiscation of the vape device and related e-liquids, as well as possible additional sanctions.
- Students must not bring any illegal drugs to school including vapes with illegal drugs. This will lead to sanctions and is normally treated as a very serious breach of the behaviour policy.

We hope you find this letter informative and understand our concerns about this potentially harmful issue for young people. Our goal is to work with parents to help support our students in making positive decisions for themselves and their future which we do through our PSHE programme and assemblies.

Your faithfully,

ATSFrier

Anita Frier
Headteacher

Further Information

The Council and other partners are producing more information that will be ready very soon. Much of this is based on information already produced by Sheffield that they have kindly let us use. You can use this link to see / use the original information / video produced by Sheffield.

[Vaping: The Facts | Smokefree Sheffield.](#)

Partners like the Police, Youth Service, Young People's Specialist Problem Substance Use Service, Trading Standards and the Council's Public Health Team are working together to offer support to schools in responding to any incidents, contribute toward the prevention of use by young people and also provide support to young people where this helps.

Some contacts:

Trading Standards:

tradingstandards@devon.gov.uk

- Under 18 Test purchasing
- Intelligence and enforcement re shops involved in underage selling and / or sales of unregulated products and devices

Young Peoples Problem Substance Service; SHARP:

[How we can make Differences for our Young People - Harbour](#) 01752 434343

Livewell South West:

[Stop Smoking | One You Plymouth](#)

- Help to stop smoking (not vaping): available for from the age of 12 and above. Can provide nicotine patches. 01752 437177