

# *Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2006*

## *Findings on drug education and school policies*

*This note is a briefing on what **Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2006** says about drug education and school policies.*

*There will be a separate note on the current numbers of young people smoking, drinking or taking drugs.*

### *Smoking*

*There's a section on normative messages around smoking in which the report's authors say:*

*In 2006, 9% of pupils were regular smokers and a further 5% were occasional smokers. Pupils tended to overestimate the prevalence of smoking. Although 41% thought 'only a few' people their age smoked (the most accurate answer), 45% thought that half or more people their age smoked. Responses were similar in 2004 and 2005.*

*The proportion of pupils who smoke rises with age, and to some extent pupils' answers reflected this. 2% of pupils aged 11 smoked, and most 11 year olds thought that none or only a few of their age group smoked (40% and 44% respectively), but 16% thought that half or more of their age group were smokers. Among 15 year olds, 29% smoked regularly or occasionally, but 71% thought that half or more people of their age smoked.*

*They go on to report on the number of young people who can recall lessons on smoking which they say has stayed at 58% since 2004, with girls having slightly higher recall than boys, and older pupils remembering more often than younger ones.*

*Only one school said it didn't teach pupils about tobacco. 83% had a written policy about what to do if pupils are caught smoking on school premises, with 5% of schools saying they would permanently exclude the pupil.*

*91% of schools said they had a policy on adults smoking on school premises. There has been an increase (67% up to 80%) since 2005 saying they don't allow smoking anywhere on school grounds.*

*9% of schools involved pupils in the development of their smoking policies. Amongst what they call predictors of regular smoking the report says that there is a correlation between schools smoking policies and the tendency for pupils to be regular smokers. Where the schools discipline policy gives detentions or puts a note on the pupil's record they are less likely to be regular smokers. They do point out that:*

*The strongest predictor of regular smoking was drug use. Pupils who had taken drugs at least once in the last year were eight times more likely to be regular smokers than those who had never taken drugs (odds ratio=8.27). Those who had taken drugs at least once, but had not done so in the last year, were more than three times as likely to be regular smokers (odds ratio=3.26).*

## Alcohol

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*Similar proportions of pupils recall their alcohol education as those remembering being taught about tobacco.*

The proportion of pupils who recalled having lessons on alcohol is 54%; this has varied from year to year, but stayed at a similar level in recent years. There were no differences in recall between boys and girls. Year 7 pupils were least likely to recall having lessons on drinking in the last 12 months. Pupils in Year 9 and Year 10 were most likely to recall such lessons (61% and 64% respectively).

*One school said it didn't provide any alcohol education.*

*82% said they had a written policy on what to do where pupils are found to have been drinking on school premises with a variety of responses. 17% of schools said this would include permanent exclusion.*

*Unlike smoking school behaviour policies don't seem to be a predictive factor in young people's drinking, with one exception:*

pupils whose schools who would send them to a counsellor if they were caught drinking were more likely to have drunk alcohol recently (odds ratio=1.31). It may be that the school policy has been influenced by the proportion of pupils who drink, rather than the opposite.

## Drug Use

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*Similar numbers recall lessons about drugs as with the other substances covered by the report.*

The proportion of pupils (58%) who remembered having school lessons on drugs in the last year is similar to previous years. As in previous years, recall was highest in Year 10 (71%), and was lowest among Year 7 pupils (44%), who in most cases were recalling teaching in their primary schools.

*For those of us interested in how young people perceive drug education there's some good news:*

Of those pupils who remembered having lessons about drugs in the past year, more than nine out of ten felt that the lessons had helped them think about the risks of taking drugs (94%), and had helped them to find out more about drugs (90%). Most of those who remembered the lessons also felt that they had helped them to realise that taking drugs is against the law, helped them to avoid drugs, and had helped them think what to do if they were offered drugs. Pupils were least likely to agree that the lessons had helped them to see that not as many young people took drugs as they thought (39%).

*They found that 96% of schools have a written drug policy (of which two thirds said that pupils had contributed to its development) and all said they provide drug education. 68% of the schools included permanent exclusion as part of their response to pupils being found in possession of illegal drugs.*

*As with smoking and alcohol the report looks at the correlation between school policies and drug taking. They find three "somewhat surprising" positive associations - writing a note on the pupil's record, temporary exclusion and detention. They go on to qualify this by saying:*

As noted above, odds ratios describe relationships but do not explain them; while it seems unlikely that pupils are encouraged to take drugs by certain school policies, it is possible that schools that have a particular problem with drug use are more likely to implement these types of discipline.

## Normative messages

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*The report looks at how young people perceive their peers use of drugs in relation to the development of normative messages and found:*

Pupils were most likely to have realistic beliefs about drug taking – most pupils chose either the most accurate category, ‘only a few’ (47%) or an underestimate, ‘none of them’ (39%). However, pupils were likely to overestimate the numbers of their peers who smoked (45% thought that half or more people their age smoked) or drank alcohol (41% of pupils thought that most or all people their age drank alcohol).

*The full report Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2006 can be downloaded from the Information Centre’s website:*

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk>

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