

7 November 2023

Dear High Storrs families,

Vaping and the dangers for our children

We have recently seen an increase in the number of young people who are vaping and bringing vapes on to school site. As a Trust and as a school we take this issue very seriously due to the negative health effects vaping has on young children and the potential harm it can cause.

It is with this in mind that I am writing to you to raise awareness about how we can work together to help all children to make sensible and informed decisions.

An article published by *The Independent* on 18 May this year highlighted startling statistics that you may have seen:

- **Nationally, the number of children trying vaping has risen by 50% in the last year.**
- **Data from a recently released report shows a rise in experimental vaping among 11- to 17-year-olds, from 7.7% last year to 11.6% this year.**

This increase is perhaps unsurprising given that the marketing of vapes has been directed specifically at young people. 'Bubble gum' flavoured vapes marketed on social media with cartoon characters are designed to appeal directly to children, not adults. This is not permitted with tobacco, but there appears to be much less regulation for vapes.

This rise in usage highlights three key areas of concern: health, safety and environmental which I would like to deal with in turn.

Health

Although vaping was initially introduced as a means for people to give up smoking, the evidence around long-term health is unclear. Vapes are illegal to purchase under the age of 18 years old and the NHS does not recommend the use of vapes for children under this age.

A significant concern is associated with the level of nicotine in vapes and the issues for children who become highly addicted. The additional content of vapes is also raising health fears. A recent BBC investigation found children could be inhaling more than twice the daily safe amount of lead and nine times the safe amount of nickel.

An additional and growing concern is that vapes are now being adapted to include cannabis and other illegal substances like 'spice' which pose a significant risk to our young people. This appears to be a national trend and one which some of our schools are working with the police and other external agencies to tackle and understand.

The health message is clear. We cannot be certain about the content of vapes and should assume that the vast majority are highly harmful to young people.

Safety

A secondary aspect that you may not be aware of is the supply chain for young people, whether that is through purchasing at a shop or from those who are selling these without licence to do so.

We are aware of reports of Sheffield shops selling vapes to those who are clearly school children. Whenever we receive this information, it is immediately passed to the police. Furthermore, we have seen evidence supplied to us from the police that suggests children as young as eight years old are experimenting with vapes and there is increasing concern around criminal activity that creates business models to supply younger and younger children with vapes; especially those containing illicit and illegal substances. Vapes are increasingly acting as a gateway drug for criminal gangs who are looking to exploit young people. This is an important fact for parents and carers to be aware of.

Environmental

The evidence is now extensive about the large environmental damage that disposable vapes are having. It has recently been reported that around 5 million disposable vapes are thrown away every week.

The vapes themselves contain lithium batteries. A Parliamentary report in 2022 estimated that 10 tonnes of lithium were being thrown away every year, equivalent to the batteries inside 1,200 electric vehicles.

Schools are increasingly finding that students are flushing disposable vapes down toilets and some have now had to engage in substantial cost to unblock drains.

Moving forwards

In the last decade, we have seen a very positive decline in smoking amongst young people. To achieve that, it took concerted efforts to change the marketing rules, limit the sale and distribution and take it out of common social situations. Vapes have been allowed to fill that void, and we must now work together to ensure our children are kept safe from this harm.

I am therefore asking for your support in this matter and ask for your help with the following:

1. Please talk with your children about the dangers of vaping and the possible health, safety and environmental implications.
2. Please warn your children about buying, handling or accepting anything from others and the risks associated with this in relation to criminal activity.
3. Please report any concerns you have relating to the illegal sale of vapes to the police

If you do have concerns about your child using vapes, please contact school to discuss your concerns with their dedicated pastoral manager (Head of House in Y7-11 and Head of Year in Y12-13). Additional information about vapes, and the harm they pose can also be found by accessing the following websites:

- Know the Risks: <http://www.ash.org.uk>
- Kids Health: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/e-cigarettes.html>

As a Trust and a school we will maintain to manage vape related incidents in line with our behaviour policy. In addition, we will:

1. Continue to provide educational input into the dangers of the use of vapes through PSHE lessons, tutor time, pastoral support, assemblies and through the formal taught curriculum.
2. Work with young people and families affected to provide support and signpost external assistance wherever necessary, particularly where individuals are seeking to quit.
3. Work with local and regional schools in sharing good practice and support effective safeguarding practices.
4. Continue to work with external agencies, such as the Police and health promotion agencies to help educate our children and keep them safe from harm.

We are also working towards the installation and use of vape alarms in school toilets and will update you further when these are in place.

I hope you have found this information useful and that we can work together to help keep our young people safe in relation to this matter.

Thank you for your continued support.

High Storrs School

Please be aware that the school has made policy changes in line with GDPR. Further information and privacy notices can be found on the school website <http://highstorrs.co.uk/our-school/privacy-notice>. If you require a paper copy please contact the school office. Please do also alert your child to the privacy notice for pupils.