



# Draft Substance Use Policy

Oct 2023

**This document serves as a draft policy, open for review by all stakeholders.**

**We encourage members of the school community to share their insights and feedback. Your input is not only valuable but essential in shaping a policy that best serves our collective interests.**

**For any comments or suggestions regarding this draft, please reach out to Dr Gash through email or other available channels.**

**To facilitate a timely review process, we kindly request that all feedback be submitted by Wednesday, 18th October 2023.**

**Thank you for your invaluable contribution and assistance.**

MIDDLETON COLLEGE



# Substance Use Policy

DRAFT Version 0.2, July 2023

## I. Introduction

The development of this Substance Use Policy is an essential part of our commitment to ensuring a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for every member of our school community.

### A. Rationale

Substance abuse represents a significant risk to the wellbeing, personal growth, and academic achievement of students. Moreover, it has implications for the broader school community, affecting our ability to maintain a nurturing and positive learning atmosphere.

This policy aims to address the issue of substance use and misuse in a thorough and structured manner. We will achieve this by outlining our school's proactive and reactive strategies to prevent substance use and manage incidents related to it. The policy will also clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all members of our community – students, teachers, staff, and parents alike – in mitigating the risks and addressing the impacts of substance abuse.

Our goal is not solely punitive; we acknowledge the importance of providing a robust support system for those affected. This includes providing resources for education, intervention, and recovery, emphasizing our commitment to the wellbeing of our students and the entire school community.

### B. Scope

This Substance Use Policy is inclusive and applies to all members of our school community, encompassing students, faculty, staff, parents, and visitors. Its relevance extends beyond regular school hours. The policy is applicable during all school-related activities, regardless of whether these activities take place on or off-campus, including during transportation to and from school or school-related events. We aim to create a consistent, unified front in our approach to substance use and misuse, fostering an environment of awareness, prevention, and support at all times and in all contexts related to the school.

### C. Policy Context

#### 1. Relationship to Middleton College's Ethos & Mission Statement

This Substance Use Policy stands as a testament to Middleton College's Ethos & Mission Statement. It is intrinsic to our commitment to holistic student development, a safe and nurturing environment, and a community that fosters respect, care, support, and encouragement.

Substance use and misuse can pose grave threats to our students' health, safety, and educational progress, thereby hindering our objective of holistic development. Our Substance Use Policy counters these risks by encouraging a healthy environment free from the detrimental effects of substance misuse.

As our Mission Statement indicates, we aim to be a place "where each student realises their potentials in an atmosphere of respect, care, support and encouragement". In this respect, our Substance Use Policy is a direct manifestation of this ethos, striving to maintain an environment conducive to maximising each student's potential.

Moreover, our Ethos Statement underscores the importance of active participation in the entirety of school life for all pupils. To this end, the Substance Use Policy provides clear guidance and outlines repercussions of substance misuse, ensuring students can engage fully and safely in their school experience.

In line with our Ethos Statement's commitment to the "educational development of each person" and to "provide the highest standard of education", the Substance Use Policy contributes to this goal. Through comprehensive education, prevention, and intervention strategies, we aim to keep our students well informed, safe, and supported.

Finally, our Ethos Statement describes Midleton College as a "familial community". The Substance Use Policy embodies this vision by cultivating an environment of shared responsibility, care, and mindfulness for the welfare of all its members. It thereby strengthens the mission and ethos of Midleton College - to respect, support, and encourage each student in their journey of growth and development.

## 2. Guiding Documents

Our Substance Use Policy is shaped by and aligned with several pivotal documents and strategies.

Foremost among these is the National Drugs Strategy 2017-2025 and 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery' – a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025, issued by the Department of Health. These documents provide a comprehensive response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland, emphasising a health-led approach based on person-centred services that promote rehabilitation and recovery. They encourage a culture of awareness, prevention, and support, principles that we have incorporated into our Substance Use Policy.

Additionally, we align with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) position, advocating for comprehensive, age-appropriate, and evidence-based substance use education for all students. This stance forms a key component of our policy and is integrated into our overall school curriculum. The DES's position reinforces our commitment to education as a crucial preventative measure against substance misuse.

This policy will be regularly updated and reviewed to comply with any changes in national legislation or strategic plans related to substance use and misuse. Our commitment is to remain abreast of current trends and guidelines in the prevention and management of substance use issues.

#### D. Definition of Substance Use and Misuse

Understanding the terms 'Substance Use', 'Substance Misuse', and 'Substance Abuse' is fundamental to the successful implementation of this policy.

For the purposes of this policy, a 'Drug' is defined as 'any substance which changes the way the body functions, be it mentally, physically or emotionally.'

'Substance Use' pertains to the consumption of both legal and illegal substances. These may include, but are not limited to, alcohol, tobacco, electronic cigarettes, vapes, prescription drugs, volatile substances (such as glue or aerosols), and illicit drugs. While certain forms of substance use, like the consumption of alcohol or tobacco by adults, may be legally permitted, any form of substance use can give rise to health risks and potential legal repercussions, particularly when it happens within the school context.

'Substance Misuse' signifies the consumption of a substance in a way that causes harm either to the user or to others. This could include actions like excessive alcohol consumption, smoking tobacco, misuse of prescription medications, or the use of illicit drugs. Such misuse can lead to serious health complications, academic challenges, and legal consequences.

'Substance Abuse' represents a more severe form of misuse. It is typically characterised by frequent and/or heavy use of a substance, particularly when such use leads to significant impairment or distress. Examples include health problems, disability, and failure to meet responsibilities at work, school, or home.

The Substance Use Policy echoes our mission, vision, and aims. It upholds our commitment to nurturing an environment that encourages respect, personal growth, and academic success for every student. Aligning with our objectives, it prioritises the health and well-being of our students and provides them with the resources and support they need to make informed and responsible decisions about substance use.

#### E. Policy Goals and Objectives

Our Substance Use Policy is designed to foster a secure, productive educational environment, undisturbed by the challenges that substance use and abuse can introduce. The policy aims to accomplish this by prioritising several key objectives:

**Promotion of a Substance-free Environment:** The policy's principal goal is to maintain an educational setting that is free from the disruption caused by substance use and abuse. This ensures an atmosphere conducive to learning, growth, and mutual respect, enabling all students to participate fully in the school experience.

**Empowerment through Knowledge:** We aim to provide honest and age-appropriate information about drugs, equipping young people to make informed, healthy, and responsible choices.

**Enhancement of Self-esteem and Confidence:** The policy is designed to increase the self-esteem and confidence of young people, arming them with the personal and social skills needed to resist the pressures of substance use.

**Awareness and Understanding of Risks and Consequences:** The policy seeks to enhance awareness and understanding of the risks associated with substance use and abuse. By offering education on the potential health, legal, and personal repercussions, the policy equips students with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions.

**Clear Procedures for Incident Response:** The policy outlines clear procedures for addressing instances of substance use or abuse within the school community. These procedures allow for swift, appropriate, and compassionate responses, upholding the welfare of all parties involved.

**Provision of Support and Minimising Harm:** Lastly, the policy aims to facilitate access to support services for those affected by substance use issues. This could include referral to counselling, provision of educational resources, or connections with community support networks. It also aims to minimise harm caused by drug use through these supportive interventions.

Through the combined pursuit of these objectives, the Substance Use Policy embodies our commitment to creating a nurturing, safe, and empowering educational environment.

## F. Roles and Responsibilities

The implementation and success of this Substance Use Policy is a collective responsibility, shared by all members of our school community. The different roles are as follows:

**School Management:** The school's management team holds the key responsibility for overseeing the enforcement of this policy. This includes ensuring that the policy is updated, clearly communicated, and consistently applied. The management team is also tasked with procuring necessary resources for

substance use education and support. They are in charge of creating a safe and supportive environment that allows students to seek help without fear of stigma or punishment.

**Teachers:** Teachers are on the front lines of policy implementation. They are responsible for integrating substance use education into their lessons where appropriate, ensuring that students are well-informed about the risks and consequences of substance misuse. Teachers are also expected to be vigilant, monitoring students' wellbeing and reporting any concerns to the appropriate personnel.

**Nursing Staff:** The Nursing Staff play a vital role in providing care, support, and information to students who may be struggling with substance use. They offer crucial first aid and ongoing support for students in need, act as a confidential point of contact for students seeking help, and provide valuable input into educational programs and policy development. Furthermore, the Nursing Staff are responsible for managing, monitoring, and dispensing prescription medications on behalf of students, ensuring their safe and proper use within the school setting.

**Students:** Students play a crucial role in making this policy effective. They are expected to comply with the policy, respect the substance-free environment of the school, and engage fully in educational activities related to substance use. Students should also foster a supportive atmosphere, assisting their peers in making healthy choices and maintaining open dialogue about substance use issues.

**Parents/Guardians:** Parents and guardians are vital partners in this effort. They are encouraged to reinforce the principles and expectations of this policy at home, thereby supporting a unified approach to substance use education. Parents should engage actively with the school's initiatives on substance use education and policy, and monitor their child's behaviour and wellbeing closely.

The combined efforts of these groups create a robust, effective, and supportive approach to managing substance use in our school community.

## II. Guidelines, Procedures and Education

### A. Prevention Strategies

#### 1. Education on Substance Use

Understanding the complexities of substance use and misuse is a cornerstone in our prevention strategy. To ensure our students have the most comprehensive knowledge and understanding possible, we incorporate a multi-faceted educational approach on substance use.

Substance use education forms an integral part of our Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. The curriculum ensures students receive age-appropriate, evidence-based information

about various types of substances, their effects on the body and mind, the social and legal consequences of misuse, and the benefits of a substance-free lifestyle. The goal is to provide students with the necessary knowledge to make informed, responsible decisions regarding substance use.

In addition to the curriculum, we invite expert speakers from relevant fields such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), the local Garda, Juvenile Liaison Officer to provide additional insights, share real-life experiences, and answer student queries. These sessions aim to broaden students' perspectives and deepen their understanding of the real-world impacts of substance use and abuse. In our commitment to providing unbiased, evidence-based education, we do not use any educational materials produced by the drinks industry or any other companies with vested interests in such substances. This policy ensures that our substance use education remains focused on the health and wellbeing of our students, free from potential commercial influences.

School assemblies also play a significant role in our educational approach. Regular discussions on the topic of substance use are included, emphasizing the school's stance against substance use, underscoring the importance of making responsible decisions, and reinforcing the resources available to students who need support.

This multi-dimensional approach to education ensures consistent, clear, and effective messaging about substance use and misuse across our school community, equipping our students with the knowledge and resources to make informed decisions and seek help when necessary.

## 2. Staff Training and Development

Investing in our staff's capacity to handle substance use issues is a crucial component of our prevention strategy. As such, we conduct regular staff training and development sessions, aiming to keep our team abreast of the latest trends, challenges, and best practices in the realm of substance use and misuse.

External experts, including those from the Health Service Executive (HSE), local Garda, or other relevant organisations, are invited to deliver bespoke training sessions. This ensures our staff receive the most current, evidence-based knowledge and strategies to prevent substance misuse and respond effectively when incidents occur.

Our school's nursing staff also play a vital role in staff training. Their medical expertise enables them to provide unique insights and practical guidance on identifying signs of substance use, handling emergencies, and providing first-line support to students in need.

Before school trips and tours, specific substance use discussions are held. This is crucial as these events may present unique challenges regarding substance use. Staff are reminded of our school's Substance Use Policy, briefed on potential risks, and trained on appropriate responses to various scenarios.



This consistent focus on staff training and development ensures that our team is well-equipped to promote a healthy, substance-free environment, support students facing substance use issues, and enforce our Substance Use Policy effectively.

### 3. Collaboration with Parents and Community

Our school believes in the power of collaboration in preventing and addressing substance misuse. We understand that substance use prevention extends beyond the school gates and requires the active involvement of parents and the wider community.

Our Parents Teacher Association (PTA) plays an instrumental role in organising informative events around substance misuse. These events, featuring expert speakers and resources, are designed to educate parents about the realities of substance use and misuse, offering practical guidance on prevention, detection, and intervention.

The school regularly disseminates information related to substance use to parents. This includes educational materials, updates on school initiatives, and advice for discussing substance use with their children. Parents are encouraged to reinforce at home the lessons their children learn at school, to foster a consistent, unified approach to preventing substance misuse.

In addition, we share relevant information from external authorities such as the Health Service Executive (HSE) and local Garda. These communications keep parents informed about wider trends and developments in the community and equip them with strategies to prevent substance misuse at home.

By fostering strong relationships with parents and the community, we ensure our prevention efforts are consistent, comprehensive, and well-coordinated. This collaborative approach is vital in promoting a safe, healthy, and substance-free environment for our students, both within and beyond the school premises.

### 4. Access Control and Supervision

Our school recognises the importance of a safe and controlled environment to prevent substance misuse. With this aim, we implement rigorous access control and supervision measures. Our staff maintains a vigilant presence throughout the school premises during operational hours, ensuring areas of potential risk are adequately monitored. This level of supervision assists in reducing opportunities for substance use and provides a secure, safe environment for our students.

All medication, including prescription medication, must be managed and dispensed by our nursing staff. Students are prohibited from keeping medication in their lockers or dormitories to prevent

unauthorized and potentially dangerous use. Prescription medication must be surrendered to the nursing staff in its original box, clearly labelled with the student's name, dosage, and administration instructions.

Furthermore, many solvent-based products and gases, such as deodorants, paints, thinners, and cleaning fluids, have the potential to be misused. All such substances will be stored securely and safely, away from public access, to prevent potential misuse and ensure the safety of our students.

In cases of emergency medication, these are also securely held and managed by the nurse, ensuring prompt and appropriate response during emergency scenarios. On occasions, under instructions from the nursing staff, boarding staff may hold medication for students.

All dispensed medication is recorded meticulously to ensure proper use and management. Our nursing staff maintain an updated list of all notified drug allergies, adding an additional layer of protection for our students.

## 5. Health and Wellness Programs

Recognising the role of a healthy lifestyle in preventing substance misuse, our school offers various health and wellness programs. For example, our Physical Education (PE) Department facilitates an annual Health, Fitness, and Wellbeing Week. This initiative focuses on holistic health education, which includes the risks and repercussions of substance misuse.

Our curriculum includes subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Home Economics (HE) that address topics related to substance misuse. These subjects educate students on the impacts of substance misuse on personal health and well-being, offering guidance on making informed and safe choices.

These comprehensive health and wellness programs, complemented by our school's overall commitment to nurturing healthy habits, contribute significantly to our preventive strategy against substance misuse.

## 6. Peer Leadership and Mentorship Programs

At our school, we recognise the value of peer influence and leadership in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of students. As such, we have instituted a variety of peer leadership and mentorship initiatives.

Form V students serve as mentors to incoming Form I students, offering them guidance, advice, and the wisdom of experience. These mentors embody the principles and behaviours set out in our

Substance Use Policy and offer vital support to their mentees as they navigate their first year at our school.

The Student Council, composed of elected representatives, plays a crucial role in setting the tone and direction on the issue of substance misuse within the student body. They run awareness campaigns, contribute to policy reviews, and serve as a conduit between the students and the school administration, ensuring that student perspectives are incorporated into our strategies against substance misuse.

Our Form VI Prefects also contribute substantially to creating a safe and supportive school environment. Beyond their traditional roles, they are tasked with overseeing student behaviour, upholding the Substance Use Policy, and providing a model of responsible behaviour. They are trained to spot potential issues and are responsible for reporting these to the relevant school personnel, ensuring early intervention when necessary.

Additionally, our Boarding Council, along with the Senior Boarding Prefects, play an essential role in guiding the boarding students. They ensure that the rules and values of the school are upheld in the boarding houses and offer advice and guidance specific to the unique environment of boarding life. Their understanding of the particular challenges and dynamics of boarding life allows them to provide specialised support and leadership for other boarding students.

These peer leadership and mentorship programs work towards fostering a sense of shared responsibility among our students, and solidifying a school culture that values health, safety, and mutual support in combating substance misuse.

## B. Substance Use Guidelines

### 1. Use of Legal Substances

#### a) *Tobacco and Electronic Cigarettes*

The use, possession, and distribution of tobacco, electronic cigarettes, and vape devices are strictly prohibited on campus and during school-related activities, both on and off-site. This prohibition is in line with Irish law and extends to all members of the school community, including students, staff, and visitors. It applies at all times, including during school hours, school-related events, and during transportation to and from school.

#### b) *Alcohol*

The consumption, possession, or distribution of alcohol by students is strictly prohibited on the school premises, during school hours, and at all school-related events, including those held off-campus.

Alcohol is a psychoactive substance that can have serious health consequences, particularly for adolescents whose brains are still developing. These can range from short-term effects like impaired judgment, risky behaviour, and accidents to long-term issues like addiction, mental health problems, and various physical diseases.

Students should be aware that there is often cultural and social pressure associated with alcohol consumption, which can be heightened during the teenage years. It's crucial to understand that drinking alcohol is not a rite of passage, nor does it enhance social standing. In fact, it can lead to numerous negative outcomes, including academic failure, relationship problems, and involvement with law enforcement.

At Middleton College, we believe that open, honest conversations about alcohol use are crucial in educating our students about its potential risks and harms. Through our curriculum, we aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to resist peer pressure, make informed decisions, and promote healthy behaviours. We also encourage parents to talk openly with their children about alcohol, to set clear expectations, and to be positive role models in relation to alcohol use.

If a student is found to be in breach of these guidelines, it will be considered a serious violation of the school's Code of Behaviour, which will be dealt with as outlined in the section on Policy Violation and Consequences. If a student is struggling with alcohol use, we encourage them to seek help from trusted adults, such as parents, school counselors, or medical professionals. The school is committed to providing support and resources for those affected by alcohol-related issues.

#### c. Prescription Medication

All prescription medication must be handed to the school nursing staff in its original packaging. The nursing staff manage, monitor, and dispense all medication, recording each administration. Students are not permitted to keep prescription medication in their lockers, dormitories, or on their person. This rule is essential for ensuring the safety of our students and preventing unauthorised access and use. During school tours or trips involving overnight stays, a similar system will be in place, with a designated staff member responsible for the safe storage and administration of medication.

#### d. Over-the-Counter Medication

While over-the-counter medications are not regulated to the same extent as prescription drugs, they can also pose health risks if misused. Therefore, students are required to inform the school nursing staff of any over-the-counter medication they are taking. This allows our health professionals to provide appropriate advice and ensure the safe use of these medications.

#### e. Caffeine and Energy Drinks

Highly caffeinated drinks, including energy drinks, are not permitted on campus due to the health risks associated with overconsumption. Students are encouraged to maintain a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle, including adequate hydration and sleep, rather than relying on caffeine for energy.

#### f. Protein Powders and Supplements

The use, possession, and distribution of protein powders or other dietary supplements are not permitted on campus or during any school-related activities. While these substances are legal and commonly used, their unsupervised or inappropriate use can lead to health issues. Furthermore, these substances are not regulated to the same extent as foods and medicines, making it difficult to guarantee their content and safety. Students are encouraged to obtain necessary nutrients through a balanced, whole-food diet and to consult with a healthcare provider before starting any dietary supplement regimen.

This policy is in line with Midleton College's commitment to promoting healthy habits and behaviors among our students. We advocate for holistic health and wellness strategies over reliance on dietary supplements.

#### ii. Use of Illegal Substances

The use, possession, or distribution of illegal substances, including but not limited to controlled drugs, is strictly forbidden at all times. This prohibition applies to all members of the Midleton College community, including students, staff, and visitors, and is in effect during school hours, school-related events, trips, and transportation to and from school.

In accordance with Irish law, any breaches of this rule involving controlled drugs may be reported to the Gardaí. Consequences for students found in violation of this guideline are severe and could include suspension or expulsion, as outlined in the Policy Violation and Consequences section.

#### iii. Substance Use During School Trips or Off-Campus Activities

Substance use is prohibited during school trips or off-campus activities. This includes the use, possession, or distribution of tobacco, alcohol, prescription medications not dispensed by a designated staff member, over-the-counter medications, caffeine and energy drinks, protein powders and dietary supplements, and any illegal substances.

This rule is in effect regardless of the laws regarding substance use in the jurisdiction where the trip or activity is taking place. The objective is to maintain the safety, well-being, and focus of all participants, and to uphold the reputation and values of Midleton College.

## v. Substance Use and Sporting Activities

In the context of sports and physical education, the use of any substances, whether legal or illegal, that could affect a student's performance or safety, is strictly forbidden. This includes performance-enhancing substances, protein powders, and dietary supplements.

The use of these substances not only poses health risks but also goes against the principles of fairness and sportsmanship that we aim to instil in our students. We encourage our student-athletes to focus on training, nutrition, hydration, and rest as key components of athletic performance and recovery.

We reserve the right to inform sporting associations or bodies of any violation of this rule that pertains to their regulations on substance use.

Remember, these policies are in place to uphold the health, safety, and wellbeing of our entire school community. Any violation of these guidelines will be considered a serious breach of the school's Code of Behaviour and will be dealt with accordingly.

## C. Reporting Procedures

### 1. Identification of Substance Use or Misuse:

*Signs and Symptoms:* All members of the school community should be aware of the common signs and symptoms of substance use or misuse. These might include unexplained changes in behaviour, appearance, or academic performance. Training and educational materials will be provided to staff, and awareness sessions will be conducted for students to help identify these signs.

*Immediate Response to Suspected Influence:* If a student is suspected to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances, they will be immediately placed into the care of the principal, deputy principal, or their nominee. The student's parents/guardians will be contacted and, as a matter of urgency, will be required to collect the student from school. If necessary, medical attention will be sought for the student.

*Discovery of Substances or Paraphernalia:* Should any individual discover substances or related paraphernalia on school property or at a school-related event, it should be reported immediately to the school management.

### 2. Reporting Concerns:

*Who to Report to:* Concerns about potential substance use or misuse should be reported directly to the school management or, if appropriate, the designated liaison person.

*How to Report:* Reporting can be done in person, by phone or through written communication.

*a) Reporting by Students:*

**Encouragement of Peer Reporting:** Students are encouraged to report any concerns or suspicions they may have about substance use among their peers. This is not about informing, but about ensuring the well-being of all members of the school community.

**Assurance of Anonymity and Non-retribution:** The school will ensure that reports made by students will be kept confidential and that there will be no retaliation for making such reports.

*b) Reporting by Staff:*

All staff members are expected to report any concerns or suspicions they have about substance use or misuse. This is part of their duty of care towards students.

**Training on Reporting Process:** Staff will receive training on how to identify signs of substance use and how to report concerns effectively and confidentially.

*c) Reporting by Parents:*

**Role and Importance:** Parents have an important role in identifying and reporting concerns about substance use. They know their children best and can often spot changes in behaviour that may indicate substance use.

**Communication Channels:** Parents should report concerns directly to the school management or the designated liaison person. This can be done through a phone call, email, or in person.

*d) Investigation and Verification:*

**Initial Investigation Process:** Upon receiving a report, school management will conduct an initial investigation. This may involve speaking to the individuals involved, speaking to witnesses, or examining physical evidence.

**Verification Procedures:** If necessary, the school may collaborate with external professionals, such as social workers, healthcare providers, or law enforcement, to verify reports of substance use.

*e) Documentation:*

**Importance of Detailed and Accurate Records:** Detailed and accurate records of all reports and investigations will be maintained. This documentation can be crucial in dealing with substance use issues effectively.

**Confidentiality of Reports:** All records relating to reports of substance use will be kept confidential, in accordance with data protection laws and regulations.

This process ensures that the school is proactively addressing any reports or suspicions of substance use, with the utmost care taken to respect the confidentiality and well-being of all involved.

## **D. Management of Substance-Related Incidents**

*a) Policy Violation and Consequences:*

**Code of Behaviour:** Any violation of this Substance Use Policy will be managed in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

**Ranging Consequences:** Consequences for violation of the Substance Use Policy may range from educational interventions to more severe disciplinary actions such as suspension or even expulsion, depending on the nature and severity of the incident.

*Involvement of Authorities:* If illegal drugs are involved, it may be necessary to involve local authorities such as the Gardaí. Distribution or supply of prohibited substances will be treated as a serious violation and will likely warrant involvement of law enforcement.

*Parental Involvement:* In all cases, parents will be informed about the incident and the school's response. We aim to work closely with parents to address the issue and to provide necessary support for the student.

*Staff Responsibility and Consequences:* As stipulated by Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, every school employee must ensure that they are not under the influence of an intoxicant while at work. Should the Principal and/or Deputy Principal have reasonable grounds to believe that a staff member is unfit for work due to being under the influence of an intoxicant, they shall ask that person to remove themselves from the workplace in the interests of the safety, health, and welfare of the employee and others. Disciplinary procedures may be implemented for employees found to be at work under the influence of an intoxicant.

*b) Intervention and Support:*

*Educational Programs:* We have in place comprehensive educational programs for all students to learn about the dangers of substance use and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. These programs are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

*Referral to Counseling Services:* If a student is found to be struggling with substance use issues, the school can arrange for them to be referred to in-school or community-based counseling services. This referral will be conducted with the utmost respect for the student's privacy and well-being.

*Connections with Local Treatment Centers:* For more severe cases, the school can assist families in arranging for more intensive support with local treatment centers if it is deemed necessary.

*Staff Training:* Our staff members receive regular training to identify signs of substance use. They are equipped with the necessary resources to provide immediate support to the student and to initiate the referral process.

The overarching goal of this policy is not to punish, but to address the root cause of the substance use issue and to provide the necessary support to our students. We understand that substance use and abuse is a complex issue, often intertwined with other mental health and personal concerns, and we are committed to a compassionate, supportive response.

## E. Confidentiality

The school acknowledges the sensitive nature of substance use issues and prioritizes the handling of such cases with discretion and confidentiality, within the bounds of our duty of care for the student body and legal obligations. The following principles guide our approach to confidentiality:

### 1. Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidentiality and privacy of students are of utmost importance to us. Information about a student's violation of the Substance Use Policy is confined to those staff members who need to know in order to support the student and manage the situation effectively. We maintain accurate and confidential



records of all substance-related incidents, as well as interventions or support measures implemented. These records are held securely, with access restricted to appropriate staff members.

## 2. Exceptions to Confidentiality

There are certain situations where the school must breach confidentiality to ensure the safety and well-being of our students. This includes situations where a student's life is in danger, when there is a risk of significant harm to the individual or others, or when legal substances are involved. In such instances, the school will disclose information to the appropriate professionals or authorities.

## 3. Parental/Guardian Involvement

Parents or guardians are crucial partners in addressing any substance-related incidents. They will be informed promptly if their child is involved in any such incident, allowing us to work collaboratively to ensure the student receives the necessary support and guidance.

## 4. Professional Boundaries and Ethics

All staff members understand the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and adhering to ethical standards. Breaches of confidentiality will be treated seriously and may result in disciplinary action.

## 5. Legal Obligations

In accordance with Irish law, there may be circumstances where we are obligated to report incidents to law enforcement, such as when illicit drugs are involved. We are committed to fulfilling these legal obligations while protecting the interests and well-being of our students as much as possible.

To reiterate, our commitment to confidentiality is integral, but it is guided and sometimes superseded by our primary goal: the safety, well-being, and education of our students.

# III. Emergency Response Plan

## A. Activation of the Crisis Management Team

The Crisis Management Team, under the leadership of the Principal, is mobilised in response to substance-related emergencies. The team comprises staff members who have assigned roles and responsibilities as detailed in the Crisis Management Policy. The school's nursing staff, who are on site for the majority of the day, often play a critical role in initial response due to their medical expertise. If needed, the school has access to a doctor in Midleton for consultation or medical care.

## B. Immediate Response and Alerting Necessary Parties

Our immediate response prioritises the safety and health of students and staff. This may necessitate prompt medical attention, collaboration with local authorities, including the Gardaí, and the swift notification of parents/guardians and relevant staff members.

## C. Investigation and Documentation

Following any substance-related incident, a thorough and impartial investigation is conducted to gather and document details. Confidentiality is preserved as far as possible to respect the privacy of all involved parties.

## D. Media Enquiries

In instances where media inquiries are made about substance-related incidents at the school, it's vital to maintain a balanced approach that safeguards the rights and reputations of individuals involved and the school itself.

*Ongoing Investigation:* The school will not comment on any individual matter while an investigation is in progress. In such cases, the school's response will be confined to outlining the school's policies and procedures for managing such incidents.

*Designated Respondent:* To ensure consistency and accuracy in communications, the Principal or the Chairman of the Board will serve as the designated respondent to all media inquiries.

*Post-Investigation:* In the interest of upholding the school's reputation, once an investigation has been fully concluded, the Board of Management may, if necessary, clarify the school's position regarding the incident. However, it will be done while maintaining respect for the privacy and rights of all parties involved."

## E. Follow-up Care

The aftermath of a substance-related incident involves crucial support for the affected individual and the wider school community. This may include in-school counselling, referral to external services, and further educational initiatives.

## F. Review and Update of the Emergency Response Plan

Post-incident, we evaluate the effectiveness of the response and identify areas for improvement. This critical reflection contributes to updating and refining our Emergency Response Plan.

## IV. Monitoring, Review, and Improvement Procedures

Our commitment to fostering a safe, healthy, and positive learning environment for our students calls for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of our Substance Use Policy. To ensure that the policy remains relevant, effective, and in line with best practices, we engage in the following:

### A. Success Criteria

Our evaluation of the policy's effectiveness is not abstract; it is based on tangible indicators. These include a decrease in incidents of substance use and misuse, an increase in awareness and understanding of substance use among students and parents, and positive feedback from the school community. Furthermore, the successful implementation of prevention strategies, proactive response to substance-related incidents, and effective intervention and support for affected individuals serve as vital markers of success.

### B. Monitoring Procedures

We undertake regular checks to ensure the full and effective implementation of our Substance Use Policy. This monitoring includes reviewing incident reports, verifying the proper administration of policy-related procedures, and auditing the effectiveness of staff training. Additionally, we periodically conduct surveys to gauge the level of awareness and perception of the policy among students, staff, and parents.

### C. Review Procedures

The policy undergoes regular reviews to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in addressing the dynamic issue of substance use and misuse. These reviews consider changes in societal, educational, and legal contexts, emerging substance use trends, and evolving best practices. We actively seek input from students, parents, staff, and community partners during these reviews, ensuring that our policy reflects the collective insights and experiences of our school community.

### D. Improvement Procedures

Following the review, necessary improvements and adjustments are made to the policy. The process includes modifying prevention strategies, adjusting response mechanisms, enhancing support services, and improving education programmes as needed. The aim is to ensure that our policy remains a robust, responsive, and effective tool in fostering an environment that promotes respect, personal growth, and academic success, free from the disruptions caused by substance use and misuse.

### E. Confidentiality, Privacy, and Legal Obligations

#### i. Confidentiality and Respect for Privacy

The school acknowledges the sensitive nature of substance use issues and prioritises the handling of such cases with discretion and confidentiality, within the bounds of our duty of care for the student body and legal obligations. Information about a student's violation of the Substance Use Policy is confined to those staff members who need to know in order to support the student and manage the situation effectively. We maintain accurate and confidential records of all substance-related incidents, as well as interventions or support measures implemented. These records are held securely, with access restricted to appropriate staff members.

#### ii. Exceptions to Confidentiality

While we highly regard confidentiality and privacy, there are situations where the school must breach confidentiality to ensure the safety and well-being of our students. This includes scenarios where a student's life is in danger, when there is a risk of significant harm to the individual or others, or when legal substances are involved. In such instances, the school will disclose information to the appropriate professionals or authorities.

#### iii. Parental/Guardian Involvement

Parents or guardians are crucial partners in addressing any substance-related incidents. They will be informed promptly if their child is involved in any such incident, allowing us to work collaboratively to ensure the student receives the necessary support and guidance.

#### iv. Professional Boundaries and Ethics

All staff members are bound by a code of conduct that underscores the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and adhering to ethical standards. Breaches of confidentiality will be treated seriously and may result in disciplinary action.

#### v. Legal Obligations

The school adheres to Irish law, which in some circumstances may oblige us to report incidents to law enforcement, such as when illicit drugs are involved. We are committed to fulfilling these legal obligations while protecting the interests and well-being of our students as much as possible.

In sum, while our commitment to confidentiality and privacy is paramount, it is guided and sometimes superseded by our overarching goal: the safety, well-being, and education of our students.

## V. Appendix 1 – Support numbers

As of September 2023:

[yourmentalhealth.ie](https://yourmentalhealth.ie) 1800 111 888 provides information of HSE mental health supports

[spunout.ie](https://spunout.ie) Text SPUNOUT to 50808 provides information on health & wellbeing

[drugs.ie](https://drugs.ie) 1800 459 459 HSE Alcohol & Drugs helpline

## VI. Appendix 2 – HSE Vaping letter

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Straitéis & Taighde, FSS Éire atá Saor ó  
Thobac, Dara hUrlár, Clár Teach na  
Darach, Páirc na Millaoise, An Nás, Co. Chill Dara

HSE Tobacco Free Ireland  
Programme  
Oak House, Millennium Park,  
Naas, Co Kildare

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)  
[TFI@hse.ie](mailto:TFI@hse.ie)

**TO:** All Principals, for sharing with parents, guardians and staff  
**FROM:** Dr Paul Kavanagh, HSE Tobacco Free Ireland  
**RE:** Vaping among children and young people  
**DATE:** 29/05/2023

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Vaping is an emerging risk to the health of children and young people. The purpose of this communication from the HSE is to better inform and support parents and guardians to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping.

Vaping means using an electronic cigarette (E-cigarette). E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices. They heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol that the user inhales.

### **Trends in smoking and vaping among children and young people**

Parents, guardians, teachers and schools play an important role in protecting children and young people from smoking. Smoking among children and young people aged 10-17 years decreased from almost 1-in-4 in 1998 to 1-in-20 in 2018. This is a huge achievement, which puts children and young people on a course for good health throughout their lives.

Vaping has become more common for adults in recent years. Almost 1-in-20 people aged 15 years and older in Ireland vape. Most of these people smoke or have smoked in the past.

Vaping has also become more common among children and young people. Data from 2018 shows that that about 1-in-10 children and young people aged 12 to 17 years old used an E-cigarette in the last 30 days. Data focused on 16 year olds, found 1-in-5 were using E-cigarettes in 2019 which is double what it was in 2015. More up-to-date Irish data is due to be published later in 2023. Based on these recent trends, we expect this will confirm a further increase in E-cigarette use among children and young people in Ireland.

### **Risks of harm caused by vaping among children and young people**

Vaping is harmful for children and young people for many reasons:

- E-cigarette use has been linked with acute harms including poisonings, burns, fractures, lung injury and asthma exacerbations.
  - Early evidence links E-cigarettes use to cardiovascular and respiratory tissue damage.
  - E-cigarettes often contain nicotine, which is addictive and leads to dependence.
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- Children and young people are especially vulnerable to the effects of nicotine on their developing brains including nicotine addiction, mood disorders, and lowering of impulse control.
  - Other drugs such as alcohol, synthetic cannabinoids, and opiates can be added to E-liquids and consumed through vaping.
  - Finally, children and young people who use E-cigarettes are more likely to start smoking compared to those who never used E-cigarettes.
  - Longer-term health effects of vaping are uncertain at this point in time.

#### **Regulating to better protect children and young people from the harms of vaping**

In 2022, the drafting of the Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill was approved by government. The Bill will ban the sale of E-cigarettes to those under the age of 18 and strengthen regulation of the retail of tobacco and E-cigarette products. We expect the Bill to be brought forward into the legislative programme soon.

#### **Support for parents, guardians and teachers to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping**

Parents, guardians and teachers have been in touch with the HSE for advice on how to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping.

Including E-cigarettes in substance misuse policies and procedures is an important step which many schools have taken to protect children and young people.

A range of resources for schools from the HSE Education Programme were updated and enhanced to include new information on E-cigarettes. Links are provided at the end of this document.

The HSE encourages parents and guardians to discuss vaping with their children and young people.

A 'QUIT4Youth' Resource has recently been developed for local HSE Health and Wellbeing services to support them in their response to the needs of young people who smoke and use E-cigarettes. The HSE is working on further resources to support parents and guardians.

We will monitor this situation and continue to develop our response, resources and supports. We will continue to work with parents and guardians, schools, the Department of Education, Department of Health and all stakeholders to ensure we protect children and young people from the harms of smoking and E-cigarettes.

#### **Links to information and resources -**

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/resources/e-cigarette-resources.html>

Yours Sincerely



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**Dr Paul Kavanagh,**  
MB, BCH, BAO, MSc, FFPHM, MCIRN 021024  
Public Health Medicine Advisor  
HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme



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**Martina Blake**  
National Lead  
HSE Tobacco Free Ireland Programme

