

Policy committee on Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs

The committee was established under the chairmanship of Kevin Jennings in February 2002 at the request of the Board of Management. The committee was constituted in accordance with the directives of the South Western Area Health Board, which recommended that any such committee should be representative of the whole school community. This approach was supported by a circular of May 2002 from the DES entitled “National Drug Strategy 2001-2008”.

The Committee

The committee had representatives of school teaching staff, school administrative staff, parents, students, and school management and also outside agencies including the South Western Health Board and the Garda Síochána.

Process

Between February and June 2002 the committee had three workshops followed by a number of meetings. A representative group of the committee met again in November 2002 and prepared a draft policy document.

Conclusions of the Committee

- A school policy on alcohol, tobacco and drugs can only be effective if it has the support of families, students and outside agencies.
- Alcohol and tobacco products are very effectively marketed and very often aimed at young people. A drug culture is often glamorised and represented as exciting in film or music.
- The drugs most likely to be misused by students are alcohol, tobacco and to a lesser extent such controlled drugs as cannabis and ecstasy.
- A policy document needs to be simple, flexible and workable.
- This policy document should take account of the respective roles of the school, parents, and students and outside agencies.

Recommendations

- An effective drugs policy requires the appointment of an overall co-ordinator in the school as a matter of priority.
- It is a recommendation that the SPHE programme be introduced as soon as possible.
- As part of the admissions process parents should be given a copy of the school’s policy on alcohol, tobacco and drugs misuse and asked to sign consent to it.

Policy

A drug is understood to mean any mood altering substance. A student, while in the school, or involved in any school associated activity, should not be in possession of alcohol, tobacco or any illegal substance. Where a student needs to use prescribed drugs the parents are obliged to inform the school in writing. For any breach of the above a student may face severe sanctions up to and including expulsion.

The whole school community i.e. staff, students, parents, in liaison with outside agencies such as the Health Boards and Garda Siochana, have responsibility for ensuring that the school and related activities are drug free.

The Role of the School

- The school will ensure that, where possible, all school related activities are conducted in a drug free environment.
- The school will take all action permitted under law to maintain this drug free environment.
- A school drugs coordinator will be responsible for linking with the Garda Siochana, Health Boards and other agencies, to enable the school to promote and maintain a drug free environment.
- The school will furnish students with information about the consequences of the misuse of drugs. This may be done in a variety of ways, i.e. through the curriculum, by seminars, talks, workshops.
- SPHE programmes will be introduced as soon as is practicable.
- The school will treat as confidential all information relating to prescription drugs.
- The school will promote and encourage students to lead a healthy lifestyle. Students will be encouraged to participate in school sport and all other recreational activities, which encourage positive attitudes.
- The school will ensure that all school activities, or associated events, are not used as an opportunity for the misuse of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.
- All teachers and staff in the school, in accordance with their exemplary role, have a duty to give good example and to do everything possible to promote healthy attitudes towards alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

The Role of Parents

- Parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents have an obligation to ensure that their children are aware of the dangers of the misuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

- Parents are obliged to support the school fully in its objectives in relation to misuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- Parents, like teachers, have an exemplary role. They should in their attitudes and lifestyle help their sons to develop responsible and mature attitudes to alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- Parents have a responsibility to be informed about issues relating to alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- Parents should support the school and the Parents Association in their work to promote awareness in this area.
- Parents have a responsibility to inform the school if their son is involved in any incident of misuse, which might pose a threat to the school community. The withholding of such information undermines the promotion of a drug free environment in the school and undermines the relationships between parents and the school.
- Parents have a responsibility to inform the school of any information that they have which will enable the school to maintain a drug free environment.

The Role of Students

- Students are expected to be aware of and comply with the school policy on alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- Students have a responsibility to bring any information they have regarding the misuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs to the attention of the school authorities. They can be assured of complete confidentiality in this regard.
- Students should not in any way breach school policy while under the care of or in the presence of staff, e.g. students, unless in the company of parents, should not be on a licensed premises while staff are present.
- Students should commit themselves to all the activities in the school that support a healthy lifestyle.
- Students, especially senior students, have an important exemplary role and are expected to give good example to younger students in this area.

Breaches of Policy

- All breaches of policy should be reported to the relevant school authorities i.e. Principal, Deputy Principal, Class Heads or Dean of Discipline.

- Any student found in breach of policy by a member of staff is expected to be co-operative and follow all reasonable direction. This may involve confiscation of prohibited items or in certain serious circumstances remaining in situ pending the arrival of the Principal, Deputy Principal or other external authority.
- The Principal or Deputy Principal may impose sanctions for breaches of policy in accordance with the Code of Behaviour.
- Sanction for breaches of policy may involve a reprimand; loss of privilege; a letter home; a meeting with parents; confiscation of prohibited items; suspension; or in serious cases expulsion.
- A student found in breach of the school policy under the Misuse of Drugs Acts (1977, 1984) will be liable for immediate suspension pending investigation under the direction of the Principal.
- If, in the judgement of the Principal, the pupil should be expelled the Principal will refer the matter to the Board of Management for a decision.
- In the event that a student is found in breach of policy under the Misuse of Drugs Acts (1977,1984) and a lesser sanction than expulsion imposed parents and students may be required to participate in a rehabilitation process. Such breaches will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- The school values trust as a most important element in the relationships within the school community. Therefore, a student found in breach of policy who is truthful and co-operative may expect more leniency than a student who is uncooperative and obstructive.
- The school is committed to adherence to and support for law in all matters. Consequently, any breach of policy under the Sale of Tobacco Act, the Intoxicating Liquor Act or Misuse of Drugs Acts (1977,1984) will be reported to the appropriate external authority or agency.
- Parents and students should be aware that members of staff, under the Criminal Law Act 1997, may exercise power of arrest if they have reason to believe that an arrestable offence has taken place.

June 2003.