Subject: DRUGS GUIDANCE

Circular Number: 2015/23
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Target Audience:
- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
- Education Authority;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

Governor Awareness: Essential
Status of Contents: Advice
Related Documents: CCEA Guidance Material

Summary of Contents:
This Circular advises school authorities about revised drugs guidance produced by CCEA on behalf of the Department of Education.

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Superseded Documents: DE Circular 2004/09
Expiry Date: Not applicable
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Introduction

1. Existing drugs guidance dates backs to 2004 (DE Circular 2004/09 refers). As this guidance is out of date in terms of the legislation relating to drugs, and does not align to the current statutory curriculum, the Department commissioned CCEA to develop revised drugs guidance for schools.

2. While this revised drugs guidance is not dissimilar to the old guidance, it is set out in a format which is easier to follow and all legislation and curriculum references are up to date. The revised guidance can be accessed and downloaded via:
   - the CCEA website;
   - C2k; or
   - The Department of Education website.

Duty of Schools

3. Schools have a duty to:
   - have a drugs policy and publish details in relation to the policy in their prospectus;
   - deliver drugs education, (to include legal and illegal substances), as part of the statutory curriculum for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PD&MU) at primary level and Learning for Life and Work, Personal Development (PD) strand, at post-primary level; and
   - inform the PSNI where they believe or suspect a pupil to be in possession of a ‘controlled substance’.

4. Each school should appoint a designated teacher with responsibility for drugs and should have agreed, identified procedures in place for handling cases of suspected drug misuse on the premises. Every member of staff of the school, both teaching and non-teaching, should be completely familiar with their school’s procedures, and know who to contact and what to do when a young person is suspected either of being in possession of drugs or being under the influence of drugs, including alcohol.

Key Points within the revised guidance

5. In the revised guidance the terms ‘drug’ and ‘substance’ is defined as any product which, when taken, has the effect of altering the way the body works or the way a person behaves, feels, sees or thinks. E-cigarettes are treated in the same way as ordinary cigarettes and their use is prohibited on school premises. This was confirmed in DE Circular 2014/25 – Encouraging a Smoke-Free and E-Cigarette Free Environment in Schools and Youth Organisations which issued on 15 December 2014. More detail can be found in Section 1 of the revised guidance.

6. Schools should note that the term ‘Legal highs’ is misleading. Public perception is that ‘legal’ means safe. This is not the case as there is no regulation of these substances and therefore no way of knowing what chemicals they contain.

7. The CCEA drugs guidance is not curricular guidance as drugs education already forms part of the CCEA guidance on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) for primary schools and the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) guidance for
post-primary schools. Rather, it focuses on helping a school in developing their drugs policy (Section 2 of the guidance) and how you should manage suspected drug-related incidents in line with the law and explains the roles and responsibilities within a school (Section 3 of the guidance). An exemplar drugs policy template can be found in Appendix 2 of the guidance and a checklist in relation to relevant roles and responsibilities can be found in Appendix 3.

8. Finally, being able to recognise the signs of substance use is important and Appendix 7 details the signs to look out for and what action needs to be taken if substance use is suspected.

SHARON LAWLO
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