

10 December 2019

Dear Families

Anti-Social behaviour concerns in Buckinghamshire

We are writing this letter jointly as the Headteachers of all the Buckinghamshire secondary schools, as we are very concerned about the rise in the use of drugs by young people and the carrying and potential danger of knives in the local area.

Many areas in Buckinghamshire are affluent and this may well be contributing to the increased availability and use of drugs. Peer pressure is usually the main reason that young people get involved in drug use and, after alcohol, cannabis in its various forms, including the vaping of THC (the active chemical component of cannabis oil) is the main drug used, though it often serves as an entry-level drug, providing a gateway to other, more dangerous drugs, over time. Additionally, there has been an alarming growth in the use of other drugs by young people including ketamine and cocaine.

The local police patrol areas known to be used by young people for anti-social behaviour and for the purpose of selling or consuming drugs. Police also target people involved in dealing drugs.

In conjunction with Thames Valley Police and partner agencies we have provided the following information, which you might find helpful.

Drug classifications

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, illegal drugs are placed into one of three classes - A, B or C. This is broadly based on the harm they cause, either to the user, or to society when they are misused. The class into which a drug is placed affects the maximum penalty for an offence involving the drug. For example, Class A drugs attract the most severe penalty as they are considered likely to cause the most serious harm. Drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act are illegal to possess, produce, sell or give away.

Cannabis

Cannabis (also known as marijuana, weed, pot, dope or grass) is the most widely used illegal drug in the UK. The effects of cannabis vary from person to person:

- you may feel chilled out, relaxed and happy
- some people get the giggles or become more talkative
- hunger pangs ("the munchies") are common
- colours may look more intense and music may sound better
- time may feel like it is slowing down

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Cannabis can have other effects too:

- if you are not used to it, you may feel faint or sick
- it can make you sleepy and lethargic
- it can affect your memory
- it makes some people feel confused, anxious or paranoid, and some experience panic attacks and hallucinations – this is more common with stronger forms of cannabis like skunk or sinsemilla
- it interferes with your ability to drive safely

If you use cannabis regularly, it can make you demotivated and uninterested in other things going on in your life, such as education or work.

Long-term use can affect your ability to learn and concentrate and if you mix cannabis with tobacco to smoke it, you risk getting tobacco-related lung diseases, such as lung cancer and chronic pulmonary obstructive disease (COPD).

The risk of harm from cannabis, including the risk of schizophrenia (mental health), is higher if you start using it regularly in your teens. One reason for this is that, during the teenage years, the brain is still growing and forming its connections, and cannabis interferes with this process*.

*taken from NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/cannabis-the-facts/>

What is THC?

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the main psychoactive compound in marijuana/cannabis so is a class B drug.

Why is THC so dangerous?

THC bought illegally is always unsafe, especially because it can also have unknown additives within the vape chemical. Some of these are capable of inducing extreme suicidal actions and psychotic episodes, even after just a few puffs. Some of the additives have been shown to induce psychotic episodes in up to 85% of those who took the substance.

How is THC taken?

Using a cartridge in a vape pen. This is becoming commonplace with young people.

Why is THC popular?

It is almost odourless and gives an instant high lasting for several minutes. THC oil is illegal and, therefore, cannot be used legally in e-cigarettes. Its use can result in a criminal record.

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Ketamine

Ketamine is a very powerful anaesthetic that can cause serious harm. Taking ketamine can be fatal, particularly if it is mixed with other drugs. It has many physical and mental health risks.

It is used as a hallucinogen, and commonly taken by sniffing (snorting) the powder, swallowed in a cigarette paper parcel (bombing), rubbed under the tongue (dabbing) or by injecting into the bloodstream. It is a class B drug which means it is illegal to have for yourself, give away or sell.

Escalation and consequences

Thirty-two percent of people between the age of 16 and 24 become frequent users after having experienced cannabis for the first time. The maximum prison sentence just for possession of a class B drug is five years. Giving or supplying drugs to someone else, even friends, can result in up to a 14 year prison sentence and/or an unlimited fine.

Is your child regularly asking for money?

An indication of current street prices for some drugs:

Drug	Common Street Price	Drug	Common Street Price
Cannabis eighth (approx 3.5g)	£20	Ketamine per gram	£30
Ecstasy per pill	£5-£15	Cocaine per gram	£40
Crack per rock	£10-£20	Heroin per bag (0.1g)	£10

Recreational drug use

A major opportunity for drug supply and experimentation is at private parties in students' homes. Music festivals are increasingly seen as a dangerous place for young people, when it comes to exposure to drugs, which is now commonplace at such events. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) is also increasingly used in canister form and has been widely available at summer festivals. When mixed with alcohol it is extremely dangerous. Crime at festivals is now a major problem for police and families need to think hard about the age at which they allow their children to attend festivals. If you do allow your children to go, we would urge you to have a frank and open conversation about drugs and the likelihood of crime scenarios.

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The impact of social media

Families need to understand that connecting to a source of illegal drugs no longer requires establishing a relationship with someone supplying; nor even having a contact number. Signing up to an Instagram feed or linking on Snapchat or WhatsApp app or numerous other platforms would enable anyone interested to receive constant updates several times a day on what is available locally and pricing. From that point, purchase and delivery is one or two clicks. Like any product, purchase can be made cashless through app or money transfer, delivery within minutes to any point. Pricing of most illegal drugs, including Class A drugs, is within the scope of the normal average UK pocket money for a teenager. Moreover, within a message group, seeing one person commit to buying a drug, soon followed by another, normalises the activity and dehumanises a profound and high risk decision, making spread of drug activity within a peer group more likely and harder to resist as an individual.

It is an offence to supply alcohol to someone under 18. The exception to this is if they are aged 16 or over; are dining on licensed premises and are accompanied by an adult. This still only permits the consumption of beer, cider or wine. Anyone found guilty of alcohol supply may face a court appearance, a fine or imprisonment. Families are now the main providers of alcohol for this age group (60%). Giving alcohol to your children's friends (who are under the age of 18) in your house is not an offence, neither is buying alcohol for your own child if they are aged under 18, but you should act responsibly when allowing your children and their friends to drink in your home and you should consider strict parental supervision.

Knife crime

In addition to concerns over drugs, we are seeing an increase in knife crime among our young people. Much of this is associated with wider criminal activity with clear links to drug supply and use. The possible consequences of knife crime are clear, and we would urge parents to act on any suspicions or concerns that you may have.

All of the local schools in our consortium take an extremely strong approach to drug misuse and parents are asked to keep in close touch with their respective school if they have any concerns of this sort. We need to work together to educate the young people to resist and not become caught up in this insidious problem.

Given the Police advice and guidance about what would appear to be an increasingly worrying national picture, we feel it would be useful if all families were to sit down with their children and discuss these issues relating to drugs.

Should you require any support for a child you are concerned about or are thinking about your own drug use please contact the two Bucks commissioned services shown below:

 SwitchBucks is a drug service for young people in Buckinghamshire.
Telephone: 01494 527 000 email: switchbucks@cranstoun.org.uk.
Website: cranstoun.org/switch-bucks

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One Recovery Bucks is the adult substance misuse service for Buckinghamshire. They also provide family and carer support for those who are impacted by other people's use.
<https://onerecoverybucks.org/>

Other useful information:

www.talktofrank.com

www.drugwise.org.uk

We hope we can work together to fight this tide of increased drugs use.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Jo Meloni,
Headteacher

Supported by the Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Headteachers:

Amersham School, Aspire, Aylesbury High School, Aylesbury Grammar School, Aylesbury Vale Academy, Beaconsfield High School, The Beaconsfield School, Buckingham School, Buckinghamshire University Technical College, Burnham Grammar School, Chalfont Community College, Chesham Grammar School, Chiltern Hills Academy, Cottesloe School, Cressex Community School, Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Dr Challoner's High School, The Grange, Great Marlow School, The Highcrest Academy, Holmer Green Senior School, John Colet School, John Hampden Grammar School, The Misbourne, Princes Risborough School, Royal Grammar School, Royal Latin School, Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School, Sir William Borlase's Grammar School, Pebble Brook, Sir William Ramsay School, St Michael's Catholic School, Waddesdon School, Wycombe High School.

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