

drugs: guidance for schools in Northern Ireland

Acknowledgements

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FOREWORD

Substance misuse in Northern Ireland is a significant issue. All available data show that young people here are being offered illicit drugs and experimenting with them, are having more than a taste of alcohol and smoking at levels which are a cause for concern.

Tackling the issue of substance misuse is a challenge for the whole of society, and the need to educate young people about drugs is part of the process of addressing that challenge.

Another feature of substance misuse is that it is a dynamic situation – one which sees new trends, new sub-cultures and sometimes new substances. In this time of change the need to educate and inform young people remains a constant, although the curriculum and pedagogical contexts may change.

Substance misuse covering in its broadest sense illegal and legal substances is not a new issue, and neither is drug education, but just as trends in substance misuse change and evolve, so must drugs education, and this pack represents current thinking about drug education, set within the current curriculum. To a large extent it builds on the previous Drug Misuse Guidance Pack, which was made available to schools in 1996. At that time it was one of the first results of what was then the Northern Ireland Drugs Campaign. Since then there have been a number of strategic and political developments.

This new set of guidance materials is funded through the Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Campaign as a direct consequence of a regional action plan developed by the Education and Prevention Working Group, itself one of the structures developed through the working of the Joint Implementation Model. The materials have been designed to provide guidance to schools in the development and implementation of a drugs policy and a programme of drugs education. It provides guidance on an issue that increasingly schools have to deal with, that of a suspected drugs-related incident and also includes additional information on types and levels of drug misuse in Northern Ireland, available teaching resources and support services.

A key aspect of the guidance is the emphasis placed on partnership, itself a foundation stone for the Joint Implementation Model. To tackle the whole issue of drug misuse across Northern Ireland necessitates partnership working; similarly within the whole school community the importance of partnerships involving staff, pupils, governors, parents/guardians and the local community in the development and implementation of drugs-related policies and programmes cannot be underestimated.

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