

Introduction to a whole settings approach to smoking in schools

Why do schools need a whole settings approach to smoking?

The smokefree transformation of England began in 2009, when all enclosed workplaces and public spaces became free of tobacco smoke. School buildings went smokefree and most extended the legislation to their entire sites.

Since then, the proportion of children who have ever smoked continues to decline. In 2012, 23% of children in the UK, aged 11-15, had smoked at least once¹. By 2018, this figure had declined to 16%. Regular smoking is lower, with just 2% of children aged 11-15 smoking one or more cigarettes a week. In Hampshire this is lower, with 1.5% smoking regularly².

Whilst we have made great strides in the right direction, there is more to do. Over 200 deaths every day are still caused by smoking³ and to create a smokefree generation an ongoing effort is needed. This is especially true for those in our society who already suffer from poorer health and other disadvantages, where smoking rates remain stubbornly high.

A whole settings approach recognises that to create a smokefree culture, schools must focus on a range of areas and extend work further into the system. There is no single intervention that will reduce prevalence amongst young people, instead a persistent effort in all aspects of the school setting is most likely to result in change, over time. More information on the whole setting approach to smoking can be found in [NICE Guidance – Smoking: Preventing Uptake in Young People](#)

What are the challenges of a whole setting approach for schools?

Working with young people aged 11-15 offers a number of challenges. The whole settings approach aims to address the issues identified below:

- Students may not have been smoking for very long and so are unlikely to feel any ill effects from tobacco.
- Students are at an age where the influence and opinion of peers is very important to them.
- Parents/carers play an important role in influencing behaviour and if they smoke themselves, it can undermine messages from school.
- Curriculum and staffing time is very limited to focus on individual issues such as smoking.
- Some schools may feel that by focusing on smoking it could negatively affect the image of the school.
- The school may have staff who smoke themselves
- Staff knowledge of smoking and vaping may be limited and mixed messages conveyed.

¹ NHS Digital. Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England – 2018. [Internet]. 2019

² Public Health, Hampshire County Council, 2018, Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in Hampshire in 2018

³ NHS Digital. 'Statistics on smoking: England 2017'. 15 June 2017. 79,000 deaths attributed to smoking per year divided by 365 days per year. (viewed June 2017)

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- Some staff may not understand that some students cannot ‘just stop’ smoking and can be addicted to nicotine.

Benefits of a Whole Settings Approach in School

- It recognises a variety of influences (i.e. family and friends) that are likely to impact a young person’s decision to smoke and seeks to address these with targeted interventions.
- It makes clear the role of the school in providing an understandable and consistent message to students.
- It emphasises the staff as role models.
- It makes clear that students are likely to enter into work places where smoking is not the norm and prepares them for this.
- It recognises that some young people may already be addicted to smoking and supports them in going smokefree.
- It can reduce the litter found on site.

