

London Drug Policy Forum

Random Drug Testing in Schools

Head teachers and Governors should think very carefully before introducing any form of Random Drug Testing in schools. We suggest consideration be given to some of the points below and familiarise themselves with all the potential outcomes before going ahead with random testing.

It is often said that head teachers have a right to test pupils on school premises, but under what power? It would appear that this is a discretionary power but supported by the DfES and 10 Downing Street back in 2004. Schools in Kent have been piloting the system and the results are available.

Some points that must be considered

- Why are you testing
- What do you hope to achieve?
- Is this the best use of scarce resources
- In most cases there is no offence of having taken drugs
- Most drugs only stay in the system for a short period of time. Thus can only say pupil 'A' has not taken drugs for so many hours
- No system is perfect, thus you could be getting false positive or false negative results
- What do you intend to find out?
- Having found it out what are you going to say to the a) Pupil b) Parent c) Governors d) Press e) Parents of next years intake f) Staff g) Rest of the school?
- Are you going to exclude? If so can the PRU cope with the possible influx?
- Is it a fair system if some parents refuse permission for their children to be tested and others are tested, does this somewhat defeat the object?
- Will the test show possible prescribed medication
- Will the testing apply to staff, visitors, contractors and governors?
- Are there any Human Rights issues?
- How do you choose the pupils to be tested?
- Are schools aware of section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971?
- Do staff know of the statutory defence under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971?
- Do you have an incident policy?
- Do you have an active substance misuse education programme?
- You will need to monitor unauthorised absences on the days that testing takes place.

- Do you know how to safely dispose of any drugs or paraphernalia found on school premises?
- Who will collect specimens?
- Will the tested person have a second sample for own analysis?

The London Drug Policy Forum suggest that before considering either drug testing, drug dogs or itemiser testing you should first have a coherent policy on what the school expects of pupils and staff in this area. How any breaches of the policy will be dealt with. Training must be given to all staff on how to detect possible usage and how these incidents will be dealt with within schools. See also Dealing With Drug Related Incidents on schools *[shhttp://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/4_95/part2.htm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/4_95/part2.htm)*

Staff must be given training in this issue. It has often been said that teaching staff know everything but we must be honest and understand that some teachers may not have enough knowledge of this subject as they would like. This is born out by the Governments Blueprint Project, when pupils commented that teachers did not know what they were talking about when teaching youngsters about drugs.

In conclusion the London Drug Policy Forum accepts that there can be a place for testing or use of drugs dogs but it must be seriously thought through before any implementation takes place. We also suggest that it is only undertaken after all other mechanisms are in place. We also believe that drugs education should form part of the cross curricula education in all schools and throughout all key stages, delivered by competent staff with appropriate use of outside professionals.

Further information and reading

1. 'Random Testing of Schoolchildren' a shot in the arm or a shot in the foot for drug prevention. (Neil McKeganey) Joseph Rowntree Foundation
2. 'Drug Testing in the Workplace' The report of the Independent Inquiry into Drug Testing in the Workplace. Joseph Rowntree Foundation
3. Appendix 10 Drugs Guidance for Schools. DfES
4. UK drug testing guidelines www.ltg.uk.net/admin/files/wpdt_guidelines.pdf

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