

Drug and alcohol education in schools

Summary report

The Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information Service (ADEPIS) is a project funded by the Department for Education and run by the drug prevention charity Mentor, in partnership with DrugScope and Adfam.

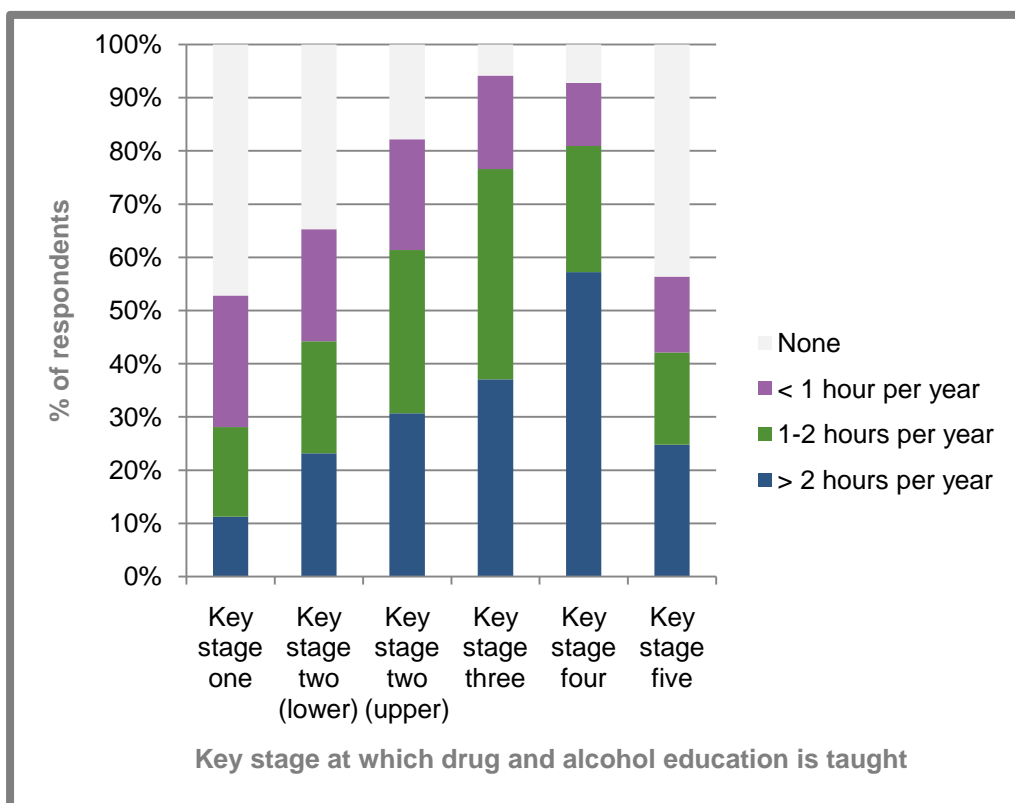
This report details research carried out by the PSHE Association, on behalf of Mentor, to inform ADEPIS's work in supporting schools' drug and alcohol education and prevention.

Teachers from 288 schools across England completed an online questionnaire, the majority reached through the PSHE Association. Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with 20 of these teachers. In total, 156 respondents were from secondary schools and 70 from primary schools and the remaining 62 from other settings such as middle schools, FE colleges and pupil referral units.

In interpreting the findings, it needs to be remembered that this is not a random sample (at least 79% of respondents were members of the PSHE Association or on their mailing list). There was considerable variation in schools' practice and how confident teachers were in providing drug and alcohol education. However, if anything the findings may give an over-optimistic picture of the resources schools commit to drug education within PSHE.

Limited curriculum time is available for drug and alcohol education

Pupils generally receive 1-2 hours of drug and alcohol education a year or less. A lack of curriculum time was also noted by interviewees as an important constraint. The hours allocated depended on the importance placed on drug and alcohol education.



“The most important aspect which could be improved would be curriculum time... it’s about having enough time to build effective teaching and experience.”

Provision is inconsistent

Open-ended responses highlighted some examples of excellent school practice in drug and alcohol education teaching, however many other respondents were very aware that practice in their school could be improved. One of the main constraints identified was that drug and alcohol education, and PSHE more generally was often delivered by non-specialist teachers, resulting in varying levels of confidence and expertise.

Many primary schools lack basic resources; secondary teachers want help addressing complex issues in young people’s lives

Four-fifths (81%) of all respondents said they would like more classroom resources for drug and alcohol education. A fifth of respondents from primary schools (19%) felt they currently had little access to effective resources for teaching drug and alcohol education, compared to just 4% from secondary schools. When asked to identify the classroom resources which would be most useful, primary schools focused more on substance-specific needs. The most popular resources requested were alcohol (50%), illegal drugs (44%), tobacco (43%) and practising assertiveness skills (43%).

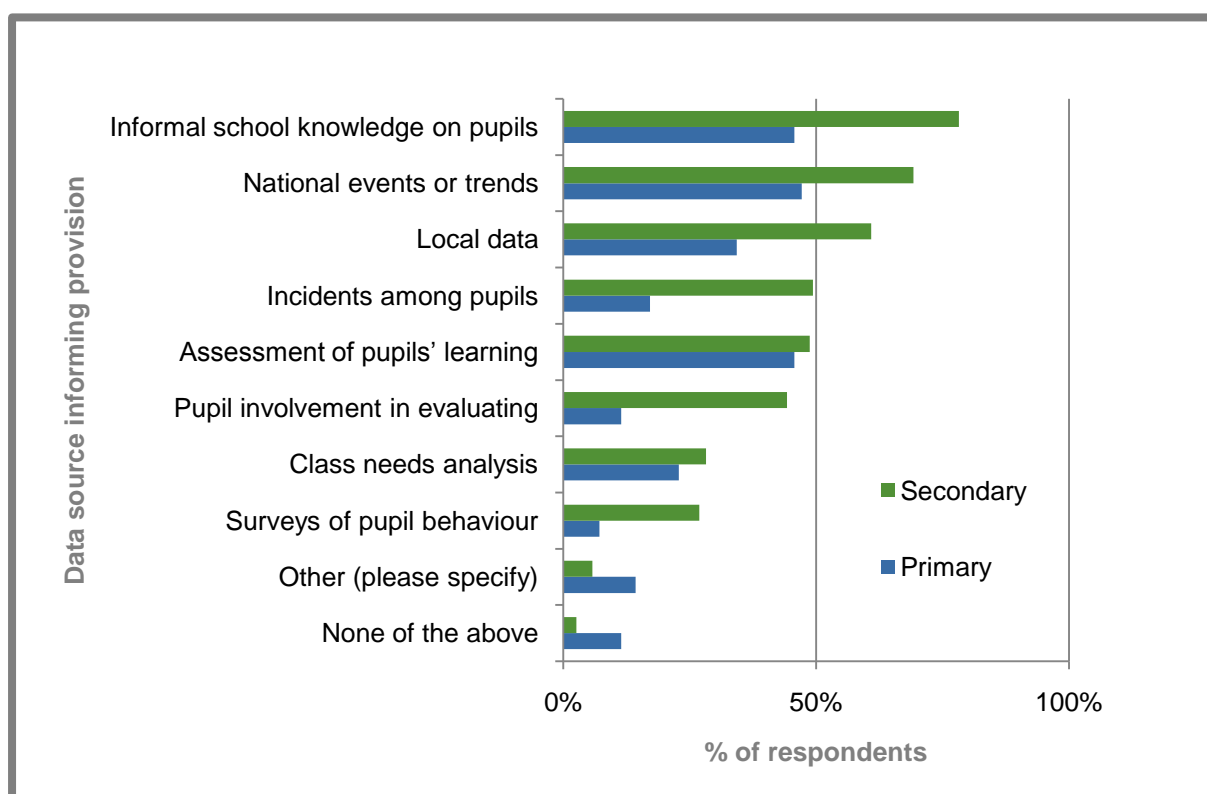
In interviews and comments from secondary school teachers, a common complaint was that resources were not up-to-date, or not relevant for their pupils. Media coverage of 'legal highs' in recent years was reflected in the 65% of secondary respondents who wanted classroom resources on these.

Otherwise, the main desire from secondary teachers was for resources which placed drug and alcohol use in the context of other issues in their pupils' lives. The most popular requests were to cover links with sex and relationships (56%), links with mental health (55%), coping with stressful situations (52%) and how many peers use (countering myth that 'everyone does it').

Teaching, evaluation and informing provision

Over half of schools responding did not take into account assessment of pupils' learning in planning drug and alcohol education. In a separate question, resources to help assess pupils' needs were requested by 44% of secondary respondents and 33% of primary respondents.

In planning drug and alcohol education, anecdotal evidence appears to be drawn on more than structured needs assessment.



The school drug policy also does not seem to inform provision: although 86% of respondents said that their institution had a whole school drugs policy, the majority of interviewees suggested that this focused on drug-related incidents and safeguarding rather than drug and alcohol education.

Sources of support

Three-fifths of all respondents (60%) cited support from their local authority advisor, however in comments and interviews there were references to this support being cut back or removed. Local authorities were said to provide support across all the areas asked about: general advice, classroom resources, factual information on drugs and alcohol, advice on the school drug policy and staff training. There were some references to teachers not having the confidence to provide services which had previously been directly provided or funded by the local authority, such as drug education for primary pupils or workshops for parents.

The PSHE Association also emerged as an important source of support (unsurprisingly given that over half of respondents were paid members). The FRANK website was used by almost four-fifths (79%) of secondary schools, and the police provided support to three-fifths (60%) of secondary schools and a fifth of primary schools. Other sources of support were also reported but 11% of primary schools did not report receiving any support with drug and alcohol education.

Teachers are keen for more support to ensure they keep up with good practice: 56% requested best practice guidance, 52% updates on policy and 52% case studies of good practice.

Meeting the needs of schools

Mentor's Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information Service (ADEPIS) will help give teachers more confidence in providing effective drug and alcohol education to their pupils by providing good practice guidance and signposting to effective resources. To ensure this is grounded in wider PSHE education which gives children and young people the life skills they need, ADEPIS is working closely with the PSHE Association.

In a challenging financial context, schools' access to local support and advice varies widely. ADEPIS will work with key players such as Public Health England to raise the profile of drug and alcohol prevention among competing local priorities. Partnership with networks such as the Drug Education Practitioners Forum will help equip local advisors with the latest research and good practice, and raise standards among external providers of drug education.

The full report can be downloaded from <http://mentor-adepis.org>

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