



Merstone and Forest Oak School

Illicit Substances Policy

V1.1. October 2025

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Illicit Substances in School Policy

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Status: Draft for governors' approval.

Applies to: All pupils, staff, visitors, volunteers and contractors while on school premises, during off-site visits and in any situation where a pupil is under the school's lawful control.

Legal / statutory references: Department for Education — *Drugs: advice for schools; Searching, Screening and Confiscation; Keeping Children Safe in Education*; Home Office / NCA guidance on criminal exploitation (county lines). [GOV.UK+3GOV.UK+3GOV.UK+3](#)

Contents

1. Purpose & principles	4
2. Definitions	4
3. Scope — separate approaches for the two schools	4
4. Prevention: curriculum, environment & staff training	5
5. Prohibited items (examples, not exhaustive)	5
6. Immediate response to an incident (use / intoxication / medical emergency).....	5
7. Suspected supply / exploitation (including third parties suspected of providing items for sale) ..	6
8. Searching, confiscation and disposal	7
9. Disciplinary responses (use vs supply) — general approach	7
10. Support, assessment & rehabilitation	8
11. Recording, reporting & retention	8
12. Working with parents, carers & external agencies.....	8
13. Staff conduct & smoking/vaping.....	8
14. Confidentiality & information sharing	9
15. Monitoring & review	9
Templates & quick flowcharts	9
Immediate incident checklist (quick)	9
Suspected external supplier / exploitation quick actions.....	9
Specific references & further reading (key sources).....	9
Illicit Substances, Tobacco & Vapes – Staff Response Flowchart	11

1. Purpose & principles

2. Protect the health, welfare and education of pupils.
 3. Prevent harm by stopping use, possession and supply of illicit substances, tobacco (including cigarettes, rolling tobacco and tobacco pouches/snus-type products), nicotine pouches and vapes (e-cigarettes) on school premises or when a pupil is under school control.
 4. Provide clear, consistent procedures for responding to incidents of **use, possession, supply** or **suspected supply**, and for safeguarding pupils who may be exploited or involved in criminal activity.
 5. Apply proportionate responses that balance safeguarding, education, pastoral support and, where necessary, disciplinary action. This is especially important because our pupils are vulnerable to exploitation; safeguarding takes precedence. (See Section 7.) [GOV.UK+1](#)
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2. Definitions

- **Illicit substances / drugs:** illegal controlled drugs, “legal highs” / novel psychoactive substances, misuse of over-the-counter or prescription medication for non-medical purposes, and solvent/volatile substances. [Digital Education Resource Archive](#)
 - **Tobacco products:** cigarettes, rolling tobacco, snuff/snus (where present), and tobacco pouches. Also includes nicotine pouches and other oral nicotine products (these may be tobacco-free but contain nicotine). [Truth Initiative](#)
 - **Vapes / e-cigarettes:** all devices that heat a liquid to create vapour, disposables and refillables. [ASH](#)
 - **Use vs Supply:** *Use* = consuming, holding for immediate consumption, or being under the influence. *Supply* = giving, selling, arranging or facilitating transfer of a substance to another person, or storing it for that purpose. Criminal exploitation (e.g. county lines) often involves pupils being used to supply drugs. [GOV.UK](#)
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3. Scope — separate approaches for the two schools

- **Forest Oak (Moderate Learning Difficulty)** — emphasis on therapeutic and educational responses, clear boundaries and graduated sanctions. Expect higher independence in community but still significant vulnerability; therefore include targeted prevention, closer parent/carer partnership, and behaviour plans with restorative elements.
- **Merstone (Severe Learning Difficulty)** — emphasis on safety, close supervision, intensive safeguarding, individual risk assessments, physical searches only where necessary and with appropriate adult support, medical response readiness (including choking/airway risks from items in mouths), and working very closely with parents/care teams and multi-agency

partners. For many pupils, communication and understanding may be limited — responses will be adapted to cognitive level, communication needs and welfare needs.

(Where the policy says “the school” below, treat it as applied with the above tailoring to the two settings.)

4. Prevention: curriculum, environment & staff training

- **RSHE / PSHE / therapeutic curriculum:** age-, development- and SEND-adapted teaching on risks of drugs, tobacco, vaping and exploitation; role-plays and social stories for Merstone; repeated short sessions and visual resources for Forest Oak and Merstone. Include harm-reduction messages, how to refuse offers, who to tell. [GOV.UK](#)
 - **Environment:** clear signage that substances are banned; no-smoking/vaping rules for staff and visitors; safe disposal points for vapes/lighters found (recorded). Consider vape-detectors only after full risk/ethics review and consultation with governors and parents; monitor legal/regulatory environment. [The Scottish Sun+1](#)
 - **Staff training:** all staff trained to recognise signs of intoxication, withdrawal, exploitation, county lines indicators and to follow safeguarding pathways; DSL and deputies receive multi-agency training and local contacts list. [GOV.UK+1](#)
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5. Prohibited items (examples, not exhaustive)

- Illegal drugs and “legal highs” / NPS; syringes / drug paraphernalia.
 - Tobacco products: cigarettes, rolling tobacco, tobacco pouches / snus, and nicotine pouches.
 - Vapes / e-cigarettes (disposable and refillable), vape liquids and cartridges.
 - Lighters, matches, rolling papers and materials primarily intended to facilitate smoking or vaping.
 - Prescription medication being used other than as prescribed (see medicines policy). Possession of any of the above on school site or during school activities will be treated as an incident.
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6. Immediate response to an incident (use / intoxication / medical emergency)

1. **Health & safety first.** If pupil is unconscious / having breathing difficulties / seizure / overdose, call emergency services (999) immediately. Provide first aid; if ingestion suspected bring packaging if safe. For nicotine poisoning (including pouches) call NHS 111/999 as appropriate — nicotine can be dangerous to children. Merstone: be prepared for airway/choking due to small items. [Truth Initiative](#)

2. **Remove other pupils from immediate area** and preserve scene for evidence (packaging, devices) without touching materials more than necessary. Staff should not taste or handle substances.
 3. **Inform DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead)** immediately. DSL assesses safeguarding risk and whether parents/carers should be informed immediately or whether doing so would increase risk. DSL logs incident in safeguarding/incident record. [GOV.UK](#)
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7. Suspected supply / exploitation (including third parties suspected of providing items for sale)

Because our pupils are especially vulnerable to being groomed, coerced or exploited (for example county lines, cuckooing or local dealers), the following **MUST** apply when supply is suspected (to or via pupils):

Immediate steps (do not approach suspected dealers personally)

1. **Keep pupils safe.** If you suspect immediate contact or an on-site transaction, take pupils to a safe place. Do not put pupils or staff at risk by confronting adults.
2. **Inform DSL and Headteacher immediately.** DSL will convene an urgent safeguarding response. [GOV.UK](#)
3. **Preserve evidence:** CCTV footage, packaging, mobile devices (do not examine devices beyond what is necessary); record times, descriptions, vehicle registration numbers and other observable details. Do not search or seize items from adults unless directed by police.
4. **Contact police / local safeguarding partners:** Where a supply is suspected, the school will normally refer to the police (in parallel with safeguarding referrals) — especially if there is an ongoing supply, violent threat, on-site trading, exploitation or possession of guns/knives. DSL should use local MASH / children's social care contact and record the referral outcome. The National Crime Agency / local police guidance on county lines should be considered. [GOV.UK+1](#)
5. **Multi-agency safeguarding:** If a pupil is suspected to be exploited or coerced into supply or being used to store drugs/money, a child protection referral must be made to children's social care and the police must be notified. Use multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) / local protocols. [NSPCC Learning](#)
6. **Do not name or accuse publicly:** Avoid naming suspected community dealers in general communications; follow police advice and legal guidance.
7. **Record & communicate appropriately:** record the incident in detail in the safeguarding log and incident form; inform governors/gov safeguarding lead as required. If police advise, follow their lead regarding disclosure and retention of evidence.
8. **Parental contact:** DSL will decide whether to inform parents immediately — do not inform if this increases risk (e.g. the supplier is a family member or disclosure may place the child at greater risk). Follow children's social care guidance. [GOV.UK](#)

(Practical note: staff must never try to act as investigators or take action that could increase risk; always escalate to DSL and police.)

8. Searching, confiscation and disposal

- The school follows DfE guidance on searching, screening and confiscation. Staff may search pupils or their possessions for tobacco, vapes, illegal drugs, stolen items or weapons where there are reasonable grounds. Searches of intimate areas are not permitted — only police. Any search must be conducted in line with DfE guidance and with a witness present and recorded. Confiscated drugs should be handed to police as soon as reasonably practicable. [GOV.UK+1](#)
 - **Storage & chain of custody:** Confiscated items (including vapes, tobacco pouches, packaging) to be stored securely and logged (who confiscated, from whom, when, storage location). For illegal drugs or paraphernalia, contact police and hand over. For vapes and tobacco, disposal should be safe and logged.
 - **Electronic devices:** If possession/use involves devices (e.g., photos of supply), follow DfE guidance regarding searching electronic devices and never intentionally view indecent images of a child — follow child protection and police advice. [GOV.UK](#)
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9. Disciplinary responses (use vs supply) — general approach

- **Use / possession (first/low-level incidents):** restorative approach, education, confiscation, parent/carer meeting, behaviour contract, targeted support, and monitoring. In Forest Oak this will commonly be a structured restorative conversation plus planned RSHE input; in Merstone, use communication-appropriate methods (symbols, social stories), and involve parents/carers and care teams.
- **Repeat use / possession:** escalate to fixed-term exclusion or alternative placement depending on risk and safeguarding needs; continue targeted therapeutic interventions and referrals to specialist services (e.g., child & adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), smoking cessation/adult services for family).
- **Supply / dealing (including attempting to sell to pupils): strong sanctions up to permanent exclusion** considered, alongside police involvement and safeguarding interventions. Supply is usually a safeguarding issue and will trigger child protection referral and police investigation. The school will consult the local authority and police before final disciplinary decisions in complex exploitation cases. [GOV.UK+1](#)

Note: Permanent exclusion decisions must factor the pupil's assessed capacity and safeguarding needs, and level of exploitation. Alternative placements and intensive support should be prioritised where appropriate.

10. Support, assessment & rehabilitation

- **Individual risk assessment:** for any pupil involved in substance incidents, put in place a written risk reduction and safety plan (who is responsible, triggers, support, monitoring). For Merstone, ensure communication needs and behaviour support plans are integrated.
 - **Pastoral & therapeutic support:** referral to school counsellor, SEND team, family liaison, substance misuse services adapted for SEND where available, and CAMHS where clinically appropriate. Forest Oak: group/peer support in addition to one-to-one work. Merstone: family/care team involvement and bespoke interventions.
 - **Education / restorative work:** pupils who remain on roll receive bespoke education on risks, safer behaviours, refusal skills and alternatives to risky peer activity. [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)
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11. Recording, reporting & retention

- All incidents logged on the school's safeguarding/discipline system with details (who, what, when, where, response, evidence). DSL ensures outcomes and next steps recorded. Relevant incidents reported to local authority where required and to police when a crime is suspected.
 - For serious incidents involving supply or exploitation, retain CCTV and evidence following police advice and the school's data retention policy.
 - Governors receive anonymised termly report on substance incidents, patterns and actions.
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12. Working with parents, carers & external agencies

- **Communication with parents/carers** is required unless doing so would increase risk to the child (DSL decision). Offer support, information on cessation services, and guidance on securing home environments (e.g. removing stockpiled vapes/tobacco).
 - **External partnership:** robust links with local police drugs liaison officer, children's social care, health services (school nurse, local stop smoking service), and local substance misuse services with SEND capability. For exploitation concerns, use local county lines/criminal exploitation pathways and the NCA / NSPCC resources. [NSPCC Learning+1](#)
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13. Staff conduct & smoking/vaping

- Staff must not smoke or vape on school premises or in sight of pupils, nor use tobacco/nicotine products when supervising off-site activities. Breaches are a disciplinary matter. Staff who smoke/vape should not store products where pupils could access them (e.g., cloakrooms, classroom cupboards). [ASH](#)

14. Confidentiality & information sharing

- Information shared only with those who need to know to protect a child, in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education* and local safeguarding arrangements. Disclosures to police/children's social care should follow the school's data-sharing protocol. [GOV.UK](#)

15. Monitoring & review

- Policy reviewed annually (or sooner if statutory guidance changes). Termly reporting to governors on incident trends, statutory updates and local concerns (e.g., new vape devices or local supplier patterns). DSL maintains local contacts list for police, social care, smoking/vaping services and specialist SEND substance misuse support.

Templates & quick flowcharts

Immediate incident checklist (quick)

1. Ensure pupil safety & call emergency services if needed.
2. Remove other pupils from area.
3. Preserve scene — don't handle substances more than necessary.
4. Inform DSL immediately.
5. Record observations (time, behaviour, witnesses).
6. Secure confiscated items (log, store). Contact police if illegal substances or supply suspected.
7. Follow safeguarding referral if exploitation suspected.

Suspected external supplier / exploitation quick actions

- Do **not** confront suspected supplier.
- DSL: secure pupil, preserve evidence (CCTV, witness statements), call police, make child protection referral, liaise with LA/MASH. Record everything. Inform parents unless doing so would increase risk. Consider emergency welfare meetings with multi-agency partners.

Specific references & further reading (key sources)

- DfE — *Drugs: advice for schools* (policy framework / pastoral & disciplinary guidance). [GOV.UK](#)
- DfE — *Searching, Screening and Confiscation* (guidance on staff powers to search and lawful handling of confiscated items). [GOV.UK+1](#)

- DfE — *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (statutory safeguarding duties, exploitation). [GOV.UK](#)
- Home Office / NCA — *Criminal exploitation / county lines* (indicators and multi-agency responses). [GOV.UK+1](#)
- Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) & Local public health resources — guidance on vaping policies in schools. [ASH](#)
- NSPCC / Local authority resources on county lines & exploitation for schools. [NSPCC Learning](#)

Illicit Substances, Tobacco & Vapes – Staff Response Flowchart

1. Immediate Safety First

- **Is anyone unwell or unconscious?**
→ **Call 999** (and **First Aider**) immediately.
 - **Remove other pupils** from the area.
 - Do **not** taste, touch or dispose of substances yourself.
 - Keep packaging or items safe for evidence.
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2. Inform the DSL Immediately

- Contact **DSL / Deputy DSL** (or Headteacher if unavailable).
 - DSL decides next steps: safeguarding, search, or emergency services.
 - Record what you saw, heard and did — **facts only**.
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3. Searching & Confiscation (if directed by DSL)

- Only search if **reasonable grounds** and **two staff present** (same-sex search unless risk of serious harm).
 - Confiscate safely → **Seal & label** (who/when/where).
 - Store securely until handed to DSL or police.
 - Illegal drugs → **Police called** as soon as possible.
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4. Distinguish the Situation

Situation	Examples	Actions
Use / Possession	Found smoking/vaping or holding a substance	First aid if needed → DSL → Record → Parent informed → Restorative/educational response
Suspected Supply or Exploitation	Offering/selling to others, or signs of coercion, money, unknown adults, messages on phones	Treat as a safeguarding incident → DSL → Police & Children's Social Care → Preserve evidence (CCTV, items, notes)

5. Safeguarding Priority

- Our pupils are **vulnerable to exploitation** — always consider:
→ Could another person be using this pupil to supply or store items?
→ Is there grooming, intimidation, or financial exploitation?

- DSL must **refer to social care / MASH** and police if exploitation suspected.
 - Do **not** inform parents yourself if this could increase risk — DSL decides.
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6. After the Incident

- Complete **Incident Form / CPOMS entry** before the end of the day.
 - Include: who, what, when, where, witnesses, actions taken.
 - DSL ensures safeguarding and disciplinary follow-up.
 - Debrief with staff if necessary (especially at Merstone).
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7. Remember

- **No tobacco, vapes or nicotine pouches** on site (staff or pupils).
- Staff **must not** smoke/vape on school grounds or off-site in sight of pupils.
- Always act with calm, care, and consistency.
- When in doubt → **Call DSL**.