

Tuesday 5th March 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am sure you will have seen a lot in the press recently on the issue of 'vaping' in schools. It has been a growing problem across the country and schools are having to spend a lot of time and energy dealing with it. There are significant concerns about the way vapes are being marketed and targeted at children. Recent figures show the number of children using vapes in the past 3 years has tripled. Use among younger children is also rising, with 9% of 11 to 15 year olds now using vapes. The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown and the nicotine contained within them can be highly addictive, with withdrawal sometimes causing anxiety, trouble concentrating and headaches. While vaping can play a role in helping adult smokers to quit, children should never vape.

I would like to point out the following facts, which I would encourage you to discuss with your children:

- The legal age for vaping or smoking cigarettes is 18
- It is an offence to sell a vape to a child under 18
- There are many unregulated products being sold to children
- The majority of regulated vapes contain high levels of nicotine, increasing the likelihood of user dependency
- The long-term health effects of vaping are very much unknown

At Great Sankey High School, we now have more toilets available to students in school during the school day. I have extended breaks by 5 minutes to 20 minutes this year and we recently opened a new dining facility on the first floor of the old primary school building with 10 new toilets. All students should be able to use them expecting to be safe there and for the toilets to be clean. With this in mind, I recently took the decision to install sensors to detect vape usage and we are finding this to be extremely effective. We had a trial period with a couple of sensors and this helped us to investigate vaping incidents. It also inspired several students to give up vaping.

Now, all of the toilets in school have a vape sensor. Each vape sensor works quite simply. They are designed to detect the vapour and the chemicals released from a vape. When it is activated, it immediately sends an email alert to senior staff. The message includes the exact time and location the sensor was set off. Staff then use CCTV to identify the student who caused the alert. CCTV covers the entrances to all toilets.

Staff will speak to any student who is identified. Vapes are a prohibited item in our Behaviour Policy. Senior staff have a statutory power to search pupils or their possessions

where they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that the pupil may have a prohibited item. We will always ask for a student's consent and any search would be done with two staff present. This may involve the use of a handheld security wand that are commonly used at sporting events and concerts.

Students found to be carrying vaping materials, or vaping in school, may be sanctioned (the length and type of which is at the discretion of the school depending upon the circumstances). Some students manage to dispose of a vape before they are searched. They may still receive a sanction as they were in the toilet or cubicle, alone or with others, when the sensor was set off.

Some students still persist in going into a cubicle with other students which is not acceptable. As a general rule, we can sanction all students in a group where vaping is taking place in the same way, regardless of whether or not they might have been vaping themselves: it is their personal responsibility to stay away from vaping.

At Great Sankey, we are educating our students about the dangers of vaping through our PSHE curriculum, assemblies and individual or group discussions. We are also clear with students that there is growing evidence of the risk to health presented by vaping, including the risks to mental health that come with addiction to nicotine. It should not be thought of as a 'safe' alternative to anything.

If you have concerns that your child may be vaping or would like more information about vaping please see these links [Vaping](#) / [Childline](#). If your child is seeking support to stop, please contact the year team who can contact external agencies such as the school nurse or the local stop smoking/cessation teams.

Thank you in advance for your support in keeping our young people safe. You can help by talking to your children about the risks involved with vaping, as well as reinforcing the fact that it is illegal and will certainly not be tolerated in school.

Yours sincerely



Mr G Evans  
Headteacher