Dear Parents and Carers

Please forgive my direct approach. We have a new pandemic growing in our society effecting young people up and down the country. You may have seen the recent news article: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/744dbdf0-b478-11ed-b79d-a407b2bc707f?shareToken=f52c32b7bdf80e709ed12d7fe1571258> Our concern is the prevalence of e-cigarettes being used by young people. You might (like I used to) be of the belief that these are better than smoking normal cigarettes and whilst they might be a good tool to help stop the habit they are not risk free. One reason is that we are concerned about increasing numbers of young people acquiring vapes from the ‘unregulated market’. These are often initially cheaper than high street prices but can be laced with dangerous drugs such as THC and Vitamin E Acetate. If you become aware of this please report directly to trading standards or the police via a 101 call.

Over the past two years we have had to call two ambulances to take away students who had collapsed and were unresponsive. In both cases the young people had used a friend’s vape and unknowingly inhaled very dangerous drugs. In one case the student was in such a bad way that we feared that what they had taken could be fatal. As you can imagine, this was distressing for staff and the parent of the child and is the reason that I wish to do everything within my power to make sure that this does not happen again on my watch. I am told by headteachers of other schools both locally and nationally that this is their experience too.

We are working with GMP to ensure that any confiscated vapes are sent for testing and we are uncovering that many are counterfeit. I know how easy it is for parents to assume that their child would know better than to use a vape but as a father of four young people, I know that it would be naive of me to think my own children are immune from the influence of others or the pressure to use a vape.

Even a vape that isn’t laced with illegal substances can have the effect of altering the mood or behaviour of someone who becomes addicted, making them more anxious and perhaps irritable. We believe that the increase in case load for our pastoral and wellbeing staff is partly attributable to this new trend.

We have been working with 360 Substance misuse service and Whysup to educate young people about the dangers of drug use and addiction including vapes but as this is a national problem we intend to seek support from the community, MPs and other schools to launch a campaign to educate all on the dangers of vapes. You may have noticed that vapes are marketed towards children with flavours such as candy floss. You may have even seen school buses with adverts for vapes on the back of them. This shows that we have some work to do in educating society and that advertising for vapes needs greater regulation.

An action we are taking is to invest in vape sensors in our toilets. It is important to us that students feel safe using toilets at breaktime and also that we give the counter cultural message about the potential dangers of e-cigarettes, doing whatever we can to make sure that this generation of children are safe and make wise choices.

We have received a lot of support from our parents and carers in this initiative. We urge parents to talk to their child about the issue. We asked that they regularly check their bags and pockets for e-cigarettes. We advise that when young people say they are ‘looking after it for a friend’, they should be doubly suspicious as it means that they cannot verify whether or not the vape is laced with something dangerous such as THC or Vitamin E-acetate. Parents and carers should be aware that young people often store them in their tie and what might appear to be an innocent looking highlighter may in fact have the potential to kill a child.

We are genuinely in this predicament together, but I believe that if we stand together on this matter we can save and improve the lives of our young people.

Tony McCabe