

Lothian Tobacco Free Schools

Evaluation summary

Background

The Scottish Government is committed to reducing smoking levels to 5% by 2034, as set out in its strategy '*Creating a Tobacco-Free Generation: A Tobacco Control Strategy for Scotland*' (March 2013).

Schools are well placed to make an important contribution towards achieving the national target to reduce young peoples' smoking.

The ***Smoke Free Schools Project*** was set up with the following aims:

- To facilitate a review of tobacco education (including teaching materials) and identify areas for improvement/development across the curriculum and across all year groups
- To facilitate a review of and improve implementation of the school smoking/tobacco policy
- To inform how tobacco education can be improved within other Lothian schools

Evaluation

12 schools across Lothian participated over a two year period; these drew from catchment areas located in both disadvantaged and relatively affluent communities and in rural and urban settings. School leads for the project were interviewed in May 2016 towards the end of the first phase of the project, and again one year later in May 2017, with a view to exploring factors which had facilitated or hindered the development and implementation of a smoke free policy.

Summary of findings

A detailed 'checklist' provided a structure for schools to begin to identify ways to improve and broaden the scope of their existing policy, and develop an action plan for implementation. Consultation with pupils and staff members was a key element in building understanding and support throughout the school, and in developing a context specific approach. Pupil involvement and participation maintained the profile and visibility of the work.

The social distribution of smoking which is also reflected within schools posed a challenge in that teachers felt they were targeting specific groups of staff and pupils. This was sometimes experienced as uncomfortable, particularly as these were also often pupils who were the focus of efforts to increase their engagement with school and there was concern not to alienate them. The emphasis on support and the positive creation of a smoke free environment was therefore welcomed as an inclusive and helpful approach

Re-framing the issue as one of health and wellbeing rather than primarily one of discipline was instrumental in bringing about a culture shift, and a clear and coherent policy increased teachers confidence in feeling able to address smoking in the school. Smoking cessation provision in schools underpinned this change from a punitive to a more supportive way forward, and the service was positively taken up by a number of pupils.

The structured and ongoing support provided by the ASH Scotland Development Officer was described by all participating schools as fundamental in equipping them with the knowledge and resources, as well as the motivation and positive reinforcement at busy times, to complete the project.

All schools reviewed tobacco education and materials but challenges remain for some in delivering this in a sustained way due to the amount of time needed to establish a progressive and well resourced programme across all year groups, and the need to balance competing and sometimes mandatory demands on the PSE curriculum.

The necessity of negotiating with private contractors or other stakeholders in the situation of a shared campus also added a layer of complexity for some schools.

Conclusion

Lead teachers identified several factors important for success:

- Active involvement and support from senior management, to raise the profile in the school
- Sufficient teacher capacity to undertake the work, and resources to support implementation
- Prioritising the process of consultation to inform context specific and appropriate action plans
- Specialist expertise and support throughout the formal project phase, possibly based on a cluster rather than individual school approach

Schools made significant achievements not only in updating and implementing a smoke free policy but in introducing a shift in attitude and norms towards an environment that is positively smoke free, rather than simply anti smoking, with ambitions to extend this into the wider community.

The lessons learned from the experiences of the 12 schools, which were generously shared by the project leads in the evaluation interviews, have helped to inform the rollout of the project to a further cohort of schools across Lothian in 2017-18.

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