



26 June 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

## Re: Safeguarding toilet spaces, vapes and vape detectors

### Summary

We have recently installed vape detectors in the toilets. They also detect noise, tampering, CO<sub>2</sub>, vape chemicals and other chemicals and send instant alerts to staff. After listening to students and parents, our aim is to ensure that all students feel like they can use the toilet facilities at the appropriate times.

### The background

In our student surveys, and from feedback from parents, it is clearly demonstrated that the only place younger children do not feel safe in our school is in the toilets. Our toilet facilities are limited and it is important that all our students, especially those with vulnerabilities or medical conditions, have access to all the available facilities at the appropriate times in the day. The main issues seem to be gathering in toilets to use phones and social media, occasional instances of vandalism and gatherings of a minority of students that have fallen victim to the latest vape issues.

I should like to stress that the vast majority of our students are exceptionally well-behaved. If you ever want to reassure yourself of this, please feel free to arrange a visit. A very small minority that commit vandalism are destroying the facility for the majority and causing expense that diverts money from classroom resource in a very challenging financial climate. We know from anonymous surveys and our own observations that a very small number of children regularly use vapes.

Vaping is one of the reasons we are strict about children leaving lessons for any reason.

Since we first became aware of the issues, we have been seeking a solution. There have been many challenges to monitoring these spaces that are explained below.

### The scourge of vaping

There has recently been a lot of news around the marketing of vapes to children, the easy access of vapes for children, the harmful effects of some vape products and the addictions that they cause. Vapes seem to be the new method of nicotine addiction. The safety of vapes has been heavily publicised thus making children and parents feel they are harmless. Sadly, we do not know the long-term effects, but

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we do now observe children with “vaper’s cough” and know that some of the heavy metals found in some of the vapes that children access are extremely harmful. Alongside this, many illegal vapes pose a fire risk too.

Our observations suggest vaping also affects concentration and leads to more children wanting to be out of lessons. This is because they are craving nicotine.

At Testbourne, we see those who use vapes as victims. We must still, however, ensure that toilets are safe and welcoming and that children are kept safe from harm.

Vapes were initially marketed as a way for smokers to quit smoking. They are likely to be far less harmful than smoking, so this is potentially a good thing for smokers wanting to give up. The issues are, however, younger and younger children are vaping, products are marketed directly to them through designs and flavours, and there are loopholes in the law about products without nicotine that have been exploited. This means that many children across the world who have never smoked are now addicted to nicotine through vaping.

## **The challenges of ensuring toilets are in working order and welcoming for all**

The main issue with toilets is that they are one of the few parts of the school that, for obvious reasons, have no CCTV. This means that a very small minority of students exploit this vulnerability to carry out acts of vandalism, to use their phones and social media, or to use vapes. It is very difficult for staff to enter these areas, however, as to do so would leave them open to false or malicious allegation. This is a sad reality of working in schools today.

Staff can enter toilets if they have a justifiable reason but, to protect themselves from allegation, they must knock, announce themselves and leave a little time before entering. Clearly, only staff of the same biological sex may enter a toilet. Our advice is that staff should not routinely enter toilets or changing rooms. This means that there are challenges with safeguarding the space.

## **The measures we have taken to ensure toilets are working and welcoming for all**

For a long time now, we have wedged the doors open to the toilets in the Scola building. This is possible because all toilet cubicles and urinals are out of view of the corridor. For other toilets this is not possible.

We have CCTV cameras monitoring the corridors outside of all toilets. This allows us to identify children involved in certain behaviours where the times are known.

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We have recently installed vape detectors as a trial. These are a new system direct from the USA and were not available even a few months ago. The vape detectors are networked facilities that look like smoke alarms and that send alerts to our system if vape chemicals are detected. They also send alerts for high CO<sub>2</sub> levels, noise, tampering and for some other chemicals. These have been on trial for a few weeks in two toilets and we have monitored the situation, without acting, to see if they work. We can clearly see which children vape, when they vape and whether they go alone or in groups as we can triangulate the corridor CCTV with the students exiting and entering the toilets when the vape notification was triggered. At this stage, we have not taken any action as we had not yet warned the students of the existence of the detectors and prefer to be open and transparent. After a successful trial, detectors will now be installed in all toilets and consequences will now be applied for all behaviours that place the integrity of those facilities at risk.

It should be noted that students attempted to sabotage the trial vape detector in the boys' toilets last week. Students should be aware that the vape detectors have tamper alarms and noise level monitors, so we were able to identify those responsible by triangulating the noise peak and tamper alarm with the time that the group entered the toilets as demonstrated by CCTV. Consequences will be applied. We are determined to ensure that all children feel they are welcome to use any of the toilets in school and that those toilets will in working order.

## **Do the vape detectors record sound or video?**

No they do not. They simply log sound levels, tampering, CO<sub>2</sub>, the chemicals from vapes and other chemicals and send an instant alert to a dashboard.

## **Rules of toilet use and consequences for breaches**

Toilets have a strict no gathering policy. No more than 1 child per cubicle should enter a toilet and they should use the facilities and then leave. Some children seem to eat their sandwiches in the toilets which has always seemed like a strange and unhygienic choice to make. Gatherings of children, even if harmless, intimidate others and deter them from using the facilities.

Toilets are not for vaping, mobile phone use or anything else other than using the facilities. Vandalism cannot be tolerated. It is mindless and the only people it hurts are the other students in the school. It is the act of a small minority that sadly has a negative impact on all.

Children caught vaping, using phones, gathering in large numbers will face a range of consequences that may include loss of social time, after school reflection, reflection room for 1 to 5 days or suspension for repeated or very serious incidents. Parents will always be asked to contribute towards the cost of

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repairing vandalised facilities. We strongly recommend that you ensure the child is responsible for paying you back the money you have contributed.

It should be noted that where toilets are concerned, the principles of collective enterprise will apply. Groups of children in the toilets together at the time of an alert will be considered to be acting collectively. We find that vandalism mostly occurs in groups.

## **How will students be informed of these measures and consequences?**

There will be assemblies to explain the use of the vape detectors and consequences for misuse of our facilities. I expect that most children will be pleased with the measures and reassured that the toilets will be welcoming for them.

## **Why take these measures?**

We know that the vast majority of our students are very well behaved. We want to protect their facilities from the handful of students who seem determined to sabotage them or make it uncomfortable to use them. We know that most families will be pleased with these measures that will help preserve facilities for our students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child's tutor in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

**Mr J Beck**  
Headteacher

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