



**To Boards of Management and Principals of Primary,  
Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and  
Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees**

**May 2002**

**National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 – Building on Experience**

The issue of drug misuse is a serious reality that confronts many homes, schools and communities on a daily basis.

The Government has recognised the urgency of tackling this issue through the publication of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008: Building on Experience<sup>1</sup>. The strategy is based on four separate pillars – Supply Reduction, Prevention, Treatment and Research. It includes a series of actions to be implemented by State Departments and Agencies. Among these is a requirement for all schools to have a substance use policy in place by September 2002.

The central objective of a school substance use policy is the welfare, care, protection and education of every young person. It should also equip schools and teachers to deal with issues relating to substance misuse in a planned and considered way and in accordance with their statutory responsibilities.

The Department is aware that many schools already have substance use policies in place and many have been actively working on policy development with the Health Boards. The accompanying guidelines have been drawn up to assist those schools, which have not yet begun the process of developing substance use policies. They have been prepared by this Department in consultation with the Department of Health and Children, the Health Boards, the Education Partners, the SPHE Support Service for Post Primary Schools, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme for Primary Schools and the School Development Planning Services. They set out the process and the main elements to be considered in the formulation of a school substance use policy. They offer a basis for good practice and can also be used to reappraise existing policies in schools. These guidelines should be regarded as complementary to any guidelines already issued by Health Boards.

While it is recognised that it may not be possible for all schools to have a comprehensive substance use policy in place by September 2002, schools are asked, at the very least, to begin the process of policy development which can be refined and elaborated over a longer period.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [www.gov.ie/tourism-sport](http://www.gov.ie/tourism-sport)

The Department has consulted widely in preparing the guidelines. The consistent message is that the development of a substance use policy within a school must involve management, teachers, students, parents and the wider community. Research has shown that the consultative process is as important as the actual content for ensuring successful implementation of the policy. A process that involves real consultation and the involvement of all the partners (a whole school approach) will assist the implementation and ensure long-term support for the policy. School substance use policy should be developed using any existing structures that may already have been established for school development planning, and should build on existing school policies e.g. discipline- M33/91, bullying- M42/93 (for Primary Schools Circular 20/90 refers), Guidelines for Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools (September 1993), Relationships and Sexuality Education - M4/95, M20/96 and the guidelines booklet for the development of RSE policy .

We recognise that the provision of support, both in terms of personnel and materials, will be an issue for schools and the Department of Education and Science is committed to providing support for policy development, on an ongoing basis, in partnership with the Department of Health and Children and the Health Boards. At present, support for the development of school substance use policy is provided by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme for Primary Schools, the SPHE Support Service for Post Primary Schools (in collaboration with relevant personnel from the Health Boards) and the Health Boards themselves. Support for the local drugs task force in Primary Schools is also available from the Walk Tall Support Service. The School Development Planning Services may also be available to assist schools in the context of general policy development. The Home/School/ Community Liaison Service is available to assist designated disadvantaged schools. It is advised that primary and post-primary schools in the same catchment area should link together in formulating a substance use policy.

Drug misuse is one of the great social ills of our time. It affects individuals, families and whole communities. The fight against it must involve everyone from national level to community level where the devastating effects are most felt. The Minister for Education and Science, Dr. Michael Woods TD wishes to express his appreciation of your efforts and those of your teachers, parents and students in formulating a substance use policy for your school. We look forward to supporting those efforts and are satisfied that the guidelines will be of significant assistance to you in this regard.

You are asked to convey the contents of this letter to your whole school community.

Paul Kelly  
Assistant Secretary General