

January 21, 2014

Dear Parents and Guardians

The Heathfield anti-smoking policy has been revised with immediate effect, to include a ban on all e-cigarettes, e-shisha cigarettes, shisha pens and hookah. This is as a result of medical advice, detailed research and discussion with the School Council; it also brings us in line with a revision in policy by other schools both in the local area and nationally.

This relatively new phenomenon has become popular with teenagers and while many western countries ban the sale to under 18s, the UK is lagging behind and as yet has no regulation on the production or sale of these items. There is evidence of extremely cynical marketing, with e-cigarettes and shisha products being available in a range of popular flavours – cherry, strawberry, bubble gum and so forth – alongside claims of their total safety. And yet when the products arrive, they contain warnings that should not be used by or sold to anyone under 18, nor should they be used by pregnant or nursing women; hardly a product which is as innocent as purchasing a packet of gum. There have also been many questions raised by health groups, about whether it is appropriate to allow children to use a product which looks like cigarettes, involves inhaling a water vapour into the lungs, and gives the impression of smoking.

Many alarming facts have come to light:

- Most of these products contain nicotine, a highly addictive substance;
- Tests have shown that even some of the items which claim to be nicotine-free, actually contain some level of nicotine;
- Tests on shisha products marketed as harmless, have in some instances shown the presence of toxins, including carcinogens;
- There is at present (although moves are underway to make changes) no regulation on the manufacture and distribution of shisha and e-cigarettes;
- No water-vapour products should be used by anyone with asthma or who is prone to chest infections as they have been found to greatly exacerbate the conditions.

Not only are these products available over the counter in some small independent stores in London, but also online via Amazon marketplace and eBay, from sites such as 'HotDailyDeals', 'GrassVillage', 'BargainMan', and with the items despatched from anonymous industrial units throughout the capital. When they arrive, there is generally no manufacturing information or breakdown of contents and chemicals on the products. In other words, they could be imported from anywhere, contain anything and can be targeted at and bought by any child.

The girls have all been told that from today, if they are found in possession of an e-cigarette or shisha product, sanctions will be applied as per the anti-smoking policy. Some girls have already handed in products which they bought in good faith and have asked us to destroy them, others have asked that they be passed to their parents at the next Exeat. A copy of the revised smoking policy can be found on the parent portal and instructions on how to access this are attached.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this with me, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am available by phone on 01344 898 349 and will also be at school on Saturday February 8 for face-to-face meetings between 10am and 2pm.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn de Ferrer
Director of Pastoral and Co-Curricular