

**QUESTION BY COUNCILLOR**

**Question submitted by:** Councillor Terri Beer

**To Cabinet Member:** Councillor Sally Cresswell

**Question:** Use of toilets during lessons times / school policy

**Response:** ( for completion by City Council officers and Cabinet Members)

Daily I am hearing horror stories of young people not being able to use the toilet during lessons. The stories I have heard is girls bleeding through their uniforms due to heavy periods. A young man who suddenly felt a stomach bug coming on and rushed to the nearest toilet in lesson time only to receive detention. I could go on with these examples. School toilets over crowded at breaks and smelly and unclean. Dedicated toilets often not in easy access and young people being punished for using the nearest toilet. I am also more than aware that teachers worry about vaping and meeting up in the toilets but this has come at a cost to genuine request being refused. I have requested this is addressed at a scrutiny panel so we can hear from young people of their concerns and from schools with their concerns and formulate a policy that we can adopt to help everyone. That is what are jobs are surely?

#### Summary

Both concerns raised in this enquiry are known to education officers in the Education, Participation and Skills Department. Both incidents have been addressed directly with Trust leads by the Head of Education who is satisfied that the school and trust have acted in an open and transparent manner in the best interests of children.

#### Concern 1:

*The stories I have heard is girls bleeding through their uniforms due to heavy periods.*

#### Response:

The Head of Education met with the Safeguarding lead for West Country Schools Trust on 19.12.23. He addressed this single directly this incident and was fully aware of the impact on the young person. The Head of Education is assured that this is a 'one off' occurrence which is not related to any member of staff denying access to a toilet for a young person in school.

#### Concern 2:

*A young man who suddenly felt a stomach bug coming on and rushed to the nearest toilet in lesson time only to receive detention. I could go on with these examples. School toilets over*

*crowded at breaks and smelly and unclean. Dedicated toilets often not in easy access and young people being punished for using the nearest toilet. I am also more than aware that teachers worry about vaping and meeting up in the toilets but this has come at a cost to genuine request being refused.*

#### Response

This concern is known to the Education, Participation and Skills Department. Officers were initially copied into to complaints from the parent to West Country Schools Trust. Following this, Plymouth City Council received a Section 11A complaint from Ofsted for assurance investigation.

The Head of Education met with the Deputy CEO of West Country Schools Trust on 8 January 2024. All relevant policy and procedure information relating to school toilets was shared. School leaders are open to reflection on impact of policy and practice on all students: this is demonstrated in the complaint responses provided by the Trust for the Head of Education to review. The Head of Education is confident that the school's toilet protocol is sympathetic to the needs of all students.

#### Vaping

Vaping in schools is recognised as a national issue. School toilets can be a focal point for vaping in schools as vapes are easy to conceal and often carry no odour.

Work is ongoing, led by Plymouth's Public Health team, to support school leaders to address the issue of young people vaping on school premises.

For young people suspected or known to be vaping substances controlled under the misuse of drugs act a partnership offer to schools is being further developed, based on the initial partnership offer available from last summer. This is supported by the Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership, Police and a range of other children's services. We have got additional investment for two full time equivalent posts. One is a youth worker and one is a problem specialist substance misuse treatment worker. This additional capacity should go fully live by May 2024 once posts have been recruited too. These posts will primarily focus on work with schools. In the interim PCC Youth Service and SHARP are doing their very best to meet the asks coming there way. The Police also provide intervention and support in the context of this offer.

A range of 'new' school resources have been circulated to secondary schools. Working with Sheffield we have refined the resources they developed in partnership with ASH to work for Plymouth. These include leaflets and posters. An animation (with voice over provided by students from Marine Academy Plymouth Secondary) is being completed and will be available in 2-3 weeks, also a (education) presentation for use in schools.

**Signed:**



**Dated:** 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024