



February 2019

Dear parents and carers

I am writing to you about the difficult but important issue of the use of illegal drugs by young people in Lymm and the surrounding areas. I am afraid this is rather a long letter, but I would appreciate you taking a few minutes to read and digest the contents.

I would like to start by inviting you into school on **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March** for a session led by Warrington Youth Service's Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team, where you can access the most up to date information regarding young people's use of drugs and the specific patterns in our local area. **We will start at 6pm with refreshments and a chance to browse some information, with the main presentation will beginning at 6.30pm.** The evening is aimed especially at parents of students in Years 10, 11 and the Sixth Form but anybody is welcome (we intend to run something similar for parents of KS3 students later in the year). I cannot recommend this evening strongly enough and urge every parent to come along.

In the meantime, there are a few points that I would like to make.

Firstly, I should say that there are some risks that come with writing a letter such as this.

Some people might be tempted to suggest that the headteacher of Lymm High School is admitting that the school has a particular problem with drugs. To be clear, this isn't true; the problems we face are no different to those faced by most secondary schools these days.

Another risk is that people might be prompted to post information on social media that is misleading, one-sided, out of context, exaggerated and/or plain wrong. This will not help anyone, and simply leads to scare-mongering and unnecessary unpleasantness.

Still others may use it as an excuse to launch into more general criticisms of 'the youth of today'. This also does not help anybody, and is not true anyway; young people today probably face a greater range of challenges and temptations than any previous generation and, on the whole, they deal with these remarkably well. It is certainly the case that those in this area are overwhelmingly wonderful children – polite, conscientious, well-adjusted and sensible.

However, if these are some of the risks of writing, then I think they are significantly outweighed by my duty to be honest with you in the interests of safeguarding all students and their families in Lymm and the surrounding areas.

Headteacher: Mr Gwyn Williams

Lymm High School, Oughtrington Lane, Lymm, WA13 0RB  
01925 755458 info@lymmhigh.org.uk www.lymmhigh.org.uk



The truth is that there is a growing problem with the use of illegal substances by young people. As you might expect, we tend to hear a lot about what happens in the evenings and at weekends and are therefore well-placed to be able to comment on general trends.

Within the school itself, drugs are extremely rare - much rarer than the vast majority of schools. Most students absolutely understand the likely consequences of bringing illegal substances into school and would not dream of doing so. Unfortunately, within the last 3 months I have had to permanently exclude a small number of students who were foolish enough to fall short in this regard. This is always a very difficult process, and traumatic for the students and families involved, but I think most people would rightly expect us not to tolerate drugs in school at all and in a sense such decisions are therefore usually quite straightforward.

With this in mind, I want to take the opportunity to inform all students and parents that we will soon be inviting the police into school along with specially trained sniffer dogs to help ensure that drugs are not present on the school site. I'd like to reassure you that the dogs and their handlers are very experienced at working in school settings and will be accompanied by senior staff at all times. There should be no reason for any student to be alarmed if they do see this taking place, either walking around the ground at breaks/lunchtimes or visiting lessons. **If, however, you have any concerns about this, please contact our safeguarding lead, Mrs Ball ([rball@lymmhigh.org.uk](mailto:rball@lymmhigh.org.uk)).**

Rather than school itself, however, the main reason for writing is to try to support parents and carers in keeping children safe in the evenings and at weekends.

This first step is to acknowledge the scale of the problem. Obviously, we cannot put a precise number on it, but we can say that increasing numbers of students are using drugs in the evenings and, especially, at weekends. Drugs are being used quite openly at virtually any party where students from older year groups are present and it is no longer confined to small groups who hide themselves away from the 'mainstream' in order to take them.

In common with other schools, we have seen a rise in the number of students presenting with mental health issues connected to drug use. We know of several cases where students have been hospitalised as a result of using drugs and, quite frankly, it feels as if it is only a matter of time before we have a tragedy on our hands as a school community. This is all on top of the long-term effects on the body and mind of taking drugs, the consequences of which might not be apparent for years.

Perhaps this all seems like a statement of the obvious; I am conscious, after all, that there has been a lot of talk in the wider community about this issue in recent months and most parents we speak to do seem to be aware that drugs are increasingly common.

However, we also know enough to know that (quite naturally) many parents tend to be quite naive about the extent of their own children's involvement. The standard line that young people tend to give to their parents on this is along the lines of: "Yes, Mum/Dad, there were drugs around at the party but I'm the one who never touches them". It is perfectly understandable why most parents will accept such assurances at face value but, and I'm afraid there is no easy way of pointing this out, it is simply not true in many cases.

If nothing else, we would urge you to watch out very carefully for any signs of drug use, and display a healthy level of scepticism when questioning your children about where they have been and what they have been up to.

I apologise if this seems unnecessarily blunt or patronising, but trust that everybody understands why the point is being made. One of the ways we feel we can try to help the situation is to be very clear with parents that this

is a problem that is far more widespread than most people realise and it is absolutely not confined to those who might have a tendency to display negative behaviours in other areas. It includes young people from all kinds of different backgrounds, including many who otherwise behave perfectly well in school and at home, and appear to be very well-adjusted.

The evening of 5<sup>th</sup> March will provide a perfect opportunity to come along and listen to experts about patterns of drug use in the local area, the signs to look out for and advice on how to approach this whole issue as a parent.

We are also reviewing our provision as regards drugs education within school. Years 10 and 11 have recently received extra sessions on substance abuse as part of the 'Risky Behaviours' education programme, but we feel we can do more and are actively exploring different options. Your support in reinforcing these messages is essential; with the best will in the world, however much we do in school there will remain a tendency amongst many students to think that the most negative effects of drug use will 'never happen to me' or that the older generation are somehow exaggerating the dangers.

Once again, I do urge you to come along on the 5<sup>th</sup> March. In the meantime, I have listed some sources of information and support at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Gwyn Williams  
Headteacher

FRANK (offers information on individual NPS)  
National Drugs Helpline  
0300 123 6600  
<http://www.talktofrank.com/worried-about-a-child>

Warrington Drug & Alcohol Action Team  
New Town House, Warrington  
01925 443442

Young person's drug and alcohol team  
Orford Youth Base, Capesthorpe Road, Orford, Warrington, WA2 01925 851029

Footsteps  
Helping you to cope with someone else's drug or alcohol misuse  
Tel: 01925 244524

Warrington School Health Service  
Warrington Youth Service  
Orford Youth Base, Capesthorpe Road, Warrington, WA2 0J  
01925 851029