School-based programmes to stop smoking...do they work?

A recent study in Finland, published in "Health Education Research", has looked at the factors associated with how young people stop smoking. The authors were surprised that their school-based smoking prevention programmes were not effective in helping teenage smokers to stop smoking by the age they were 28 years old. Although many studies have shown links between education and giving up smoking, this research found that the social environment was an important factor in stopping smoking.

Most smokers begin smoking in adolescence and the research was particularly concerned about the effects of smoking on heart disease. Part of the study was based on teaching skills to resist the factors that promote smoking. The research began in 1978 and was carried out in 4 schools in Finland involving 903 pupils who were 13 years of age.

A follow-up study tested the effectiveness of a smoking prevention program based in schools. This involved 5 follow-up surveys which were carried out between 1980 and 1993 when the subjects were 28 years old.

The results show that a quarter of daily smokers and about half of occasional smokers at age 15 years had quit by the age of 28. Females were more likely to stop smoking. Three-quarters of all teenage smokers stopped smoking before the age of 28.

Findings also showed that stopping smoking was associated with: being married; employed; and working in a white-collar occupation. Those who had friends and family members who smoked were less likely to stop smoking.

There was also shown to be a link between the health of smokers and the health of their friends. Like the consumption of fatty milk, having a lowleisure-time physical activity and consuming more alcohol and lower rates for stopping smoking. The authors expressed their worries about the increasing smoking rates among girls and women. They recommended the development and evaluation of gender-specific approaches in smoking cessation programmes.

Little or no effect

There is further support for the findings that school-based smoking prevention programmes have little or no effect on stopping young people from smoking**. Speaking from personal experience the authors present some possible reasons why programmes fail.

Smokers and potential smokers are more likely to be absent from school

Smokers do not hold school values

Young people learn little from these programmes except the more academic who are less likely to smoke

The classroom cannot meet the needs of specific target groups

Major life decisions, like stopping smoking, cannot be made by school students

Social influences are very strong including peer smoking

Smoking can be made to appear more attractive with the right risk warnings

A lot of time needs to be given to smoking prevention programmes

Programmes are modified because teachers are not familiar with the underlying theories and methods involved in behaviour-oriented education

They concluded that there appears to be little hope for school-based intervention programmes except for the transient short delay in preventing the young person for taking up smoking in the future. The authors observe that school-based and out-of-school programmes are of dubious value. Smoking intervention programmes should only involve targeted small groups with identified needs.

These are still of limited value unless the programme forms a small part of a national programme, which includes adults, as described by the UK Government’s White Paper Smoking Kills.

Karen Tann

Karen Tann is a Senior Teacher at the James Hornby High School which is a mixed 11-16 Comprehensive school in Basildon, Essex. It was formed by the amalgamation of two secondary schools in September 1998.

Using the HRBQ in school improvement plans

A self-evaluating school will gain an important insight into the attitudes and knowledge of students related to health issues.

Since the publication of The National Curriculum Handbook for Secondary Teachers in England (1999), I have been leading a team of staff at my school in reviewing our current PSHE curriculum and ensuring appropriate coverage of Curriculum 2000. This work has also involved the implementation of a curriculum for Citizenship, which becomes a new National Curriculum subject in August 2002.

In common with all schools, we are also expected to adopt the National Healthy School Standard. This work complements and reinforces the Healthy Schools vision, since implicit in the Healthy Schools Standard is an expectation that students are given opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding related to the PSHE and Citizenship Curriculums as part of a planned whole-school approach.

Implicit in the Healthy Schools Standard is an expectation that students are given opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills and understanding related to the PSHE and Citizenship Curriculum and as part of a planned whole-school approach.

PSHE guidance

If one refers to the initial guidance for schools on PSHE, one is able to identify the knowledge, skills and understanding which are to be taught:

- Developing confidence and responsibility and making the most of their abilities
- Developing a healthy, safer lifestyle
- Developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people.

Also in the initial Guidance for Citizenship, one is directed to three interconnected stands in Citizenship Education. The first of these stands is social and moral responsibility, which includes developing self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour.

‘Hoops for Health’

The school was delighted to accept an invitation to take part in a local project called ‘Hoops for Health’ in January 2003. This is run jointly by London Leopards Basketball Team, the local Health Authority and Basildon District Council. Its aim is to encourage young people to follow a healthier lifestyle and to offer support to improve fitness to targeted students. This project fitted admirably with our work on PSHE, Citizenship and the National Healthy Schools Standard. We worked with Year 7 students in several ways:

- Launch assembly by members of the London Leopards who promoted the theme of needing to be fit for achieving personal ambitions
- All Year 7 took the hoop test and students who needed to increase their fitness levels were encouraged with extra support from Basildon Leisure Services.
- The Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire was given to a sample of Year 7 students. This was sponsored by the local Health Authority

HRBQ

The Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) has proved invaluable for staff working at the James Hornby High School for curriculum development and addressing whole school issues. In line with guidance given in the frameworks for PSHE and Citizenship staff have been able to collect information on the students’ knowledge of, and attitude towards, a range of health related issues. This
has enabled us to look at our current FSHE curriculum and identify areas where students seem poorly informed or need greater support. Some specific examples are given below.

The information has also allowed us to identify current strengths and targets for attention within the key objectives of our Healthy Schools Action Plan.

Data & developments

Only a few applications have been provided. Obvious areas not covered here include Sex and Relationships Education and Health Related Fitness. We also used data to look at literacy at home (which newspapers are taken), and issues around self-esteem which obviously impact upon individual students’ learning and progress.

Drug Education

At the James Horrocks High School we have a planned Drug Education Curriculum, taught through both Key Stages by form tutors. This programme includes smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs and addictive behaviours. There was a wealth of information supplied by the HIRBO on drug-related issues.

Alcohol / Smoking

It would appear that alcohol and smoking education is being targeted at the correct age range and is taught effectively in our current scheme.

The figures show that over 95% of students had not drunk alcohol in the past week and close to 100% of students had not smoked in the past 7 days. We therefore did not feel a need to adjust this teaching package greatly. However, illegal drugs were not well known about (tables 2a - below & 2b - overpage).

This has led us to consider the need to teach about illegal drugs at an earlier point in the student’s school career. Especially since 12% of the boys and 8% of the girls (table 3a - overpage) said that they had already been offered cannabis, and 14% of boys and 8% of the girls (table 3b - overpage) had been offered other illegal drugs.

Healthy eating

A key part of the National Healthy Schools standard is promoting sensible, healthy eating and ensuring that food provided in schools is both appetising and forms part of a planned well balanced menu. Of concern to us (table 4) was the number of students who said they did not have lunch (8% of males & 16% of females).

Even more worrying was that over 25% of the sample (table 5) had nothing to eat or just a drink at breakfast time. This is especially worrying if the same students belong to both categories.

In January 2001 we held a special drug education initiative which lasted approximately 2 weeks including a poster campaign, a competition and culminating in an event staged by Essex Police and Essex FM radio the “2 smart 4 drugs” roadshow. This informed students in a relevant but entertaining way. We would hope to be successful in holding such an event again in future years and so plugging the gap in student knowledge in Year 7.

Table 1a Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: Total number of units of alcohol

Table 1b Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: How many cigarettes you smoked during the last 7 days

Table 2a Percentage of Year 7 males responding to: What do you know about these drugs?

Table 2b Percentage of Year 7 females responding to: What do you know about these drugs?

Table 3a Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: Have you ever been offered cannabis?

Table 3b Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: Have you ever been offered other drugs?

Table 4 Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: What did you do for lunch yesterday?

Table 5 Percentage of Year 7 students in each group responding to: What did you have for breakfast this morning?
and media publications. It may be due to poverty and inability to pay for food or it may reflect a different set of priorities where money is spent on something else (e.g. trading cards). The figures from the survey show that in fact 33% of boys and 48% of girls want to lose weight. We do have a high proportion of students receiving free school meals (28%) so we would hope that these students do at least eat lunch. However, the balance of type of food that is consumed is also a concern. Not unexpectedly, students favour sugar and fat rich items compared to fruit and vegetables. The information provided has lead us to include some important points for action in our aim to create a healthier school. The FHSE curriculum is to be reviewed, concentrating on education about healthy eating, self esteem and self image.

The Food Technology curriculum will also be examined in the light of these findings. We have now reintroduced our breaktime service in the canteen and we will be working with the catering staff to review the range of food offered to students. The possibility of a system to encourage better food choices by students will be considered (e.g. points for healthy foods which can add up towards a reward).

**Relationships and Bullying Behaviour**

Schools should have in place an anti-bullying policy and be following procedures to combat bullying behaviour in school. We already had such a policy and have been working at developing further supportive systems around this issue.

There was a need to add more strategies to our current policy and practice. We then carried out a questionnaire involving both students, parents and our home-school link team. Training sessions using ‘Kicsape’ were run. We have a team of staff who are able to work with both recipients and perpetrators of bullying behaviour and a Mediator has been appointed to work with targeted students.

Recognising student reluctance to approach adults to discuss concerns we have also set up a peer mediator scheme, staffed by trained volunteers. We also have a box where students can drop a note if they are unable to approach a teacher face to face. We hope that in our follow-up survey next year will reflect a positive picture of a successful support system for students and a reduction in the small number of students who are worried about bullying very often.

**Worries**

The HRBQ yielded some useful information about ‘worrying’ (table 6).

**Table 6** Year 7 students responding to: How much do you worry about these problems? (Give a lot or a bit)

A significant number of girls and boys worry about problems with friends and a significant number of girls (39%) worry about the way they look.

The most likely person for our students to confide in would be one or other parent. A worrying number of male students (table 7) would keep things to themselves, if they had problems with friends (31%).

**Table 7** Percentage of Year 7 Males responding to: If you wanted to share any of the problems listed below, to whom would you turn?

**The project was in response to teachers’ struggles to motivate ‘lethargic’ pupils to reach their academic potential, and growing evidence of children’s ‘couch potato’ lifestyles.**

Angela Balding is a project co-ordinator at the Schools Health Education Unit and leads the Unit’s work with the ‘Fit to Succeed’ project.

Angela Balding

Pupils get ‘Fit to Succeed’

A pilot project in the Westcountry found that not only could regular exercise be promoted - but also found links with academic performance.

The unique ‘Fit to Succeed’ project brings together schools, Exeter Academic Council, Devon Curriculum Services, Exeter City Council, DC Leisure Management and the Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU).

It came about in response to teachers’ struggles to motivate ‘lethargic’ pupils to reach their academic potential, and growing evidence of children’s ‘couch potato’ lifestyles.

There are also strong indications, from research carried out at seven Exeter middle schools, of a link between physical exercise and pupil’s school performance.

**Concerns**

‘Fit to Succeed’ emerged from a number of key concerns identified locally and nationally:

- Headteachers reported lethargy in the classroom and increasing difficulties in motivating children to reach their academic potential.
- Many children in Exeter and elsewhere are not sufficiently active to maintain good health. Lack of activity has been particularly identified in girls.
- Even more concerning, the levels of recorded obesity are high and increasing.
- At the Sports Council Consultative Group, which had Exeter Youth Forum representatives on its committee, a number of problems regarding access to facilities were highlighted.

At the initiative of the SHEU, a group was convened of organisations that may have been able to help children in the Exeter area.

A partnership emerged which enabled these key concerns to be addressed in an innovative fashion. This collaborative approach has been crucial in finding practical ways to help towards solving these problems and at the same time helping to raise standards in school.

**Key elements**

- Teachers have the motivation to get children into clubs and activities and schools are keen to investigate a possible link between active bodies and active minds.
- Children have the interest in a variety of activities.
- DC Leisure have the facilities and are keen to involve more children.
- Devon and Exeter Councils have the contacts with schools to bring partners together.
- The Schools Health Education Unit has the research expertise to monitor the effectiveness of the project.

**Pilot project**

The pilot project in 7 schools started with a survey of 1400 pupils in Years 5 to 7 (age 8 to 12). The questionnaire was then re-administered 6 and 12 months later to act as a monitoring tool. Three surveys were carried out involving 3000 ‘Fit to Succeed’ questionnaires. Several important features of the relationship between young people’s exercise levels and other aspects of their lifestyle have been identified.

Teachers’ observations confirmed the association between children who lead active lives, their greater interest in school work and their higher levels of success. A major project aim therefore was to increase the overall levels of exercise reported by the youngsters involved in the project.

**Activity levels**

- Comparisons for the Exeter Year 5 with SHEU wider...