

**BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS  
VAPING & SUBSTANCE MISUSE  
6 MAY 2025**

**Introduction**

NASUWT - The Teachers' Union - in addition to the support we are providing to our members across the UK, is committed to ensuring that those involved in education policy development remain informed of developing challenges in schools and colleges.

**Background**

This briefing explores some of the key findings across Scotland from our Behaviour in Schools research.

The data has been gathered to provide an up-to-date picture of pupil behaviour and indiscipline – 18 months after the Union's first in-depth look at this issue.

This briefing explores:

- the evidence gathered through our research on vaping and addiction;
- the voices of teachers and their lived experiences;
- a set of recommendations.

## Our approach

We conducted an online survey in January and February 2025, which was completed by 5,808 members of the NASUWT across the UK: this included 476 members in Scotland.

Results from this data collection have been compiled to produce the following report based on the responses from Scotland and, where appropriate, compared with the findings across the UK.

## Key Findings

Vaping continues to be a problem in schools, with 56% of respondents in Scotland, and 54% of respondents across the UK, reporting that pupil vaping is a factor in issues of school safety and behaviour.

Scotland	UK-wide	
53%	52%	of teachers have observed an increase in vaping among pupils over the past year.
65%	62%	of teachers state that students frequently leave lessons to vape.
36%	39%	of teachers report that nicotine addiction affects students' concentration in class.
19%	17%	of teachers stated that students vape in the lesson itself.
82%	71%	of respondents reported that pupils vape at break times
85%	81%	reported students gather in the toilets to vape throughout the school day.
46%	40%	of respondents said that pupils are misusing snus and nicotine pouches in school.

Vaping is also a significant cause of damage to school buildings and property, with pupils hiding vapes causing damage to ceiling tiles and pupils flushing vapes causing expensive plumbing issues.

### **Detailed Analysis of Survey Data**

We asked respondents what type of behaviours they witnessed:

Vaping in lessons	19%
Pupils leaving lessons repeatedly to vape	65%
Vaping at break times	82%
Pupils unable to concentrate because they are distracted or affected by nicotine	36%
Peer pressure for non-vapers to engage in vaping	30%
Students gathering in school toilets to vape throughout the school day	85%
Damage to school toilets/plumbing as pupils flush vapes away	48%
Fires caused by vapes/vapes not being disposed of properly	5%
Vapes being thrown away in school bin	41%
Fire alarms being set off as a result of pupils vaping	28%
Damage to other school property because of vapes	6%

Teachers told us that:

*‘Car park and playground covered in them’*

*‘Pupils scared and unable to use toilets during break and lunch due to vaping gangs, so they ask out in class or wander corridors to try to use other toilets in the school’*

*‘We are seeing more damage in the toilets and staff being asked more and more to police toilets’*

*‘Pupils gathering in stairwells or just outside school at lunchtime or just after school as staff are trying to get to their cars’*

*‘Pupils taking a long time in the toilet with "sweet smelling" wafts left in the toilets’*

*‘Students collapsing and require ambulances’*

*‘Soap dispensers set alight to melt the plastic’*

*‘Pupils openly vaping in corridors in front of staff’*

### **Ages and numbers of pupils involved**

Under 11	4%
11-13	74%
14-15	92%
16-18	60%
Over 18	6%

Some children as young as 10 years old have been reported using vapes regularly.

Where respondents indicated they had seen an increase, we asked them to approximate how many more pupils were vaping in or on school premises:

Less than 10% more	19%
10-25% increase	46%
25-50% increase	24%
50-75% increase	7%
75-100% increase	3%

*'This has been a major issue since COVID. The numbers haven't increased because they were already so high'.*

## **School Policies and Procedures**

Respondents were asked if there was provision in their school's behaviour management policy to address pupils who are vaping:

Yes, it is effective	4%
Yes, but it is ineffective	11%
Yes, but it is not regularly enforced	8%
No	39%
Not sure	38%

Teachers told us that:

*'Not taken seriously by the school'*

*'This has flown under the radar and is not widely discussed by the whole school community'*

*'Whenever vaping is reported, there is a distinct lack of urgency to deal with the problem from SLT. It is very much a 'they do it, and we can't stop it's attitude. And I guess this also comes from the fact that very often we've discovered that parents are also helping fund/facilitate these poor habits of their children. This is a bigger concern'*

*'Management is well aware that pupils are vaping in toilets and in corridors'*

*'Our school has taken steps to address this issue and it has moved from being a large and expanding concern to a small and diminishing one'*

## **Teacher views and concerns**

Teachers had strong views and shared the following comments in relation to vaping:

*'Alarms should be installed in every school to dissuade the use of tapes the same way as smoke alarms stop smoking'*

*'I am asthmatic- it gives me asthma attacks''*

*'Watched a very good documentary with Jason North with a first year cover class about the dangers of vaping. It's excellent. Latest nonsense are these flavoured toothpicks. No idea what chemicals are involved in these. I've had to request these are spat out in the bin more than ten times already this week'*

*'Parents often provide their children with vapes. Grey area over the confiscation of vapes - are we allowed to destroy them or do we need to return them to parents'*

*'This is a serious issue which is not being addressed nationally. Think of the smoking campaigns that were run for public health - why not for vaping?'*

*'Have had people in to talk to pupils. Not effective. Coughing by some of pupils is awful'.*

*'Pupils are making their own vapours which include illegal drugs and pupils are being hospitalised as a result'*

*'Pupils do not even try to hide their vaping'*

*'Older pupils have been known to bring them in to sell to the younger age groups'*

*'Lost learning time seriously impacts attainment. Parents are buying vapes for their children because they see it as the lesser of two evils compared to smoking. Parents then inform the school their child is "allowed" to vape'*

*'I use the campus policeman to search under 16's and confiscate the vapes'*

*'I think it is a massive issue in all secondary schools'*

*'Regular checks for vapes are carried out and installing vape alarms in the toilets has helped cut vaping on the premises. As older pupils are allowed off the premises there is no control on them'*

### **Misuse of other substances**

Respondents were also asked if they were concerned about the pupils they teach misusing any of the below:

	In school	Out of school
Alcohol	18%	98%
Nicotine pouches / Snus	46%	86%
Energy drinks	89%	64%
Gambling websites or app	44%	88%
Cannabis	53%	88%
Spice	38%	87%
Nitrous Oxide	33%	88%
Other drugs (please state)	49%	90%

*'Cocaine is on the rise at parties and workplaces of senior pupils. There are known dealers (both current and ex pupils)'*

Teachers raised concerns regarding cocaine, acid, ketamine, sniffing solvents, ultra-processed food, ecstasy, zombie (xylazine), MDMA, mobile phones and sugar consumption.

## **Pupil Behaviour**

*'As you would expect from drugs. Education is the last thing they want'*

Teachers were clear that there are substantial impacts on inter alia behaviour, young people's readiness to learn as well as on pupil attendance:

*'Social impact on the community that filters into school. Lack of learning in class due to 'drowsiness' or irrational behaviour'*

*'Apathy, poor concentration, aggressive and antisocial behaviour'*

*'Reduced Motivation & Focus Memory & Concentration Issues Paranoia & Anxiety'*

*'Disruptive Behaviour Increased Restlessness & Irritability Loss of Focus & Fidgeting'*

*'Increase in Risk-Taking & Rule-Breaking More Behavioural Issues in Unsupervised Areas'*

*'Poor concentration. Late to class'*

*'Lack of sleep, poor mental health, lack of routine, decreased attainment in school, attendance issues'*

*'Delayed brain development. Lack of maturity. End of week focus is on the weekend antics and beginning of week is recovering. Attendance is getting worse'*

*'Unable to focus and remain calm and settled in classes'*

*'Sleepiness in class/ agitation and aggression (possibly due to cravings)'*

*'They are often spaced out, unable to focus, unable to regulate their emotions unable to control their tempers'*

*'A small number of pupils are in class clearly under the influence. Arguments/fights arise. Energy drinks are drunk like water'*

*'Erratic behaviour, violent behaviour against other pupils'*

*'I have had to have pupils removed from class due to being non-responsive and very confused and unsettled after cannabis use'*

*'Passing out, sleepy, hyper, gang mind-set'*

*'Lack of concentration and as a design and technology teacher my worry is that there is potential for them to encounter an injury whilst using tools and equipment in my department whilst under the influence. Whoever there have been times where I have suspected substance misuse and if I decided to withdraw them from practical activities and report it, only to then be told to reintroduce them back into the classroom because there is no way of proving whether they had or had not taken any substances. I refused to do this'*

*'Pupils in class under the influence of drugs not being able to learn. Falling asleep or being sick'*

*'High levels of sugar and caffeine prevent concentration and focus'*

*'Extreme tiredness when the energy drinks wear off in afternoon classes They find it difficult to settle in class'*

## **Recommendations**

The government's plans to ban disposable vapes and enact age restrictions for vape purchase are urgently needed to uphold public health.

It is clear that our children and young people are vulnerable to predatory marketing practices from vape manufacturers. We must also see further action on vape packaging, flavour restriction, and strict retail license penalties for non-compliance.

NASUWT would like to see vaping tackled as part of a wider approach to public health and as part of coherent national strategy to support relationships and behaviour in schools, recognising that schools alone cannot address vaping and substance misuse.

The issue of vaping is growing in schools and is often linked to behaviour that challenges. The NASUWT believes we should continue to explore research in this area and questions on vaping should be part of the next national BISSR research.

In an age rife with misinformation, schools need support and resources to make sure pupils fully understand the dangers of tobacco and nicotine. NASUWT has for some time been calling for the government to fund school-based programs to prevent youth vaping, and to provide clear guidance for schools on addressing vaping-related issues.

An assessment of the success of the Tobacco and Vaping Framework, including the awareness-raising campaign on the health impacts of vaping rolled out to schools in 2023, should be undertaken. Any assessment must include consideration of whether the numbers of pupils engaging in vaping within that setting have been positively impacted.

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