

Parklands Community Primary School

Misuse of Alcohol, Drugs and other Substances Policy

Date of Approval : June 2026

Review Date : Summer 2028

Reviewed by : Finance and Staffing Committee

1. Aim of this Policy

To provide a clear framework to enable instances of substance misuse by employees to be handled in an appropriate, fair and consistent manner.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff based in schools on permanent, temporary and fixed term contracts.

3. An Issue for Management

Inappropriate use of alcohol, drugs and other potentially damaging substances can have a far-reaching effect on an employee's personal and working life. Misuse of alcohol or drugs at work can lead to increased absenteeism, poor levels of work performance and increased health and safety risks – not only for the individual concerned but for others such as work colleagues, pupils or members of the public.

West Sussex County Council is committed to providing a safe and productive work environment and to promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees.

• It is almost certain that the County Council will have in its workplace some people who misuse drugs and/or alcohol, which will be affecting their performance at work.

• Managers should intervene at an early stage where changes in performance, behaviour, sickness levels and attendance patterns are identified to establish whether alcohol or drug misuse is an underlying cause.

• Such problems could be the result of, or be exacerbated by, work pressures or expectations and it is important that these issues are fully explored.

• It is the duty of every employer to maintain a safe and healthy environment for all employees.

If it has been identified that an employee has misused drugs and/ or alcohol, it is important that every manager is aware of what help and assistance can be offered. There are essentially three steps in this process.

• Understanding what substance misuse is.

• Learning to identify it.

• Taking the correct steps to provide support and assistance.

Managers may at times find that dealing with difficult or complex cases where substance misuse is suspected is stressful. In such cases managers can seek support from their own manager or from the Employee Assistance Programme.

4. What is Substance Misuse?

Substance Misuse falls into three main categories

• Problematic use: this means using a substance which is in normal use (e.g. alcohol) or which has been prescribed (e.g. a medicine) to excess or in a socially unacceptable way, even though the use may fall short of being habitual.

• Habitual use: this is where an individual becomes so dependent on the effect of a drug (including alcohol) that they feel unable to function adequately without regular recourse to it.

• Dependency: this is where a person is using a substance on a regular basis and withdrawal produces severe symptoms, which may be life threatening. In addition, the dose required to produce the 'desired' effect increases with time, leading to greater and greater dependence.

Drugs have the potential to change an individual's perception in a variety of ways – as does alcohol – but this does not necessarily mean that an individual cannot function in his or her job.

5. How to Identify Substance Misuse

Substance misuse may be the cause or the symptom of a variety of problems at work. Clearly, the earlier that individual employee's with difficulties are identified, the greater the likely success of any assistance offered. All managers should maintain awareness about the following aspects of their staff's behaviour, as any of these may indicate a case of substance Misuse.

• Absenteeism: Unauthorised absences; large amounts of sick leave; absence on certain days, particularly near weekends or after 'pay day', lateness to work in the morning or at lunchtime; leaving early; frequent absence from post whilst at work; frequent visits to lavatories; frequent occurrences of certain illnesses, long tea or coffee breaks.

• Accidents: high and/or increasing incidents both in and out of work.

• Low Performance Standards: missed deadlines; slow working; poor judgement; lack of attention to details; complaints from colleagues; unreliability; forgetfulness, etc.

• Interpersonal Difficulties: unpredictable reactions to criticism; paranoia; irritability; avoiding colleagues; borrowing money; physical or verbal Misuse to colleagues.

• Appearance: changes in physical appearance and standards of dress and hygiene, In relation to alcohol, flushed faces, hand tremors, aroma and general physical incapability may be give-away signs. Use of drugs is far more difficult to identify – some common symptoms are "runny nose", dilated pupils, etc. With solvent Misuse some signs could be spots or cold sores around the mouth or nose. However, these are also the symptoms of many common illnesses and great care should be taken before drawing conclusions.

It is important that Managers do not make assumptions about the reasons why a member of staff is displaying any of the above behaviours and / or symptoms. Managers should ask employees if they realise that their behaviour or performance is not of the standard required and discuss any possible explanations. Managers need to be aware that there may be an underlying disability affecting the employee and

reasonable adjustments may need to be considered. Advice should be sought from HR Professional Support.

6. Employee Responsibilities

• Employees have a responsibility to present a professional image at work to those with whom they come into contact with at all times.

• Employees are expected to report for work and remain throughout the working day in a fit and safe condition to undertake their duties and not be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

• Employees who are taking prescribed or over the counter medicines that are likely to or are causing side effects should discuss this with their line manager to ensure their safety and the safety of those they come into contact with, (they are not obliged to disclose the actual medical condition being treated).

• Employees are strongly encouraged to seek help if they have concerns regarding their alcohol or drug use and are expected to co-operate with any support and assistance provided by the organisation to help address their drug and alcohol misuse.

7. The steps to take

If a problem arises with an employee because of misuse of alcohol or other substances, in deciding what action to take, it is important to distinguish between those cases where suspected substance misuse is causing disciplinary or capability problems and those where it may be causing problems for the individual but is not affecting his/her work. In the former type of case, there is a clear obligation on the manager to resolve the immediate problem, but in the latter, the main benefit lies in preventing future problems and providing support and assistance.

A situation where substance misuse is suspected requires delicate handling, as any action taken by management might be viewed by the individual as unwarranted interference. Nevertheless, the subject must be raised with the employee in a general, informal way, and help offered. Complete confidentiality should be assured at this stage.

Whether or not the employee admits to having a problem, he/she should initially be recommended to seek counselling or medical help from an appropriate source, e.g., GP, Occupational Health Provider, or the Employee Assistance Programme. Where help is sought, consideration should be given to reasonable time off for consultation/treatment. If, at this stage, there is not work-related problem, the manager need not take any further action.

If an employee refuses to acknowledge a substance misuse problem or refuses to accept help provided, and there is a work-related problem, then appropriate action in accordance with the relevant procedure, such as Capability or Discipline, may ultimately be necessary. Indeed, dismissal may eventually be warranted, where circumstances justify it or where medical or other help is refused or (in certain cases) ineffective.

Although alcohol or drug dependency is not covered by equalities legislation, any subsequent illnesses or conditions bought about by the dependency may well be. In addition, the substance misuse could be related to an existing condition or disability. Managers should always consider the issue or reasonable

adjustments in dealing with cases involving alcohol and drug misuse. Employees can access Employee Assistance for support.

Who can help?

Headteachers/ line managers can contact HR Professional Support on 033022 22422 or email HR.Professional.Support@westsussex.gov.uk

Reviewed: March 2020 by NH SHRS (updated HR contacts)

Sense checked: May 2020 by KMG SHRS