

## Drug Testing In Schools – A Young Person’s View

### **Background:**

This paper provides a brief overview of the views of young people from Kent, in relation to drug testing in schools.

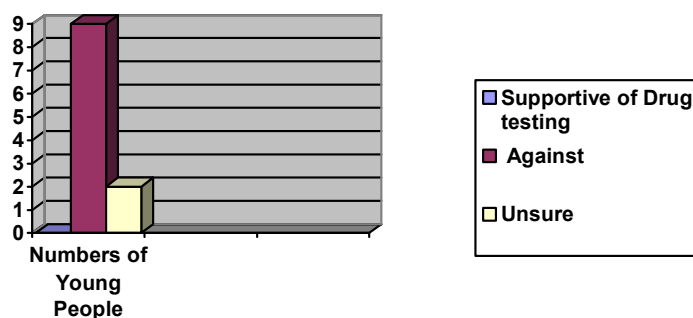
### **Method:**

A brief questionnaire (see attached) was completed by 84 young people. These young people include clients seen by KCA Young People’s service aged 14 and 15 years and children aged 13 to 15 years, from two schools in Kent who participated in a health day where KCA Young Peoples had representation.

### **Results:**

#### *Young People In Treatment:*

Eleven clients of KCA’s young people service completed the questionnaire. 82% indicated that they did not support drug testing in schools, 18% of the young people were unsure and no young people supported the drug testing.



Some young people indicated they would refuse to take the test, and many felt that school attendance would be reduced. One boy stated “ I know that my

friends who use Cannabis would try and bunk off school if they thought they may be tested” Whilst another male of fourteen stated that; “ I would refuse to take part whether I was using or not. I do think some people may not attend school if they think they may be drug tested”. Another young person stated “I would probably not attend school that day”.

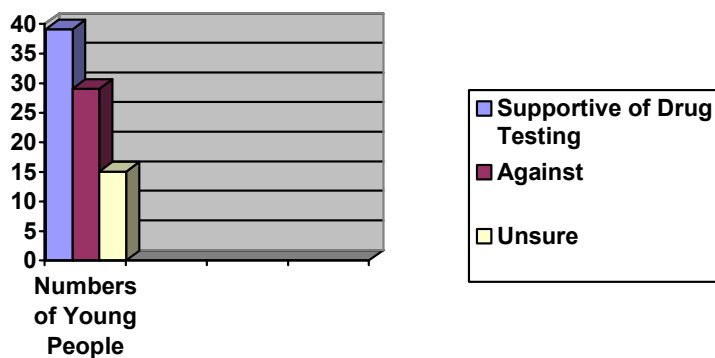
Some young people indicated that they were concerned that drug testing would get them into trouble with the police, lose their school place or cause problems between their parents and themselves.

Two young people indicated that drug testing could have a positive impact on them. One young person reported, “ I probably would cut down because I wouldn't like to get caught at school” another young person stated, “ I don't want to experiment with drugs anyway. But I know that if I thought I might be tested then I would definitely not experiment”.

Several young people indicated that they did not feel that it was the schools right to monitor behaviour that occurred outside of school, and one young person suggested “Just test people who look stoned or out of control”.

### *Young People in School*

Seventy-three young people whom KCA had contact with on school health days completed the questionnaire. 55.4% stated that they supported drug testing in schools, 39.7% stated that did not agree with drug testing in schools and 20.5% of young people were unsure.



Similar to young people in treatment, a very strong theme found in the responses, was the negative impact drug testing could have on school attendance. Some of the young people's perceptions include:

"Pupils may not come to school as often".

"I would walk straight back out again and bunk until it's all over".

"It's a bad idea because it would stop people from going to school".

"I would go home, and stay home or I would move schools".

"I wouldn't maybe come to school if I had took drugs because I wouldn't like to get caught".

Four young people completing the questionnaire felt that drug testing in schools would make the school feel like a prison. One female student stated "I think drug testing is a bad idea because this school is like a prison because

there are cameras and sensors everywhere and if they start to do drug testing then it would feel more like a prison”.

Other students reported that they would feel scared and worried if drug testing was introduced into their school; “I don’t know about it. I’m worried if the test will involve injections”, another young person stated “ I think that it is a bad thought of doing this because people would feel scared and would do more things wrong”. Some young people expressed that they did not think it was the role of the school to monitor behaviour outside of school hours.

Many young people who completed the questionnaire suggested that if pupils were compelled to have drug tests, then teachers should too. One young person stated; “You should only test pupils if you will be testing teachers!”

Despite many of these negative perceptions, many students were also quiet positive about drug testing or felt unbothered, as they “did not do drugs anyway”. A number of young people felt that drug testing may be helpful to young people using drugs. Some of the comments by the young people include:

“It’s a good because you can help them if they take drugs and you’ll be able to help them when they are younger”.

“I think it would be good in schools because they could catch a lot more people and help them to get back to normal life”.

“I think it’s a good idea because people at a young age shouldn’t be taking drugs anyways so it’s a good idea to stop them”.

“I think this is a good idea because they might have family problems”.

Other young people indicated that if drug testing was introduced into the school this might prevent experimentation and use. One student stated “I feel that drug tests are a good idea and that it might scare people from using

drugs”, another young person stated “It would make me think twice about taking drugs...” and similar to this a young female that was engaged in the consultation reported “If I took drugs then yes it would change my mind because of the thought that you are going to be caught taking drugs”.

### **Conclusions & Recommendations:**

From the consultation there appears to be many diverse thoughts and feelings with regard to drug testing in schools held by the young people who participated.

Clearly, the majority of young people in treatment for substance misuse who provided their opinions did not feel drug testing should be introduced into schools. They indicated that they were very concerned about possible negative consequences such as expulsion, police involvement and family conflict. Careful consideration needs to be made on how the welfare of this group of young people, who are already seeking treatment and support for substances, is going to be protected. Although these young people will be a minority within school settings, their well-being must be of significant priority to the Young People's Joint Commissioning Group of KDAT.

The young people consulted in education settings, held a more mixed view of drug testing in schools. Over half the young people who participated indicated they supported drug testing in schools, with many indicating they felt it would prevent or reduce drug use. A considerable number of young people stated they were neither supportive or against testing, stating that it wouldn't bother them as they didn't use drugs. Additionally, there were many young people against drug testing due to a range of reasons related to an invasion of privacy, rights and control. Several young people, who indicated they did not use drugs, stated they would still refuse to take the test.

The most predominant theme for both young people who were consulted in treatment and education settings was related to a negative impact on school attendance. This was equally so for young people that were supportive and against drug testing, with many young people speculating that either themselves, their friends or other pupils in general will attend school less, or attempt to avoid days when drug testing may take place. By keeping the day of testing random and confidential this will obviously protect to a large degree

attendance, as the days of testing will be unpredictable for those pupils who only want to avoid the day of testing. However if drug testing in schools decreases the appeal of attending school in general, this may affect overall attendance and possible school drop out, particularly amongst young people with vulnerabilities. Schools who plan to introduce drug testing need to consider what negative impacts drug testing may have on the appeal of the school environment for young people, and attempt to minimise attendance issues.

A number of limitations need to be raised regarding the current consultation. Firstly only a small number of young people in treatment participated, however their views still raise valid concerns and issues. Additionally the young people consulted were in the lower years of adolescence (13-15 years) who may hold different views from older teenagers. Certainly cognitive processing in later adolescence is much complex, with increased questioning, analysis and thought on global concepts such as justice and politics. Additionally only two schools in Kent participated in the current consultation, and students in other schools may hold different views from a different geographical areas.

In conclusion, drug testing in schools is a complex issue that brings rise to a range of opinions and views - young people are no exception. A number of valid issues and concerns have been raised and it is important that these are considered when developing any guidelines for drug testing in schools. Indeed it would be encouraged that schools considering drug testing conduct their own consultation, thus enabling them to address any fears or concerns specific to their school, and put into place strategies to prevent any possible negative impacts that drug testing may bring to general school life and learning.

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## Young People's Opinions on Drug Testing in Schools

### **RESPONSES SHEET**

Client Initial:

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Service:

Name of worker:

**Background** (to be read to or with the young person): The Kent Drug Action Team funds services for young people in relation to drugs and alcohol. The government recently decided that schools could introduce random drug testing of students in secondary schools. We would like to know young people's views about this. Your responses will be totally anonymous; we would however like to share your views with others. There is no pressure to give your opinions to us, but we would be very grateful.

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**1. What are your thoughts and feelings about drug testing in schools?**

**2. If you are currently in school how do you think this may affect you? If you are no longer in school how do think this may have affected you if it had been introduced whilst you were still in school?** (If the young person has difficulty with this question prompts may include how would this have influenced your decisions about whether to take drugs?)

*Thank you for your time*