

**This is a copy of the criteria for the Healthy Schools'
Understanding Substances Specialist Award**

**Please use this as a guide only as we will only
accept online submissions via our [website](#).**





Understanding Substances Specialist Award

Welcome to the Bristol Healthy Schools' Understanding Substances Specialist Award

What is the Understanding Substances Specialist Award?

The Understanding Substances Specialist Award aims to prevent, delay and reduce the use of alcohol, tobacco and nicotine (in cigarettes and vapes) other drugs among young people in Bristol.

The Understanding Substances Specialist Award:

- Focuses on a whole school approach to preventing and delaying substance use
- Looks at how a school might address concerns when young people, staff or parents/carers are using substances.
- Highlights the importance of staff skills and clear pathways to support young people

The award has been designed in an age-appropriate way, meaning that the criteria are suitable for both primary and secondary level settings.

The secondary level criteria include more detail about protecting oneself from risk and, where appropriate, signposting young people to support services.

The award is informed by local and national guidance and evidence.

Is this the right award for us?

Typically schools decide a topic of focus based on health need. The School Community Health Profiles provided by Bristol City Council/ Healthy Schools provide a good insight and schools may also have their own data and insight.

How long does it take?

Each Specialist award takes up to a year but it may take only a few months if you already have good practice in place.

How does the online system work?

Throughout your journey you can log in and out as many times as you like, updating your evidence as you go. Your email address becomes your login. Please keep saving your changes as you go.

Most of the criteria require a Yes/No response, others ask for more detail via a text box. We never ask you to upload documents or provide additional evidence. Only this form is needed.

IMPORTANT: Do not click the back button at the top left of your browser as you complete the form. To go back to the previous section, click 'previous page' at the bottom of the survey.

Do I get guidance?

Yes, there is guidance throughout. This will either help you make sense of what we are asking for, or signpost you to helpful documents. For example, we might ask you to write a policy about something. In that case, we have provided you with an example policy and that should save you time.

If you would like a word version of all the criteria and guidance for reference, please visit our [website](#).

At any point, you can email us for help or further guidance on healthy.schools@bristol.gov.uk.

How do I know if I've passed?

To pass this award, you need to be able to answer 'yes' or 'correct' to every question (other than the text box questions) as they are all essential. If you answer 'no' or 'incorrect' to any question, you will have the opportunity, at the end of the application form, to tell us why and what you are doing to work towards this criteria.

We will consider your response but it may be that you need some extra time to put the required practice in place and should re-submit once you have done so. We will support you to achieve this.

We aim to advise you, via email, of the outcome of your application within 3 weeks of submitting. The outcome will either be 'Pass' or 'Further work and/or clarification needed'. If the latter, we will provide you with feedback and guidance about what you need to do to pass.

If you do not pass the first time, you can re-submit your application as many times as you need, although we hope that the guidance is clear enough that this won't be necessary.

Good luck!

Initial Self-Assessment

This initial step involves completing a brief self-assessment and making sure that you have established a foundation for your healthy school's work. This foundation will provide you with a support network, leadership, and strategic focus, all of which will strengthen your successes. Before proceeding with the application, it's important to complete this initial self-assessment. This short survey is designed to:

- act as a benchmarking tool to determine your current status.
- provide a quick overview of where you might focus your efforts.
- identify areas where the Healthy Schools' team can provide extra support.

[Please click here to fill in the short Understanding Substances Specialist Award Initial Self-Assessment.](#)

The answers to the survey above will not be used in your final assessment. The information will only be used at the start of your process to highlight where we can be of support. Your honest responses are greatly appreciated as they will help us better understand your starting point.

Establishing a Healthy Schools foundation

You can complete Specialist Awards without doing the [Essential Award](#) first, however, if you have never worked on any awards the Healthy Schools team recommends schools to sign up to the Essential Award before Specialist Awards. The Essential Award covers key health and wellbeing topics and sets the foundations for creating a healthy and happy school. You can sign up on the [Healthy Schools website](#). You can also do the awards alongside one another. By completing the Understanding Substances Specialist Award, you will have already made some progress towards the [Essential Award](#).

1. Our school have achieved or are you 'working towards' the Bristol Healthy Schools Essential Award?

('Working towards' the Essential Award means that you have started the online application and you are implementing the criteria.)

Yes

No

Whilst establishing your Healthy Schools foundation or working on the Essential Award, have you completed the following?

Action	Yes	No
Our School Improvement Plan has a section on improving health and wellbeing.		
We have a Healthy Schools Coordinator.		
We have established a Healthy Schools Steering Group. The Groups meets at least 3 times a year and has a wide representation.		
We have a pupil Healthy Schools Team with representation from across the year groups OR We have included Healthy Schools as a standing item for every School Council meeting.		
Our school has taken part in the Bristol Pupil Voice Survey or/and we commit to taking part in the next round (2026). Click here to sign up.		

School Ethos and Environment

2. We are a smoking and vaping free school and we have removed any areas previously designated for smoking or vaping:

- Yes
 No

3. Please describe briefly how you make it clear to pupils, parents/ carers, staff and visitors that smoking and vaping are not permitted anywhere in your grounds at any time:

Schools are subject to the same [smoke free legislation](#) as any other premises. The smoking and vaping free policy must apply to everyone using the school premises for any purpose at any time.

4. We have a good understanding of the needs of our entire school population in relation to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.

- Yes
 No

5. Please describe briefly what you do to understand the needs of your school population in relation to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs: (e.g., Bristol Pupil Voice Survey, School Community Health Profiles, local ward level health data).

Links to health data:

- [Bristol Healthy Schools | Data and research](#) - Health and wellbeing data and research relating to school age children, including School Community Health Profile, provided by Public Health
- [Staff and Pupil wellbeing surveys templates, Bristol Healthy Schools](#)
- [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\) Bristol data profiles](#)

6. We have developed/reviewed a substance use policy which outlines the schools' approach to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs. (* this criterion is only a requirement for secondary schools).

- Yes
- No

7. We ensure a [trauma-informed](#) approach is taken within our school, and reflected in our policies related to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.

Staff Health and Development

8. The school monitors staff wellbeing and has a staff wellbeing policy.

- Yes
- No

School Community Health Profiles provide an overview of the changing health and wellbeing needs of your schools' community and can be a quick and easy way to find local health data, identify priorities and which groups are more likely to experience poor outcomes. The Bristol Healthy Schools Team shares these profiles each year with all Bristol schools. Please get in touch to make sure your school's contact details are up to date!

9. Staff are aware of the support available for pupils, parents/ carers, and themselves in relation to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.

- Yes
- No

10. Describe briefly how staff are made aware of this support, including the fact that it can be accessed confidentially:

This could include information on the staff notice board, on the staff intranet and via leaflets and posters in staff room, staff toilets etc.

Sources of advice, guidance, and support, including information specifically for teachers, are listed above.

11. All members of staff delivering education on alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs, have the knowledge and skills to be able to do this confidently and effectively:

- Yes
- No

12. If using external visitors/organisations to support a PSHE, do you ensure that visitors and speakers don't replace but enhance/complement a planned PSHE education programme?

- Yes
- No

*High quality PSHE training should cover the knowledge and skills required to deliver alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs education, especially if your school is using a high quality PSHE programme, which has alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs education woven throughout. Visitors and speakers should not replace a planned PSHE education programme; however, they can add value by supporting what you teach in your lessons if chosen and used thoughtfully. The Healthy Schools and PSHE Association's guidance can help you encourage active learning in sessions with visitors or external speakers.

- [Using Outside Visitors | Bristol Healthy Schools](#)
- [Selecting and working with visitors and speakers | PSHE Association](#)

13. Please list all relevant training that members of staff have undertaken within the last 2 years that has equipped them with the skills to deliver effective alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs education:

The focus of any training should be on the ability and confidence of teachers to support pupils to develop life skills and make healthy choices. Organisations, such as the [PSHE Association](#) and the [Talk About Trust](#) also offer specialist training and consultancy services which your school may wish to access.

See the [Safeguarding in Education](#) website for guidance and [Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership's](#) webpage on safeguarding Policies, Procedures, and Information.

14. The school monitors the effectiveness of workshops, and lessons related to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.

- Yes
 No

Feedback, focus groups and/or surveys before and after lessons on a particular topic; conversations with staff related to behaviours and attitudes of pupils; trends in school data over time.

Curriculum Teaching and Learning to Promote Resilience and Support Social and Emotional Learning.

15. We deliver age-appropriate alcohol, smoking, vaping and other drugs education as part of PSHE, to all pupils, in all year groups:

- Yes
 No

16. Our alcohol, smoking, vaping and other drugs education meets the following criteria:

	Yes	No
Lessons focus on the development of life skills (resilience, healthy decision-making, resisting peer pressure etc.) which reduce the likelihood of young people starting to drink, smoke or take drugs, and help to minimise harm if they do start.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils are given the opportunity to practice these skills through interactive learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Lessons are delivered in a supportive environment, where pupils are aware of the school rules, feel able to engage in open discussion and feel confident about asking for help if necessary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils are taught about the risks and health implications of legal and illegal substances, and about how the media, role models, parents, peers and society can influence substance use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lessons are tailored to the particular needs of the pupils, e.g. where there is known issue with smoking, this is given extra attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lessons help pupils understand and question social norms around substance use, challenging both myths and extreme scenarios?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs education is taught holistically, as part of the wider PSHE curriculum, given the interrelationship between this topic and many others within PSHE, such as mental health, sex and relationships and safety.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PSHE lessons include signposting to support services, including school nurse drop ins, phone lines, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If issues are raised during or after lessons teachers are prepared/trained to respond appropriately.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers ensure they create a safe space when covering the more sensitive or difficult topic areas in PSHE lessons (this could be done by setting boundaries and ground rules at the start of a lesson; using group agreements; having additional staff in lessons; ensuring there is a safe space to go to) .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Useful teaching guidance and resources, including lesson plans:

- [Bristol Healthy Schools: Understanding Substances](#)
- PSHE Association: [Creating a safe learning environment](#)
- PSHE Association: [Handling complex issues and creating a safe learning environment](#)
- PSHE Association: [Effective teaching' and 'safe classroom' interactive posters](#)
- PSHE Association: [Drug and alcohol education](#)
- [OHID Better Health School Zone | new resources for schools on vaping, aimed at Years 7 and 8 \(teacher e-mail and social media toolkit\)](#)
- PSHE Association: [Where-is-vaping-covered-in-our-materials ; Vaping year 9 lesson pack](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens: Lesson plans](#)
- [Alcohol Education Trust: Teacher's area](#)
- [Health for Teens: Lifestyle](#)

17. The school uses local data to guide plans related to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs, e.g., content of PSHE lessons.

Yes

No

Enabling Student Voice to Influence Decisions

18. The school ensure there are a range of ways for pupils to voice their opinions and impact decisions on health and wellbeing in school.

Yes

No

19. Please explain how you ensure the inclusion of all voices. Consider the most vulnerable and least vocal pupils, and how you ensure fair representation in terms of equality groups.

Examples:

- Use of [Makaton](#), [Widgit](#), [Boardmaker](#) to communicate and share ideas.
- Communication in other languages (including Class Dojo).
- Establishing an Equality group for school staff and pupils.
- Ensuring inclusion of more vulnerable pupils in school council.

20. Please provide 1-2 examples of changes made as a direct result of pupil feedback and how this was reported back to the school community.

Identifying Need and Making Referrals

21. We have a clear process in place to identify and support pupils who are at risk of, or using alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs and/or affected by the substance use of parents/ carers or others.

Yes

No

Your school nurse can help you with this in terms of providing direct support to pupils, identifying clear care pathways, and signposting to appropriate services. Consider what you would do if a child presented with a physical or mental health issue or was deemed as 'at risk' of either. Always consider wider health and social needs rather than isolated health issues.

Schools should follow best practice on safeguarding, consent, and confidentiality. More information can be found in [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) and [Keeping children safe in education](#).

22. Please briefly describe some of the strategies and interventions you have in place to identify those at risk of or already showing signs of poor health and wellbeing.

Identifying 'at risk' groups

At risk groups include, but are not limited to, pupils in care/ on the edge of care, living with parents/carers who smoke or use substances, at risk of exclusion and/or involved with criminal justice services.

Strategies to identify pupils at risk could include effective use of school data about health and wellbeing and target groups e.g., behaviour and exclusion data, attendance data, safeguarding data, and data on specific groups including children in care, children with SEND and children entitled to free school meals, School Community Health Profile, provided by Bristol Healthy Schools, Pupil Voice and other pupil questionnaires, discussions with school nurses, emotional check-ins and pupil reviews meetings, comments boxes and a dedicated email box for pupils', and a strong pastoral support system so that one member of staff knows every pupil well and can spot problems quickly.

Identifying needs will involve distinguishing between pupils who require general information and education, those who require targeted prevention, and those who require a detailed needs assessment and more intensive support.

Advice, guidance and support should:

- Be offered both within and outside school, and in a range of different formats, depending on pupils' needs and preferences.
- Be high-quality, evidence-based and age-appropriate.

- Involve pastoral staff and school nurses.
- Include signposting and referrals to specialist services, including the [Horizons](#) and [Young People's Specialist Substance Misuse Treatment Service \(YPSSMTS\)](#)
- Follow best practice on child protection, consent and confidentiality. More information can be found here: [Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership website](#).

23. We have clear processes in place for responding to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drug-related incidents within our school and all members of staff are fully aware of, and adhere to these:

Yes

No

24. We do not use exclusion as an automatic response to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drug-related incidents within our school:

Yes

No

25. Please describe briefly how alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drug-related incidents are monitored and responded to within the school:

- Guidance for Schools, Colleges, and Other Educational Settings: [Offensive Weapons and Controlled Drugs in Educational Settings](#)
- [Education Inclusion Managers \(Bristol Safeguarding in Education\)](#) offer advice around how to manage risk around responding to alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs in schools.

For smoking and vaping-related incidents:

Pupils should be made aware of the illegalities involved in smoking or using e-cigarettes underage. Key health messages should be explained, both to the individual and as part of a whole-school approach. Schools may choose to remove cigarettes or e-cigarette/vape paraphernalia and dispose of these or ask parents to collect. If a pupil wishes to stop smoking, they should be signposted to [Childline's stop smoking advice for under 18's](#). Support should also be offered by the school's pastoral team or school nurse.

If you are aware of illegal cigarettes or vapes, or illegal sales to children, this can be reported anonymously here: [Report IT - Trading Standards South West \(tssw.org.uk\)](#). Children and young people can also be encouraged to use this link. Trading Standards work with local authorities, police, education, and wider partners to gather intelligence and take action against the illegal cigarette and vape trade.

26. Pupils know who the first point of contact is within their setting if they need to discuss issues related to substance use.

Yes

No

27. Pupils are aware of the support available around alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs, for themselves and for others, including parents/ carers:

Yes

No

28. Please describe briefly (a). how pupils are made aware of this support, including the fact that it can be accessed confidentially, and (b). how you know that pupils are aware of this support:

Methods for sharing information with pupils, and for them to feedback, could include: PSHE lessons, focus groups, circle time, assemblies, comments boxes, a dedicated email box, Pupil Voice and other pupil questionnaires.

Pupils (and parents/carers and school staff) should have information about a range of support services, including services for young people and adults; for alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs; and for those worried about another person's substance use (young people/ parents/ carers/ other family members). They should be told about where to find reliable information and advice online. Some useful sources are listed below.

Support services:

- [Horizons Bristol](#) - This service should be the first point of contact for most young people who are referred.

- [Hawkspring - Drug & Alcohol Support for Children](#) supporting children in South Bristol who are affected by family alcohol or substance use.

- [NHS Smokefree](#) - Smoking cessation advice and support for all ages

- [Smoke free Bristol](#) - Smoking cessation advice and support for young people aged 12+

- [Talk to Frank](#): Honest information about drugs.

- [Alcohol Change UK](#): Advice, information, and support.

- [The Mix](#): Drink and drugs information and guidance for under 25's.

- [Health for Teens](#): E-Cigarettes/Vapes.

Working with Parents and Carers

29. The school regularly communicates with parents/carers about our Healthy Schools work.

Yes

No

Keeping parents/carers informed about your Healthy Schools work is important in gaining their support. If they understand why you're making changes, they're more likely to get behind that change. This could include letter/comms to families to introduce schools' commitment to achieving the Healthy Schools Understanding Substances Specialist Award. Use this opportunity to explain what it entails and invite families to offer support/skills

Here are some engagement ideas:

- Have a regular slot for Healthy Schools news in your newsletter/social media posts.
- Share updated policies / build clear guidance on e.g., vaping and substance use policies.
- Provide advice, guidance, and resources (e.g., leaflets), via book bags, on the website, via school social media, and at open evenings/ new parent events.
- Get involved in key calendar dates/ campaigns e.g., Get involved in key calendar campaigns e.g., [Dry January](#), [National No Smoking Day](#), Stoptober.

30. The school consults parents/carers when developing, reviewing, and promoting policies around alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.

Yes

No

31. How does the school encourage parents/carers who may feel excluded?

Examples could include pupil-led events could bring in parents, buddy system (parents from the community who are eager to come into school round up parents who may want to come in but are not at ease or confident enough to come alone), drop-in times and spaces on site, looking closely at what issues families face and removing specific barriers.

- [Open door policies and Parent/carer engagement](#)

32. We work with a range of local services that can offer support including family support.

Yes

No

33. Where relevant and appropriate, we provide advice and guidance to parents about alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs including the importance of talking to their children about substances and the support available:

Yes

No

Resources/Support services for staff, children and families:

- [SOUTH BRISTOL CYP: Drug and Alcohol support Bristol – Hawkspring](#)
- [YPSSMTS - Young People’s Specialist Substance Use Treatment Service – Specialist CAMHS](#)
- [Team Around the School](#)
- [Education Inclusion Mangers](#) – to reduce exclusions and suspensions for those who are at risk of child exploitation (criminal and sexual)
- Signposting to specific support more individual support: (School nursing team could also support)
- [Horizons](#) – A partnership of drug and alcohol services for adults, including support for family members.
- [Horizons Bristol - Youth Team - Early Engagement Youth Team](#)
- [Talk to Frank](#): Honest information about alcohol, smoking and vaping, and other drugs.
- [Talk to Frank](#): Advice for parents/ carers
- [Alcohol Change UK](#): Advice, information and support
- [The Mix](#): Drink and drugs information and guidance for under 25's
- [Health for Teens](#): E-Cigarettes
- [Families in Focus \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Families Also Matter - Bristol | DHI](#)
- [Parental substance use | NSPCC Learning](#)
- Regular slot for Healthy Schools news in your newsletter/social media posts.
- [Solihull Approach](#) free online course for Bristol parents, carers, children and young people

SUMMARY

Please tell us about something that you are particularly proud of in relation to your school’s approach to Understanding Substances:

As a result of working with the Healthy Schools programme, have you noticed any positive changes?

(e.g., Have you achieved the goal you had in mind when completing the initial assessment?)

Please share a few examples.

Tell us what you think

22. How has being involved with the Understanding Substances award changed your school's approach to preventing, delaying, and reducing the use of alcohol, smoking, vaping, and other drugs among your school community?

Well done!