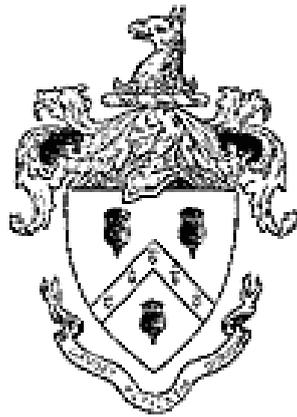


St. Custards, Kent

School Report



Pupil Name: Random Drug Testing

Term: Spring 2005

Form Tutor's Report:

Looking at Random Drug Testing's (RDT's) school report is not a happy experience. In all areas of school life, RDT has failed to meet expectations. RDT came to us highly recommended and we have made strenuous efforts to help RDT fit in.

However, RDT has represented a big drain on school resources, impacted on school morale and upset a number of pupils and parents with no measurable gain.

Science: RDT in school has used a process of oral fluid collection called Intercept ® Oral Mucosal Transudate (OMT) - a small mouth swab. This is sent off for analysis and shows up some - but not all drugs. It does not for example show up solvents like glue or gas, alcohol or magic mushrooms. So some young people may switch substances away from detectable ones like cannabis on to undetectable and more hazardous ones like butane gas.

OMT can't detect drugs that were used a while ago. It is most useful for showing up recent drug use - this is why it is most useful when used in "safety critical" settings like railway workers.

OMT shows what was used in the last one to three days - depending on which drug was used. So it is a poor method for random sampling: if a young person smoked cannabis on Friday night, they would not test positive if they were tested on the following Tuesday. So the odds of cannabis - or other drugs showing up in a school drug test are low, especially with infrequent use.

GRADE**D**

Business Studies: Companies can make a lot of money out of RDT - if they can persuade schools to take it on. Altrix, who supply Abbey School in Kent with Intercept kits saw its earnings go up by a staggering 403% in 2004.

So the companies are keen to see drug testing in schools be extended. More schools doing more testing means colossal profits.

Each test and analysis costs around £35. So a school testing 20 pupils a week would need to spend £700 per week, or around £28,000 per year. This works out, across a region with ten secondary schools, at £280,000 per year. This would be enough to employ ten full time drug educators or counsellors, to educate and support young people!

No wonder the testing companies are keen to see more schools take up drug testing: nationally there are massive profits to be made!

A+

(for the testing company)

D-

(for the school)

	GRADE
<p>Law: Drug Testing companies are aware that RDT may be hard to defend against a legal challenge - especially when they are used in school settings. It may be that RDT can be challenged under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act - which says, "everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life..."</p> <p>So far, it has been argued that where someone is involved in a safety critical task - such as driving a train - the need to protect public safety means that someone may need to interfere with the right to privacy.</p> <p>But, in a setting such as schools or college, it is less likely that RDT could be justified in the interests of public safety.</p> <p>Young people also have the right to decline to be tested: consent from parents cannot overwhelm the right of a young person to refuse if the young person can be considered "competent." But schools are not always making it clear that young people can refuse to be tested.</p> <p>At present, state schools have not chosen to make testing mandatory, and pupils cannot be excluded solely for refusing a test. It is likely that, if a state school made testing mandatory and made exclusion an outcome for refusing a test, such a measure would be challenged under Human Rights legislation.</p>	C
<p>Maths: The odds of detecting drug use within a small-scale random testing regime are not good.</p> <p>In a large school, randomly testing people is hit and miss. It relies on picking someone who not only uses drugs, but has done so in the last 1-3 days. So statistically the odds are against low levels of drug use being detected through such an approach. It is more likely to miss drug use than to detect it.</p>	D
<p>PSHE: RDT is not a good substitute for effective drugs education. This should be undertaken by trained teachers in a supportive environment.</p> <p>RDT can get in the way of such a process - it can make people feel too threatened to talk to their teachers about substance use, and make it more difficult to seek support. Teachers are forced in to more of a policing role, and so may be less able to deliver support when it is most needed.</p>	F

<p>Media Studies: The media have been very interested in RDT and it has meant a great deal of attention for a school that has put such a programme in place. It makes it hard to make informed and balanced decision when the media are paying such close attention. Especially if a tabloid like the "News of the World" has sponsored the trials to make news.</p> <p>But more importantly, it makes it very difficult to agree that this is all in the pupil's best interest. When a school starts inviting the media in to witness pupils being tested for drugs, it suggests that head teachers are more interested in publicity than best practice in drugs education and prevention.</p>	<p>GRADE</p> <p>E</p>
<p>International Studies: RDT has been trialled in a number of countries and has been used in some American states. It has been subject to a number of legal trials and has also been reviewed as part of a large-scale national study.</p> <p>Some schools made testing a mandatory part of extracurricular activities. But, rather than reducing drug use, they found that people chose to drop out of these activities. This was unfortunate - engagement in such activities is a key way of reducing drug problems.</p> <p>In a study of 76,000 students by the University of Michigan, levels of drug use were actually higher in schools with drug testing than those without. Contrary to what advocates for testing say, there was no evidence that testing regimes discouraged drug use.</p>	<p>F</p>
<p>General Attendance and Behaviour: Even when you've done nothing wrong, processes like RDT are stressful. Rather than concentrating on lessons, there's every risk that pupils will worry about tests. Tests can and do throw up "false positives," where household medicines or other items suggest an illegal drug has been used. So imagine sitting around, waiting to find out if you've been selected for a test, and then waiting to find out what the results are. More stress, more anxiety, increased chance of truanting from school: all the factors that actually contribute to substance use amongst young people.</p> <p>Even when substance use has been identified as an issue, exclusion from school will rarely be the appropriate response: education, support and, where appropriate drug treatment will be the right response in most circumstances. Such interventions will work best where the young person feels safe enough to discuss their drug use with someone that they trust - not because they have failed a drugs test.</p> <p>It is hard to keep the outcomes of RDT confidential in school settings: any pupil who is the subject of additional school attention following a RDT will inevitable be suspected, rightly or wrongly, of drug use.</p>	

Headteachers Comments:

Random Drug Testing (RDT) arrived in the school early this year and, despite initial hopes, has proved to be a disruptive influence.

We had hoped that RDT would have a benign effect on pupils, and discourage use of drugs. But instead we have been concerned that RDT may encourage other pupils to hide their drug use better, switch to drugs which are harder to detect, or truant from school when tests were expected.

We are also concerned that RDT's arrival has meant that we have been distracted away from effective models of drug education and prevention. As the comments from other teacher's highlights, many aspects of RDT's performance have been distinctly lack-lustre and so, it is with some regret, that we feel that RDT is not suited to our learning environment and so will be asked to leave at the end of this term.

Further Reading and Where to Get Help

For help or advice on schools and drug policy contact:

Children's Legal Centre: www.childrenslegalcentre.com: clc@essex.ac.uk

For drugs information and advice

Frank: www.talktofrank.com 0800 77 66 00

Further reading

Making Sense of Student Drug Testing: Why educators are saying no:
ACLU/Drug Policy Alliance: Jan 2004

Random Drug Testing of Schoolchildren – A Shot in the Arm or a shot in the foot
for drug prevention: Neil McKeganey: Joseph Rowntree Foundation: 2005

Drugs – Guidance for Schools: DfES: 2004

Inside the orange room - how pupils are tested for drugs: Guardian: 11.1.05

Four week wait for results at drug test school: Guardian: 7.1.05

Questions raised as school starts random drug tests : Guardian: 6.1.05

School launches drug-testing programme: Guardian: 5.1.05

Pupils to face random drug tests: Guardian: 29.12.04



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kfx@ixion.demon.co.uk

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