



ALTERNATIVE ACRES

Drugs, Alcohol, Smoking, Vaping and Substance Misuse Policy

Academic Year 2026/27

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Placement ratios	1:1, 1:2 and 1:4
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Alternative Acres takes a safeguarding, health and education-led approach to substance misuse. Illegal drugs, alcohol, nicotine/vaping products and unsafe or unauthorised substances are not permitted during provision activities. Responses will prioritise immediate safety, safeguarding, individual need and proportionate commissioner/parent involvement.



1. Purpose

This policy explains how Alternative Acres prevents and responds to concerns involving illegal drugs, alcohol, smoking, vaping, misuse of medicines, solvents and other psychoactive or intoxicating substances.

It applies on the Alternative Acres site, during off-site activities, work placements and transport arranged as part of Alternative Acres activities.

2. Status and national guidance

Alternative Acres is a non-school alternative provision. The Department for Education's Drugs: advice for schools is written for schools and specified education settings, although the DfE notes that it may also be useful for community settings and others supporting young people. Alternative Acres therefore uses relevant principles as good-practice guidance rather than claiming school-specific statutory powers.

The DfE voluntary national standards for non-school AP expect providers to maintain clear safeguarding and health-and-safety arrangements and to work effectively with commissioners. Alternative Acres' response to substance-related concerns sits within that wider safeguarding framework.

KCSIE 2026 applies directly to schools and colleges. Alternative Acres aligns its safeguarding practice with relevant KCSIE principles and commissioner expectations without presenting itself as a school.

3. Aims

Alternative Acres aims to protect learners from substance-related harm while avoiding responses that shame, stigmatise or unnecessarily disengage a vulnerable learner from education.

- Keep learners, staff, animals and visitors safe.
- Prevent possession, use and supply during Alternative Acres activities.
- Recognise medical emergencies promptly.
- Identify safeguarding, exploitation and county-lines concerns.
- Provide factual, accessible education and early support.
- Use proportionate responses rather than automatic punishment.
- Work effectively with parents/carers, commissioners, police and specialist services.
- Respect Alternative Acres' legal status and avoid importing school-only search powers.

4. Definitions

For this policy, 'substance' can include illegal/controlled drugs, alcohol, tobacco, cigarettes, vapes/e-cigarettes, nicotine products, solvents, volatile substances, psychoactive substances, prescription or over-the-



counter medicines used other than as authorised, and any other substance used with the intention of intoxication or significant alteration of mood/behaviour.

Legitimate medication administered or carried in accordance with the First Aid, Medical Conditions and Medicines Policy is not treated as substance misuse.

5. Expectations for learners

Learners must not possess, use, supply, share, sell or be under the unsafe influence of prohibited substances during Alternative Acres sessions or activities.

Prescription and other authorised medicines must be managed under the medicines policy rather than carried or shared informally.

6. Smoking and vaping

Smoking and vaping are not permitted by learners during Alternative Acres provision, including on site, in vehicles used for provision activities or during off-site activities.

Staff should respond to vaping as both a health/behaviour concern and, where relevant, a safeguarding concern. A learner should not be humiliated or subjected to an unsafe confrontation over a vape.

7. Alcohol

Learners must not possess, consume, supply or be under the unsafe influence of alcohol during Alternative Acres activities.

Where intoxication is suspected, immediate health and supervision needs take priority. Staff should consider whether medical assessment is required and whether the learner can safely continue the session.

8. Illegal and controlled drugs

Possession, use or supply of illegal/controlled drugs is prohibited. Staff should consider safeguarding, exploitation and criminality as well as behaviour.

Drug involvement may indicate child criminal exploitation, coercion, debt, grooming or pressure by peers/adults. Staff must remain professionally curious about how the learner obtained the substance and whether another person is controlling or exploiting them.



9. Medicines and medication misuse

Prescription and over-the-counter medicines can cause serious harm when misused, shared, taken in excess or combined with other substances.

Any suspected medication misuse must be treated as a potential medical and safeguarding issue. Staff should not assume a medicine is safe simply because it is legally available.

10. Solvents and other substances

Misuse of aerosols, gases, glues, fuels, cleaning chemicals or other volatile substances can create acute health risks. Farm/workshop products must be securely managed through health-and-safety/COSHH controls.

Suspected inhalation or ingestion requires immediate first-aid/medical consideration.

11. Farm-specific risks

Substance impairment creates heightened danger around animals, lakes, woodland, uneven ground, tools, vehicles and equipment. A learner suspected of being impaired must not take part in activities where judgement, coordination or reaction time is safety-critical.

Staff should move the learner to an appropriately supervised safer area and assess medical and safeguarding needs.

12. Prevention and education

Substance education should be factual, age/development appropriate and responsive to individual need. It may form part of health education, relationships work, preparation for adulthood or targeted support.

Staff should avoid exaggerated or inaccurate claims that could undermine trust. Where specialist advice is needed, appropriate health/substance-misuse services or commissioner resources should be used.

13. SEND and vulnerability

Teaching and intervention must be accessible to learners with SEND, including communication differences, cognitive needs, impulsivity, social vulnerability or difficulty assessing risk.

Some learners may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation, pressure to hold substances for others or misunderstanding the legal/health consequences of substance use.



14. Signs that may indicate concern

Possible indicators can include sudden changes in presentation, smell of alcohol/cannabis, unusual drowsiness/agitation, impaired coordination, unexplained money/items, repeated secrecy, drug-related language, possession of paraphernalia, unexplained absences or association with concerning adults/peers.

These indicators do not prove substance misuse and may have other medical, safeguarding or emotional explanations.

15. Immediate response to suspected intoxication

Staff should remain calm, maintain supervision and assess immediate medical risk. The learner should not be left alone if there is concern about consciousness, breathing, poisoning, overdose or rapidly deteriorating condition.

Call 999 for serious or life-threatening symptoms. Staff should provide first aid within competence and follow emergency-service instructions.

16. Unknown substances

Staff should not taste, smell closely, test or unnecessarily handle an unknown substance. Avoid actions that could expose staff or learners to powder, liquid, fumes, needles or contaminated materials.

Where there is a credible hazardous-substance risk, isolate the area where safe, prevent access and seek emergency/police advice.

17. Needles and sharps

Needles, syringes or other sharps must not be handled casually. Staff should prevent learner access, avoid recapping or manipulating a needle and follow appropriate sharps/infection-control arrangements.

A needlestick or sharps injury requires immediate first aid and urgent medical advice under the Infection Prevention and First Aid policies.

18. Possession or discovery of a suspected substance

Where a substance or related item is discovered, staff should prioritise safety and inform the Head of Provision/DSL promptly.



Alternative Acres does not assume the statutory search and confiscation powers available to schools. Staff should not conduct non-consensual or intrusive searches simply because school guidance permits authorised school staff to do so.

19. Searching

Where there is a concern that a learner has a prohibited or dangerous item, staff should first seek cooperation and use safeguarding, placement and site-safety arrangements.

If the learner refuses and there is a serious risk, staff should make the environment safe, maintain appropriate supervision and seek advice/support from the parent/carer, commissioner or police as circumstances require.

Staff must not conduct strip searches or intimate searches.

20. Bags and belongings

Staff may ask a learner to voluntarily show or surrender an item where there is a reasonable safety concern. The learner's dignity, SEND and communication needs should be considered.

If consent is refused, staff should not automatically use force or assume school search powers. Risk should be escalated through the Head of Provision/DSL and police where necessary.

21. Handling and storage of seized/surrendered items

Where an item is voluntarily surrendered or otherwise safely secured to prevent immediate harm, it should be handled as little as possible, stored securely away from learners and dealt with promptly.

Suspected illegal drugs should not be retained longer than necessary or disposed of casually. Police advice should be sought where appropriate. Needles/sharps require safe specialist disposal.

22. Police involvement

Alternative Acres will consider police involvement according to the nature, quantity, circumstances, safeguarding context and risk. Immediate danger, serious supply concerns, weapons, exploitation or significant criminality may require urgent police involvement.

Police involvement should not replace safeguarding assessment. A learner suspected of offending may simultaneously be a victim of exploitation.



23. Supply and exploitation

Supplying, sharing or arranging access to substances is particularly serious. Staff should consider whether the learner is acting voluntarily, being coerced, repaying debt, being groomed or involved in child criminal exploitation.

Concerns about exploitation must be referred through safeguarding procedures and recorded on CPOMS.

24. County lines and criminal exploitation

Substance-related concerns may overlap with county lines or other forms of child criminal exploitation. Indicators can include unexplained travel, missing episodes, multiple phones, unexplained money/gifts, threats, debt, older associates or sudden changes in relationships.

Staff must not require a learner to disclose the identity of dangerous individuals in circumstances that could increase risk. The DSL should coordinate safeguarding referrals and police information-sharing as appropriate.

25. Parent/carers communication

Parents/carers should normally be informed promptly about a substance-related incident, subject to safeguarding considerations.

Where informing a parent/carers could place the learner at greater risk or compromise a safeguarding/police response, the DSL should seek appropriate advice before sharing.

26. Commissioner communication

Significant substance-related incidents should be shared promptly with the commissioning school/local authority, subject to safeguarding and information-sharing requirements.

Where concerns indicate changing risk, attendance, peer association or placement suitability, Alternative Acres should seek a commissioner review rather than allowing concerns to drift.

27. Recording

Safeguarding aspects of substance-related concerns must be recorded on CPOMS. Records should be factual and include observations, what the learner said, immediate actions, medical concerns, items involved, safeguarding decisions, notifications and outcomes.

Staff should avoid diagnostic statements such as 'drug dependent' unless supported by an appropriately qualified professional.



28. Behaviour response

Substance misuse may require a behaviour response, but safeguarding and health needs should be assessed first. Responses should be proportionate, individualised and consistent with the Behaviour, Relationships and Positive Support Policy.

Automatic exclusionary responses may conceal exploitation or increase disengagement. Serious or repeated incidents may nevertheless require changes to supervision, activities or an urgent commissioner-led placement review.

29. Session continuation

A learner should not remain in a hazardous activity if suspected intoxication or possession creates unacceptable risk. Where the session cannot safely continue, this must be treated as an exceptional health/safeguarding decision rather than an informal school-style suspension.

The parent/carer and commissioner should be informed appropriately and next steps agreed.

30. Support and referral

Alternative Acres should consider what support may reduce future harm. This may include trusted-adult work, health education, GP/health service advice, local young people's substance-misuse support, safeguarding services, exploitation support or commissioner-arranged intervention.

Support should reflect the learner's age, development, SEND, consent/capacity considerations and level of risk.

31. Confidentiality

Staff must not promise secrecy about substance use. Information should be shared proportionately where necessary to protect the learner or others.

Casual discussion of a learner's substance concerns with people who do not need the information is unacceptable.

32. Staff conduct

Staff must not attend work impaired by alcohol, illegal drugs or misuse of medication. Staff must remain fit to supervise learners, work around animals and hazards, drive where authorised and respond to emergencies.

Concerns about staff substance use should be managed through safeguarding/allegations procedures where child safety may be affected and through employment procedures as appropriate.



33. Staff smoking and vaping

Staff must not smoke or vape with learners, provide nicotine products to learners or model their use as part of Alternative Acres activities. Staff should follow site rules and maintain professional boundaries.

34. Visitors, volunteers and contractors

Visitors, volunteers and contractors must not bring illegal substances onto the site or work while impaired. Concerns should be addressed immediately through site safety, safeguarding and contractual/management routes.

35. Transport

A learner suspected of being significantly intoxicated should not simply be sent away alone or placed into unsafe transport arrangements. Safe handover and medical needs must be considered.

Staff who drive for work must never drive while impaired by alcohol, illegal drugs or medication that makes driving unsafe.

36. Evidence and confidentiality

Where an item may be evidence of an offence, staff should minimise handling and follow police advice. Staff should not photograph or circulate substances/items unnecessarily.

Records and communications must comply with Alternative Acres' Data Protection, Privacy and Information Governance Policy.

37. Related policies

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2026/27; Behaviour, Relationships and Positive Support Policy 2026/27; First Aid, Medical Conditions and Medicines Policy 2026/27; Infection Prevention, Control and Zoonotic Disease Policy 2026/27; Health, Safety and Farm Site Safety Policy 2026/27; Anti-Bullying and Peer Harm Policy 2026/27; SEND and Inclusion Policy 2026/27; Travel, Transport and Driving for Work Policy 2026/27; Data Protection, Privacy and Information Governance Policy 2026/27.

38. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner following a serious substance-related incident, safeguarding learning, material change to the provision or relevant legal/guidance change.



39. Quick staff response guide

Learner appears intoxicated	Supervise, remove from hazardous activity, assess medical risk and seek emergency help if needed.
Possible overdose/poisoning/unconsciousness/breathing concern	Call 999 immediately and give first aid within competence.
Suspected illegal substance found	Do not test/taste it; secure safely if this can be done without risk and inform Head of Provision/DSL.
Learner refuses to show contents of bag/pocket	Do not assume school search powers or use force; manage risk and seek Head/DSL/police support as appropriate.
Needle/sharp found	Prevent access; do not handle casually; use safe sharps procedure.
Learner says they are holding drugs for someone	Consider criminal exploitation/coercion and refer to DSL.
Vape found	Address safety/health/behaviour; consider safeguarding context and parent/commissioner notification.
Medication being shared or misused	Treat as medical and safeguarding concern; follow medicines procedure.
Significant incident	Record safeguarding aspects on CPOMS and notify parent/carers and commissioner appropriately.
Learner cannot safely continue session	Use safe handover and commissioner discussion; do not describe it as a statutory school suspension.