A fresh perspective on a rank issue: pupils’ accounts of staff enforcement of smoking restrictions

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Abstract

Evidence on the effectiveness of school-based smoking restrictions on reducing pupil smoking rates is mixed. So far, the effect of such policies has only been considered using quantitative methods and ‘level of enforcement’ has primarily been measured according to data collected from staff. This qualitative study is based on data collected during 25 discussion groups held with 13-year-old pupils concerning whether and how staff in their school addressed pupil smoking. Groups were conducted in two schools. Both served relatively deprived communities but varied in their pupil smoking rates. Pupils made reference to members of the Senior Management Team, teaching and non-teaching staff. They mentioned a range of possible staff reactions and discussed what factors they felt influenced how staff responded. It appeared that a more proactive, firm line was being taken in the ‘high’ than in the ‘low’ smoking school.

Introduction

There is evidence to suggest school-based smoking restrictions reduce adolescent smoking rates. Moore et al. (Moore et al., 2001) and Wakefield et al. (Wakefield et al., 2000) showed that schools enforcing no-smoking policies experienced lower rates of pupil smoking. In addition, Pinilla et al. (Pinilla et al., 2002) found most school differences in pupil smoking rates could be accounted for by the extent to which a ban was being implemented. Yet, some researchers have found no association between school-based policies and pupil smoking rates [e.g. (Charlton and While, 1994; Clark et al., 1994)], and it has even been argued that smoking restrictions might encourage adolescents to smoke (Unger et al., 1999).

When reflecting on how ‘staff enforcement’ has been measured, it is evident that researchers have relied primarily on data collected from staff, rather than pupils. Pinilla et al. (Pinilla et al., 2002), for example, measured the extent to which schools enforced a smoking ban by asking school directors whether or not smoking was allowed in specific areas of the school. Moore et al. (Moore et al., 2001) also used information from staff to assess the extent to which their study schools enforced a no-smoking policy. Whilst Wakefield et al. (Wakefield et al., 2000) did assess this issue on the basis of pupil data, they collected this information by asking pupils if their school had a ban and, if so, how many pupils obeyed it, thus largely reflecting the extent to which a ban was present rather than enforced, and the degree to which pupils complied rather than the extent to which staff implemented the policy.

All of the studies described above were quantitative in nature and gave no attention to how staff enforced a no-smoking policy. The ways in which staff react to pupil smoking have not been considered in detail, even though the manner in which a ban is implemented appears crucial to its
success. For example, Wakefield et al. (Wakefield et al., 2000) found only strongly enforced bans were associated with lower rates of pupil smoking and Pentz et al. (Pentz et al., 1989) noted that smoking policies which emphasized prevention were related to lower pupil prevalence rates, whilst those stressing punishing pupils for smoking were not.

It would appear, therefore, that pupils’ perceptions of whether and how staff enforce a ban have not been explored. Considering it is how an individual perceives a situation which will influence how he/she behaves (Downie et al., 1990), pupil views are key to any assessment of the effect and effectiveness of school-based no-smoking policies. Assessing pupils’ views using a qualitative approach would enable us to capture their understanding of the situation and the range of responses they consider staff use to address pupil smoking.

This paper documents qualitative material collected from pupils attending two schools which varied in their smoking profiles, concerning whether and how staff in their school addressed pupil smoking. The data were collected as part of the Teenage Health in School (THiS) study. THiS study was granted ethical approval from the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee for Non-clinical Research using Human Subjects. Pseudonyms for the schools, pupils and staff have been used in order to maintain confidentiality.

### Methods

Twenty-five single-sex discussion groups were held with 13 year-old [Secondary 2 (S2)] pupils in two local authority secondary schools. Both schools were located in the west of Scotland and on the basis of deprivation levels (i.e. DEPCAT scores) (Carstairs and Morris, 1991) were regarded as serving relatively disadvantaged populations (Sweeting and West, 2000). According to the West of Scotland 11–16 study (Sweeting and West, 2000) they were also known to differ in their smoking rates for 13- and 15 [Secondary 4 (S4)]-year-old pupils. Data collected 2 years later as part of THiS confirmed the schools still differed in their prevalence of regular (smoke one or more cigarettes a week) and occasional (smoke sometimes) smokers among S2 and S4 pupils (Table I). We have given the ‘high’ and ‘low’ smoking schools the pseudonyms of Highacres and Lowlands, respectively. Mode number of cigarettes smoked per week was greater for S2 and S4 pupils in Highacres than in Lowlands [S2: 20 cigarettes versus 5 and 10 (bimodal distribution); S4: 40 cigarettes versus 10] (modal values rather than mean scores are provided as cigarette consumption was not normally distributed). Notably, these differences appear unexplained by parental smoking: a smaller proportion of Highacres than Lowlands pupils reported that one or both parents smoked (Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School and year</th>
<th>Pupils smoking</th>
<th>Parental smoking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td>$\chi^2$ (1 d.f.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highacres S2</td>
<td>19.0 (39)</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowlands S2</td>
<td>11.7 (32)</td>
<td>67.2 (160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highacres S4</td>
<td>26.5 (50)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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personal and professional values. For example, staff discussed how they were more likely to respond if they caught pupils smoking inside the buildings and one interviewee explained that he held a tolerant view towards pupil smoking as he himself smoked. Yet staff in both schools understood that smoking within the buildings was forbidden and accounts from Senior Management Team (SMT) members [e.g. head teachers (HT) and assistant head teachers (AHT)] indicated the schools were signed up to a policy which banned pupil smoking in school (Gordon and Turner, 2003a).

Thirteen discussion groups were held in Highacres (seven male, six female) and 12 (six male, six female) in Lowlands. Noting that friendship-based groups can encourage open debate (Lees, 1986), we recruited participants by asking pupils from various S2 classes to volunteer along with friends in their class. We asked participants to select friends of the same sex, as we wanted to conduct single-sex discussions since we intended to explore issues surrounding friendships and smoking with both male and female pupils, and felt different factors would be important to each (Michell and Amos, 1997; Colarossi, 2001). Only S2 pupils were invited to take part as analysis of 11–16 data showed that ‘school effects’ (variation between schools over and above individual predictors of a particular outcome) for smoking were stronger at S2 than S4 (West, pers. commun.). In addition, whilst we contemplated interviewing S4 pupils, the schools were reluctant for them to be involved as they had examinations.

The groups were conducted on a double-blind basis with neither the participants nor ourselves knowing the smoking rates for each school. The groups ranged in size from three to eight individuals and most of the discussions lasted for over an hour. Each interview was taped and fully transcribed.

In each school, half the groups conducted focused on issues concerning the Health-Promoting School (HPS) (WHO, 1993) (e.g. school ethos, health education curriculum). This model guides school health promotion activity in Scotland and Wales, and has been operationalized in England as the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). The other groups explored pupils’ views of smoking, smokers and how smoking was addressed within their school. During these groups, participants were asked what would happen if a staff member caught a pupil smoking and were sometimes prompted to discuss how a S2 pupil in particular would be dealt with, and dealt with in different situations, e.g. outside school premises and inside school buildings. Although this question was not included in the interview guide for the HPS discussions, some pupils taking part in these groups commented on how they thought certain staff members would react. For the purpose of this paper, analysis focused on all discussions concerning staff reactions to pupil smoking, whether these arose in response to direct questions on smoking and/or health more generally (Table II) or spontaneously during the interviews.

Initial stages of the analysis involved one of us (K. T.) thoroughly reading each transcript, and developing a coding frame based on emergent themes and issues covered during the interviews. Transcripts were imported into NVivo version 1.2 (NVivo, 2000) and fully coded. Data coded under specific themes (i.e. pupils’ accounts of staff enforcement and what factors they viewed as influencing staff responses) were then selected, and K. T. wrote descriptive summaries detailing exactly what participants in each group had said on these matters, and noting the nature of any group consensus and divergent views. Writing the summaries ensured each account was systematically documented and incorporated into the analysis, and meant we could trace which discussions had led to particular findings. Within- and cross-school comparisons were made using these summaries.

This paper is structured so that data collected in Highacres are presented first and then considered in light of material gathered in Lowlands. Data regarding SMT members, teachers and non-teaching staff (e.g. cleaners and office staff) are
considered separately to allow any relationship between pupil perceptions and staff status to be considered.

**Highacres**

**SMT**

Highacres participants described their HT as someone who did not tolerate pupil smoking either on or off school premises, and actively discouraged such behaviour by punishing smokers and patrolling possible smoking sites. One group argued that the HT would suspend or expel a pupil, or place him/her in isolation, and might contact parents prior to doing so, and another commented he would give a punishment exercise. (Isolation was a room on school premises where pupils who had misbehaved were sent. A teacher would be present. Pupils were given work and were not allowed to talk.) Two other groups mentioned he would send the offending pupil to his office and that a smoker would receive a punishment essay, be suspended or placed in isolation.

As participants stated a particularly firm line would be taken if the pupil was caught smoking inside the buildings, it is possible participants identified a number of responses because the HT’s reaction varied according to where pupils were caught. The variation found across the groups could also be due to the relationship the participants had with him. For example, the group which argued a smoker could be expelled was referred to by an SMT member as a ‘bad’ boys group. Participants in this group commented that the HT ‘goes mental’ if ‘you’ve had a lot of trouble in school’ and been ‘smoking and a’ [all] that’. As such comments suggested a firm line would be taken with those who had been in trouble before, these participants may have mentioned this response because they felt such action would be taken if they, themselves, were caught.

The HT was described not only as addressing pupil smoking when it was brought to his attention but also discouraging this behaviour by seeking out smokers. Participants described how he visited ‘smokers’ corner’ (a corner of the playground where smokers gathered) and the school gates, and an account was given of how the HT, himself, had smelled pupils’ hands in order to determine who had been smoking. There was also a sense of him encouraging teachers to address pupil smoking, as participants mentioned that a list of smokers’ names was currently being circulated among

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**Table II. Discussion group questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HPS discussions</th>
<th>Smoking/peer discussions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that schools should just teach subjects to young people or should schools teach subjects and also focus on the health of their pupils?</td>
<td>Thinking about the pupils in your school who smoke at least once a week, what are they like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think teachers and other staff members should be setting a good example to the pupils or is it their own business whether they eat a healthy diet, exercise, smoke?</td>
<td>In this school, where do pupils smoke?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which members of the school staff do you think have a right to tell you not to smoke, tell you not to drink, tell you to exercise?</td>
<td>How often do you see pupils smoking on school premises?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you view school staff as: role models (copy/ be like) for health issues; role models for smoking behaviour; and role models for how you should behave and talk to others?</td>
<td>How easy is it for pupils in this school to smoke without being found out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do pupils get disciplined in this school? What do you think about this?</td>
<td>What would happen if an S2 pupil was caught smoking while at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How worried would you be if you were caught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you know which members of staff at your school smoke?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does this influence your view of: smoking, your teachers?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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teachers and one group argued that he had asked teachers to inform him of any pupil smoking. As participants described how smokers scattered when he approached, and mentioned his actions led to smokers being caught and reprimanded, it was apparent his efforts made a difference to smoking on school premises.

During the discussions, the AHT in charge of S2 pupils was also referred to. Participants argued that this individual would definitely respond if he saw pupils smoking and would probably send them to his office. In addition, it was apparent that he had previously suspended a pupil for smoking, although it did appear this measure had been taken because of the way in which the pupil had reacted when caught and/or because she posed a fire risk, rather than simply because she was smoking (when reproducing quotes, ‘P’ denotes pupil and ‘I’ interviewer):

P: Ma (my) big cousin got suspended. She was smoking, walking up by PE wi [with] a fag in her hand… the only reason she got suspended, see Mr [AHT] says ‘Who’s got the lighter?’, and Kate said ‘Lisa’s got it’, Lisa says ‘no Jane’s got it’, Jane says ‘no Kate’s got it’ and then they were going roond [round] each other all the time and that’s how she got suspended.

P: Cos she had the lighter.

P: Aye. [HS4, girls]

**Teaching staff**

Pupils identified a number of possible responses in relation to teaching staff, including parents being contacted, interviewed, and pupils being placed in isolation, suspended, expelled, given punishment exercises, given a warning and sent to the HT.

There were accounts of teachers giving pupils punishment exercises. Yet, one group argued that teachers did nothing. In addition, two other groups stated that a smoker would not be suspended and in one of these it was commented that parents would not be informed. It also seemed that teachers were less likely than the HT to visit the school gates and smokers’ corner, as one participant argued teachers did not look for smokers and there were no descriptions of them doing so. In addition, some participants mentioned that teachers did not intervene when seeing pupils smoking at smokers’ corner.

The variation across the groups concerning how a teacher would react could relate to a number of issues. First, it appeared teachers varied in how they dealt with pupil smoking as participants argued that the response given would depend on which teacher caught you. Second, it seemed that the same teacher could vary in his/her reaction depending on his/her mood at the time:

I: So who’s the nice teacher?

P: Mr Giles.

I: So if he caught you smoking at school, what would he do?

P: He would probably say, ‘Right,… if I catch you once more then…’

P: Aye, he would give you a warning.

P: He’d tell Mr [HT].

P: Or maybe he’d just take your name, depends what mood he’s in, I don’t know.

I: And what about Mrs Thompson.

P: She’d blow up.

P: She’d take you down the hall… [HS3, girls]

Third, participants commented that the reaction given could depend on whether or not the pupil had been caught before. Fourth, it was apparent that some felt a teacher’s reaction could depend on the pupils concerned:

P: He [the teacher] knows like Angus and that smoke, but he doesn’t bother because they do well in school.

P: But they’re older.

P: He’s a year older. [HS12, girls]

Fifth, it is possible each group varied in their relationship with staff and that this influenced their
accounts. Certainly, the ‘bad’ boys group tended to predict more severe responses than those mentioned by other Highacres participants. For example, only they argued that the HT might expel a pupil for smoking. Finally, it appeared a teacher’s reaction would depend on where the pupil was caught. One participant described how a teacher when seeing him smoking outside of school had simply laughed and others recounted how pupils on a school trip had smoked in front of a teacher. Additionally, participants commented that the implications of being caught inside the buildings were greater than those when caught outside and there were accounts of pupils being suspended for smoking inside. The idea that smoking outwith the building received a less severe response was also suggested when participants commented that teachers did nothing when seeing pupils smoking at smokers’ corner, although it did appear that staff did not react because of the number of smokers who gathered there:

P: There’s about four teachers standing looking down staring at everybody [at smokers’ corner].

I: Don’t they come down and tell them off?

P: But they wouldnae [would not]. They can’t really do anything…

P: There’s too many folk there to give you a row, like if you need to gi' [give] one a row, you need to gi’ them all a row.

P: And then you would be there all day. [HS3, girls]

Non-teaching staff
There were two janitors (caretakers) working full-time in the school. In three of the groups, individuals described how they thought the janitors did/would do nothing. However, during two of these, others argued this was not the case, and across the groups participants stated the janitors would tell pupils to put out their cigarettes and/or report them to an SMT member for further punishment. In addition, some participants stated the first time the janitors caught you they might just give a warning.

The suggestion that the janitors would initially give a warning implied their reaction could depend on whether the pupil had been caught before. The implications of being caught also appeared to depend on who caught the smoker and where, as individuals argued that the response given would depend on which janitor caught you and that a particularly firm line would be taken with anyone caught smoking inside.

Participants mentioned that the janitors visited smokers’ corner and described how pupils scattered when they approached. The notion of janitor presence discouraging pupils from smoking was also implied when participants explained that pupils did not smoke in the house blocks (buildings where pupils could go during interval and lunchtime) because the janitors were often there.

During the discussions, reference was also made to a cleaner who worked in the school. Some participants mentioned that she let pupils smoke and/or gave them cigarettes, and it was evident that some pupils exploited the fact that she let them smoke:

P: The jannies come up but there’s wan [one], Agnes…when a janny comes up we go doon [down] and tell Agnes to go and get rid o’ the jannies…

I: So that you can have a smoke?

P: Aye. Cos she’s bang on, she lets you smoke…

P: Agnes knows everybody smokes and all that and all the smokers come doon and they’re like that, ‘get him [a male janitor] away’, you know, ‘so’s we can have a fag’. [HS8, boys]

Yet, there were accounts of pupils extinguishing their cigarettes when hearing her approach and some smokers mentioned that they did not smoke in the buildings because she had asked them not to.

In summary, participants’ comments suggested the HT took an active firm line in relation to pupil smoking. Teachers appeared less involved and active in their response, but were also known as
individuals who sometimes reprimanded smokers. The janitors seemed to play an important role, with most of the participants’ comments indicating that they addressed pupil smoking and some describing how they patrolled areas popular with smokers. The fact that the janitors, along with the HT, appeared to be the ‘key players’ involved, suggested the extent to which a staff member addressed pupil smoking related to how he/she perceived his/her role in relation to this behaviour rather than simply the authority he/she held. Although the cleaner created a ‘weakness’ in the enforcement of a ban, her presence could deter pupils from smoking.

**Lowlands**

*SMHT*

Lowlands participants referred to both the HT and a deputy head teacher as ‘HTs’. Although pupils were given the opportunity to discuss their HTs, only a few did so. This gave the impression that neither HT did much in relation to pupil smoking nor had regular pupil contact. Certainly, as discussed below, some of the participants’ comments implied they did not address pupil smoking and during fieldwork we did not see either HT walking around the school. This situation was in contrast to Highacres where there had been no suggestion that the HT would do nothing, and where we had regularly seen him walking around and talking to pupils.

One Lowlands group suggested the HTs would give a detention, telephone parents or interview the pupil. Another group mentioned the possibility of parents being contacted and another argued that the deputy HT told smokers to put out their cigarettes. Yet, others stated the HTs did little and there were descriptions to support this comment. Such descriptions indicated that pupils continued to smoke in their presence. For example:

P: …they [pupils] stand up there [on a nearby street] and smoke and the teachers just walk past like the HTs. I don’t think they notice that they’re actually standing cause there’s so many of them. [LS11, girls]

Participants usually described how staff reacted when seeing pupils smoking just outside Lowlands. Based on their comments and our own observations, this was the main area where Lowlands pupils smoked during the school day. Thus, it is possible the HTs did little because pupil smoking occurred mainly off school premises. This situation was different from that in Highacres where most smokers smoked on school grounds, possibly because in contrast to Lowlands pupils they were not allowed to leave the grounds during the morning and afternoon intervals.

In Lowlands, participants discussed the AHTs more often than the HTs and talked about ‘the AHTs’ as if they were the team of individuals who dealt with the pupils.

Possible reactions mentioned in relation to the AHTs were sending a letter home, sending the pupil to Guidance staff, reporting them to the police, telling them to put out their cigarettes and asking them to move on. As each of these was mentioned by individual participants, there was no sense of which reaction was most common. This range of possible responses suggested each AHT dealt with smoking in his/her own way and/or varied in how he/she managed each incident. However, all of the descriptions given concerning how an AHT had reacted when seeing a pupil smoking, indicated little had been done. For example:

P: …the teacher just says ‘you’d better stop smoking’, never sent a letter home [home] or that.

I: And where were you smoking?

P: In the toilet.

I: And they just came in and said stop smoking?

P: Naw, he took me into his office.

I: Who was this?

P: Mr [AHT]…he said ‘stop yer [your] smokin’. I said I ‘wisnae [was not] smokin’, he smelt ma [my] breath and he said ‘aye ye wur [were]’ and never sent a letter. [LS3, boys]
On this occasion little had been done even though the participant had been smoking in the building and had argued with the teacher. Based on accounts given in Highacres, both smoking inside and arguing would have resulted in the smoker being suspended.

Therefore, the AHTs seemed to do little in terms of addressing pupil smoking. Yet, the AHTs were described as the staff members most likely to react and one participant mentioned that they sometimes looked for smokers.

Teaching staff

During seven of the 12 Lowlands discussions, pupils claimed teachers did nothing when seeing a pupil smoke. This was the most common response mentioned in relation to teaching staff and this situation was in contrast with Highacres where only a few participants had argued teachers did nothing. Other responses were volunteered, however, including sending smokers to Guidance staff, talking to them in class, giving them a warning, noting their names in a book, taking their cigarettes off them, suspending them and contacting parents. In addition, some participants commented that teachers sometimes asked pupils who were hanging around outside Lowlands to move on so that they could see what they were up to. It was also mentioned that a teacher might ask a smoker to put out his/her cigarette and that something would be done if the pupil was caught on school premises. In addition, there were accounts of staff seeing pupils smoking on streets near to the school, reprimanding them and/or asking them to extinguish their cigarettes. Furthermore, it was evident that staff presence had an effect as participants described how smokers tried to hide their habit from staff and one individual argued that pupils did not smoke on school premises because they knew they were not allowed to.

Teachers with a responsibility for Guidance and/or PSE were viewed as particularly likely to react and to take a hard line:

I: So what happens if an S2 pupil got caught smoking?

P: It depends…

P: A teacher might let you off with it or he might report you to your Guidance teacher, if it was your Guidance teacher they might send you doon [down] to wan aw [one of] the AHTs.

P: If it was a teacher that just liked teaching you and didn’t bother about your social life or anything, they’d probably let you away wi [with] it.

P: If it was you PSE teacher, you would get it…

P: Aye…you get told to go down to Guidance or something like, you get suspended…

P: They’d try to drive you to stop.

I: You’d get suspended?

P: Probably. [LS2, boys]

The suggestion that Guidance staff would take a relatively hard line was also implied when responses which had not been mentioned in relation to teaching staff in general, were voiced when discussing Guidance staff. These were giving the pupil detention, asking for an interview and sending the pupil to an AHT. Given that the AHTs were viewed as the staff members most likely to react, it should be noted that all Lowlands AHTs had Guidance responsibilities. Yet, not all Guidance staff were AHTs, and therefore the participants’ view of the AHTs could have been based on both their position in the school and their responsibilities.

Thus, although most of the participants’ comments implied teaching staff would do nothing, there was evidence to suggest that some teachers addressed pupil smoking and that a strong line could be taken. However, it seemed such a line would only be taken by those with a responsibility for Guidance and/or PSE. In addition, and in contrast to Highacres, there were no actual reports of pupils being suspended or given punishment exercises. Hence, there was nothing to suggest that, in reality, teachers did little more than reprimand a smoker. Furthermore, the fact that AHTs/Guidance and PSE staff were mentioned as particularly likely to respond implied only these individuals consist-
ently addressed pupil smoking. Although in Highacres it was argued that the response given could depend on who caught the smoker, this was not explicitly associated with the individual’s designation but rather his/her relationship with pupils. It was therefore a comment which applied to all staff members and, in contrast to Lowlands, was one which did not imply that a particular staff group were enforcing the ban.

**Non-teaching staff**

In Lowlands there were two janitors working full time. All but one of the comments made suggested they would do little on catching a pupil smoking. The exception indicated the janitors would inform a teacher.

In contrast to Highacres, there was no indication that the presence of a janitor would discourage pupil smoking at school. There was also no suggestion that they patrolled the school or sought out smokers. In fact, participants stated the janitors just sat in their room. Our own observations supported such comments.

A few participants mentioned there were cleaners working in the toilets. The extent to which they enforced a ban was unclear. Whilst one individual argued they would report a smoker, a fellow participant commented she did not think they would. In addition, it was argued that the cleaners, themselves, smoked in the toilets and let pupils smoke.

**Conclusions**

Before drawing conclusions and discussing their implications for future research, policy and practice, it should be noted that the study schools were not randomly selected and therefore cannot be viewed as representative of schools in general. Additionally, as participants were not randomly selected, their views may not be representative of their peers.

In both schools, participants stated the implications of being caught depended on *which* particular SMT member, teacher or non-teaching member caught the smoker and *where*, suggesting the manner in which staff addressed pupil smoking was largely individualistic and context dependent, a conclusion consistent with analysis of staff accounts (Gordon and Turner, 2003a). There was no clear relationship between staff status and the descriptions concerning how they would respond, e.g. the key enforcers in Highacres were the HT and the janitors, whilst in Lowlands the AHT’s appeared to take a stronger role than the HTs. Interestingly, in both schools, it seemed that auxiliary staff might undermine efforts by other staff members aiming to curtail pupil smoking as Highacres and Lowlands participants described the cleaner(s) not only as reprimanding smokers, but also as providing pupils with cigarettes and letting them smoke.

When considering the enforcement strategies mentioned, it was apparent that staff in both schools used various forms of punishment to addressed pupil smoking. Highacres pupils mentioned that a smoker might be suspended, expelled, given punishment exercises or placed in isolation, and Lowlands participants also mentioned the possibility of smokers being given a detention or suspended. Yet, in Lowlands, there was some indication that staff sometimes aimed to discourage rather than punish, as it was argued that staff might ‘talk’ to the smokers, give a warning and/or simply ask them to extinguish their cigarettes. Whilst Highacres participants made similar remarks, they did so less often.

From the pupils’ accounts it seemed that Highacres staff not only took a firmer line, but were also more likely to actively and consistently enforce a ban. In Highacres, there was a sense of the HT actively addressing pupil smoking and encouraging staff members to do the same. There were also accounts of pupils being suspended and staff visiting certain areas in an attempt to catch smokers. In addition, although pupils argued that teachers might not intervene, and it was clear there was an auxiliary staff member who let pupils smoke, the majority of the comments made regarding teaching and non-teaching staff implied they would react. In contrast, in Lowlands, there was no suggestion that the HTs actively sought smokers, took a firm line or encouraged staff to
enforce a ban. In addition, participants’ comments implied that usually both teaching and non-teaching staff ignored pupil smoking. Furthermore, it seemed that only one particular group of staff (the AHTs) consistently took up this challenge.

The more lenient approach in Lowlands might have been because Lowlands pupils smoked mainly off school premises, whereas Highacres pupils smoked both on and off school grounds, and staff are less likely to reprimand pupils smoking off premises because they view them as beyond the school’s responsibility (Gordon and Turner, 2003b). More generally, this approach could also have been related to Lowlands wider philosophy, staff accounts indicating that it subscribed to a pupil-centred, holistic approach which attended to pupil welfare (Gordon and Turner, 2003b), whereas an authoritarian and punitive approach characterized Highacres pupil management style (Gordon and Turner, 2004).

The manner in which Highacres staff enforced a ban may have contributed to its relatively high pupil smoking rate. We cannot assume causality as cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data were gathered, but the wider literature supports this suggestion. Pentz et al. (Pentz et al., 1989) found the use of punishment to regulate pupil smoking was ineffective. In addition, this approach is one which works against rather than with pupils and Unger et al. (Unger et al., 1999) argue that adolescents who believe their rights are being restricted may smoke in order to reassert their personal autonomy. This possible explanation suggests that researchers aiming to assess the effectiveness of staff enforcement should consider how the ways in which staff address pupil smoking encourage and discourage this behaviour. This is an area which could be explored, as little is known about young people’s attitudes towards no-smoking policies (Unger et al., 1999) and clearly we need to understand how pupils perceive smoking bans in order to fully appreciate their effect.

Staff enforcement of a no-smoking policy is only one possible explanation for school differences in pupil smoking rates. Young people’s smoking behaviours have been associated with a range of factors, such as peer smoking and cigarette advertising (West and Foulds, 1999). These factors might also vary between the schools and influence their smoking rates. Certainly, in terms of explaining Highacres and Lowlands differing smoking rates, factors both directly and indirectly related to pupil smoking have appeared important. For example, Highacres pupils perceived greater access to commercial sources of cigarettes than Lowlands pupils (Turner and Gordon, 2004), and we have argued that Lowlands holistic focus and attention to pupil welfare may have combated disaffection with school and, in turn, reduced the likelihood of smoking among its vulnerable pupils (Gordon and Turner, 2003b). This situation suggests that researchers aiming to identify reasons for school differences in pupil smoking rates should search not for one possible explanation, but many. It also implies that while the extent to which pupil health can be influenced by the HPS will be shaped by factors outwith the school context, attention to ‘HPS issues’ such as pupil esteem, behaviour management and discipline systems could help address pupil smoking rates (Scottish Executive, 1999).

Participants in both schools were aware not only of how different staff members would react, but also what factors might lead to a firmer line being taken. This suggests pupils have a level of awareness which they can use to inform when and where they should smoke in order to reduce the likelihood of being caught and/or firmly reprimanded. Indeed, it was apparent that pupils may exploit staff members who let them smoke and move off premises in order to smoke, believing they are less likely to get into trouble. Thus, pupils can utilize ‘weaknesses’ in the enforcement of a ban, and it would seem that schools implementing a no-smoking policy should involve all staff members and consider what indirect effects their policy might be having. The need to involve all staff members was also signalled by the fact that auxiliary staff could have as much, if not more influence than other staff members on controlling pupil smoking, and may work in areas where pupils often smoke, e.g. the toilets and playground.
However, this paper has raised questions concerning the effectiveness of staff enforcement. The former more active line taken in Highacres might actually have contributed to its higher pupil smoking rate. Furthermore, the fact that modal scores for number of cigarettes smoked per week were higher for S2 and S4 smokers in Highacres than in Lowlands suggests efforts made by Highacres staff may not have even reduced levels of consumption. Yet, Stead et al. (Stead et al., 1996) argue that the absence of no-smoking policies may convey the message that smoking is acceptable. The situation, therefore, is complex and perhaps in order to gain a solution, attention needs to be given to how staff can enforce smoking restrictions in a way which indicates that they aim to protect pupil well-being rather than restrict pupil rights. It has been suggested that no-smoking policies should be developed through negotiation with pupils (West and Foulds, 1999) and this would allow pupils to influence the manner in which pupil smoking is addressed. Staff could also highlight the benefits of no-smoking policies (e.g. reduce risk of passive smoking) and emphasize that these actually protect rather than curtail pupil rights.

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References


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