

I watched Elizabeth Burton-Phillips give an interview on Breakfast News (BBC) this morning (5.2.08) and felt that I had to respond, in some way, to her courage in speaking out. I live in a fairly affluent area of [North Yorkshire] and have been very concerned for some time about the complacent attitude of "good schools" to the problem of cannabis. "Image" is everything now, for a successful school; much effort and money are spent on attracting new parents, and developing a school's image through websites, Open Evenings, Press Releases etc. Admission of a drug problem does not tally with the positive image that every successful school strives to project. Parental support is also vital to a school's success – OFSTED base their judgments about a school's performance partly upon a parental questionnaire - middle-class parents of children disciplined for a drug offence by their school do not necessarily have nice things to say to OFSTED about that school.

My own experiences demonstrate how powerless an "ordinary" member of a school's teaching staff is to affect the policy of the Senior Leadership Team towards drug abuse in school; I will spare you the details, but on one occasion when I interrupted pupils involved in a drug "incident" the only reprimand which was meted out was to me! Heartbreakingly, I have watched post-16 pupils in particular fail to keep up with their courses of study, due to the lifestyle they were getting involved in, and then abandon their studies. These pupils, under-achieving because of their habit, are never a high priority because of their potential for affecting a school's position in the League Tables.

I am so angry by what I have seen – youngsters' well-being sacrificed on the altar of the reputation of a "good school" . Why am I telling you this? Because parents need to know that admission to a "good school" is no inoculation against their children confronting a drugs culture - a culture more likely to be resisted in a school with a less glossy image, I would suggest.

I am still teaching in the area, and have children at another local school and so would appreciate if you did not circulate what I have said with my name attached!

I have no particular skills or talents to recommend me, but if you do need any help in this area of the country, I would seriously consider whether I could.

P.S. I salute your courage and openness in sharing about your family also, and wish you and them a hopeful future.