

# Principals reveal growing blight of vaping in schools



Head teachers report having to police lavatory blocks and impose harsh rules as pupils are fainting in class from e-cigarettes bought online, writes *Julianne Corr*

At least ten secondary schools have reported “serious” incidents of pupils having experienced “an adverse reaction” to vaping this year, *The Sunday Times* can reveal.

Paul Crone, director of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, said while the recent ban on selling vapes to under-18s was welcome, e-cigarettes were still a big problem at Irish secondary schools.

“I have spoken with in excess of ten schools that have had serious incidents of adverse reactions from the contents of vaping in the current academic year, and I wouldn’t catch them all – they’re just the ones that have spoken to me,” he said. “Schools are cracking down on it, they’ve changed their policies and are much more diligent in chasing it up, but students vaping in the bathroom is still a big problem. Very often we are finding disposal vapes dumped into the toilet with the potential to block the sewage system, as they don’t want to be caught in possession with them.”

Vaping can cause damage to the lungs and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. It can be particularly damaging to those with asthma.

Twenty per cent of women aged 15 to 24 use vaping products daily or occasionally, according to a report last year by *Healthy Ireland*. The figure was 16 per cent for men in the same age cohort.

Crone said Ireland as a society thought it had beaten smoking, but it was now facing a vaping epidemic.

The *Sunday Times* reported last week how disposable vapes are set to be banned in Ireland by the end of this year on both environmental and health grounds, with the government calling the situation a “health emergency”.

“Vaping began to really take off in schools in 2022,” Crone said. “It wasn’t a major problem when schools were opened during Covid. It was when restrictions tended to lift and society opened back up, that’s when we really started to notice it.”

“They’re doing it at break time, they’re doing it when they go to the toilet during class, they’re doing it on the way into school and on the way home.”

Crone said if a pupil was caught vaping on school premises the vape would be confiscated immediately, but some parents were requesting their return.

“A lot of students have more expensive vapes and ... when it’s confiscated, parents arrive at the school looking for it to be returned. So I’m not sure parents are fully aware of the dangers if they’re buying vapes for their child.”

Amy Doherty, principal at Ballinteer Community School in Dublin, did not believe the ban on vape sales to under-18s had made much difference. “It’s still a really big problem, students are still buying them very easily online,” she said. “They’re vaping in the bathroom and keep the

vape on them, hidden from teachers. It’s different to smoking, because with cigarettes you can smell them but with vapes you can’t. I really think they should be banned altogether – it doesn’t help that some vape shops are so close to schools.”

Paul Thornton, principal at Tullow Community School in Co Carlow, said his school had carried out an “intensive crackdown” on vaping, including strengthened sanctions if caught.

“We’ve increased control on our bathrooms at break times and in between class periods and have made adaptations to the bathroom so it’s more difficult for someone to close the door of the outer bathroom area,” he said.

“We can now at times suspend a student if we find them vaping inside the school building ... but we would regularly see it out on the street, whether they’re going to school or coming back from

“

They’re vaping at breaktime, they’re vaping in the toilet, they’re vaping on the way to school and on the way home

School principals Kevin Shortall, left, Amy Doherty and Paul Thornton say pupils vaping has become a big problem

vape on them, hidden from teachers. It’s different to smoking, because with cigarettes you can smell them but with vapes you can’t. I really think they should be banned altogether – it doesn’t help that some vape shops are so close to schools.”

Paul Thornton, principal at Tullow Community School in Co Carlow, said his school had carried out an “intensive crackdown” on vaping, including strengthened sanctions if caught.

“We’ve increased control on our bathrooms at break times and in between class periods and have made adaptations to the bathroom so it’s more difficult for someone to close the door of the outer bathroom area,” he said.

“We can now at times suspend a student if we find them vaping inside the school building ... but we would regularly see it out on the street, whether they’re going to school or coming back from

school. It’s something that we have to continue to be strict about.”

Thornton said a big concern was students using unknown substances inside vape devices purchased online. He said several pupils had become unwell while at school as a result.

He said: “Some of these products are quite dangerous to take and can lead to hospitalisations. We haven’t had to hospitalise anybody but we have had students become faint and disoriented as a result of vaping from what we suspect are products that shouldn’t be in there.”

Thornton said the school would immediately contact parents and health services when a pupil fell ill, but the difficulty of finding out what was in the vapes was a serious problem. “Our greatest concern is that when they admit to vaping, they tell us they don’t know what it’s in so then it’s very difficult on the ground in terms of how to deal with it,” he said.

Louis Callaghan, a teacher at Ardee Community School in Co Louth, said there were now three chapters devoted to vaping in the junior cycle SPHE curriculum. “I find first years are usually very interested and are very good at participating in discussions and group activities, but it’s the kind of subject where there’s a tendency for students to lose interest as they get older,” he said.

“I would say generally there is an interest in alcohol, smoking, vaping and other addictive substances if they’re presented in a student-centred and interesting way, but definitely vaping is an issue that they’re interested in. It’s very hard to kind of quantify how many students are actually vaping because it’s done under the surface.”

Kevin Shortall, principal at St Aidan’s Community School in Tallaght, said he had taken vaping seriously from his first day in the job.

He said: “When I started two and a half years ago, I was really worried about vaping and beginning to say, ‘This is a problem we’re going to find very difficult to solve.’ We did a major toilet reform and installed individual toilets which has been a massive success for us and since then vaping [on school premises] has largely disappeared.”

“When we had the communal toilets, up to six students were going to the bathroom together with one or two vapes, swapping them.”

He added: “I think for younger people, it’s [vaping] largely a sociable and a curiosity thing, so the draw of being with other people who are vaping and being in that mix is important [to them].”

## Australia leads way in ecigarette crackdown

Julianne Corr

Strict laws have meant vapes have never been a consumer product in Australia.

Unlike Ireland, where there are more than 250 specialist vape stores, the commercial sale of liquid nicotine has always been banned in Australia, and can be legally obtained only with a doctor’s prescription.

But an explosion of vape use during the Covid-19 pandemic among teenagers and young adults created a lucrative and widespread black market that quickly pushed the Australian government to tighten its laws further.

Legislation banning the purchase or importation of nicotine vapes without a doctor’s prescription was enacted in October 2021, and on January 1 this year it became illegal to import single-use vapes, including those without nicotine.

With Ireland set to follow suit on environmental and health grounds, what can we learn from Australia’s crackdown on vaping?

Matthew Peters, a professor of respiratory medicine at Macquarie University Hospital in Sydney, said disposable vape exports from China – where the vast majority are manufactured – had declined by 95 per cent since the January 1 ban.

“The Chinese government has regulations that mean exporters can’t violate the law of the country they’re exporting into so there seems to be a big drop in the import of disposable vapes into Australia,” he said.

“We don’t expect to get rid of every last disposable vape as people will still try to buy them on social media. The ambition is great and we wouldn’t be flummoxed if there is a low level of use, but if we get rid of the easy access that will be good.”

“It’s a bit too early to say if there’s a change in schools yet but some kids are reporting that they’re harder to get and how the prices have gone up. Probably in a few months time there’ll be quality data but so far

it’s anecdotal evidence.”

Becky Freeman, a professor in public health at the University of Sydney, said while access had largely been restricted, people were still purchasing vapes illegally in corner stores.

She said: “People are getting them in convenience stores, petrol stations and tobacconists. It’s not a deep, dark black web, they’re just literally going to a shop and buying illegal goods.”

“In Australia you can call yourself a tobacconist without needing a special licence. Their window displays are usually all lollies and sweets that are often imported from the UK and the US. So they look like sweet shops but they call themselves tobacconists and they’re the ones primarily selling the illicit goods.”

Paige Preston, a general manager of policy, advocacy and prevention at the Lung Foundation Australia, said it was advocating for the federal government to pass a bill that would close the loopholes that were being exploited to continue selling illegal vapes in corner stores.

“Australia banned the importation of disposable vapes on January 1 this year [which] has heightened awareness of the dangers of vaping and reduced access to vape products,” she said.

“[However], we know one in six Australian children aged 12-17 have vaped in the past month. Vapes are marketed to children, and nine in ten stores are located close to schools.”

Peters said about 85 per cent of the population had supported a ban on disposable vapes.

“The world hasn’t ended since we’ve had a ban and we haven’t suddenly had millions of kids take up smoking, which is what the opposition were saying,” he said.

“Australia wasn’t afraid of being leaders on this. Ireland banned smoking in pubs 20 years ago and people thought the whole Irish culture would die but it didn’t and now it’s normal. My advice to Ireland would be to go ahead and ban disposable vapes.”

## Ireland and the world delivered to your door

Get quality journalism delivered every weekend. Order *The Sunday Times*, Ireland Edition straight to your door.

Visit [newsdelivery.ie](http://newsdelivery.ie) or call 01 920 3902, choose your preferences, and we’ll do the rest



THE SUNDAY TIMES  
IRELAND EDITION

T&C’s apply, see [newsdelivery.ie](http://newsdelivery.ie) for details. Home delivery is subject to availability.

## Re-turn retailers will soon face €5,000 fine for selling old stock

Julianne Corr

Retailers participating in the deposit return scheme (DRS) will be fined €5,000 from next weekend if found selling old stock of the plastic containers and cans without the Re-turn logo.

June 1 will mark the end of the transition period for retailers, meaning they must sell any containers not registered with the scheme.

The DRS launched in Ireland on February 1 with the aim to reduce litter and achieve a “circular economy” by incentivising consumers to recycle single-use containers. Some 131 million containers have been returned through the scheme as of last Thursday night, including almost 57 million in May.

The EU has set Ireland a target to separate and collect 77 per cent of plastic beverage bottles by 2025. This target will rise to 90 per cent in 2029.

Ossian Smyth, the junior minister for the environment, said that local authorities



The scheme’s transition period ends on Saturday

would begin inspecting shops from Saturday.

“The shops will have their final chance now to sell off everything they have at a discount before the end of the month – because if they try to sell a product that doesn’t have a Re-turn logo on it in June they can be fined,” he said.

“It will now be much simpler for the public to understand that every plastic container and can will be returnable. The shops have

had four months to adjust to this and any customers who purchase a can without the Re-turn logo on them can call the local authority and they will fine them [the retailer].”

Smyth said there had been some issues during the transition period with consumers putting shampoo bottles and milk cartons into the

reverse vending machines. “I think it’s difficult for people to adjust to something like this but the fact that three million containers are coming back in one day, and if we reach that level every day from now on, we’re going to have a huge improvement,” he said.

The Irish Petrol Retailers Association said its members had now reached almost entirely new stock.

Vincent Jennings, chief executive of the Convenience Stores & Newsagents Association, said the scheme was a “culture shock” but should also be viewed as a “phenomenal success story”.

Lidl said “a small number” of old stock without the Re-turn logo might still be present in some stores, but they would not be sold after May 31. Aldi said it was currently “washing out” the last few unmarked items.

## Readers sinking their teeth into horror with mother-and-daughter cannibal tale

Rosamund Urwin

The maternal bond is well-trodden ground in contemporary fiction but the mother-daughter relationship at the heart of Lucy Rose’s first novel, *The Lamb*, is different.

Margot and Ruth are cannibals who take in passers-by, called “strays”, and eat them together.

*The Lamb*, which has been described as a “rare” and “tender” coming-of-age story, is not out until January but it has already created a buzz. It was bought by Weidenfeld & Nicolson after a six-way auction between publishers.

Overall, last year was a record-breaking year of sales for horror as a genre, with British figures from Nielsen BookScan showing that the horror and ghost stories category was up 54 per cent on the previous year by value.

Although it remains a relatively small genre of fiction, sales are already up 55 per cent this year, compared with the same period last year, according to *The Bookseller* trade magazine.

Rose, 28, who lives in Newcastle, said: “It’s a story all about the brutality and beastliness of growing up and of girlhood. It also touches a

lot on what happens when you thrust women into motherhood roles that they reluctantly take on, and the monstrosity that can come from that.”

Nicola Barr, a literary agent at the Bent Agency, said this was part of a wider sub-trend for girlhood gone gory: horror writing that explores common female experiences such as motherhood, sexism and the changing body during adolescence. “Women are angry and they want to read about women acting on that anger and root for them – the female rage book is practically its own genre now,” she said.

A forerunner in this was Rachel Yoder’s *Night Bitch*, published in 2021, which explores the challenges of modern womanhood through the prism of a middle-class mother who is resentful of her largely absent husband and who appears to be turning into a dog.

Alison Hennessey, who runs the Raven Books imprint at Bloomsbury, said the appeal of these works also lay in the simple fact that they are fun. “Sometimes people want a safe scare: it’s like going on a rollercoaster – it’s scary but it’s contained and you know what you’re getting,” she said.