

ROTHERHAM COUNCIL NEWS RELEASE

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BETTER LIFESTYLE CHOICES SURVEY SHOWS

Pupils are putting the brakes on bad lifestyle choices – like smoking and drinking sugary drinks - a new school survey has found.

Hundreds of teenagers responding to Rotherham Council's annual Lifestyle Survey have said they drink one or less high sugar drinks a day, which is being put down to campaigns to ban such drinks from schools.

And there has also been an increase in pupils saying they have never smoked, which is a higher percentage than national figures in similar surveys.

Young people have also told council officers they feel safer going into Rotherham town centre and visiting the bus station – which is a direct result of new safety measures put in place since the last survey, where children said they felt unsafe.

Other highlights of the survey show the use of contraception has increased among those having sex and there has also been an increase in awareness about child sexual exploitation, with more school lessons on this than ever before.

However, there are still areas of concern, including a rise in the numbers of pupils reporting issues around bullying and cyber bullying along with a slight increase in young people saying they have tried drugs, even if this was only once. Officials are now set to meet to discuss strategies to deal with this.

Ian Thomas, Strategic Director of Children's Services at Rotherham Council said:
"We are committed as a Council to ensure every child gets the best start in life.

"Part of this commitment is making sure the voices of our young people are not only heard, but also have a direct influence on the work we do for them. That is why it is very important for us and schools to heed the results of surveys like this and listen to what Rotherham's children are telling us, good or bad.

"As a result of last year's survey both the Council and schools have taken a number of direct actions to tackle some of the issues raised and we will do the same again this year and we will report back the results of what we have done to enhance the lifestyle choices of our young people."

He added the ambition is to change the experiences of children and young people in Rotherham.

Over the last few years the survey has led to schools introducing a number of changes including:

- Introducing specific drug and alcohol awareness sessions
- Introducing afterschool cookery clubs with students encouraged to make healthy, simple recipes and enjoy these meals together. Parents are now being encouraged to attend these cookery clubs as well.
- Ban on all high sugar fizzy drinks

This year's survey will be extended from seven weeks to 12 to allow more time for pupils to take part, following feedback from schools that this would be helpful. This year's survey will go out to schools on 3rd May and run until 19th July.

The results of this year's Lifestyle Survey are to be looked at by the Health and Wellbeing Board at its meeting on Wednesday, 11th January where actions to address key areas of concern will be identified.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The Council undertakes the Lifestyle Survey every year in order to provide a unique insight into the everyday experiences of children and young people in Rotherham.

It is carried out with young people in year 7 and year 10 in the majority of Rotherham secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU). Overall 2,806 pupils across 12 secondary schools participated in the 2016 survey, which is a 60 per cent participation rate of the schools that took part.

The survey covers a range of issues for local young people including healthy eating, sport and exercise, aspirations, and feeling safe.

The data will help provide a benchmark for measuring the success of Rotherham as a child-centred borough over future years, as it provides the opportunity to track changes in the experience, ambitions, behaviours and feelings of local children and young people.

Learning from previous years' Lifestyle Survey data has enabled a number of improvements, including:

Food and Drink

- Schools have campaigned to stop the sale of high calorie and high sugar content snacks.

- The sale of high caffeine drinks was reduced in schools.

Mental Health

- The 'My Mind Matters' website launched offering support, advice and guidance to young people and their parents.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) distributed pens with coping strategies to all secondary schools.
- Information provided to young people and schools around suicide and self-harm awareness.

Feeling Safe

- Following reports of concerns of safety at bus stations the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTTE) updated information on their websites and put in place reporting mechanisms.
- Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) sessions have also been run with colleagues from the SYPTTE around feeling safe.

Smoking

- A campaign has been held in all secondary schools to promote non-smoking.
- Trading Standards have issued warnings to local shops who sold tobacco to young people.

Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness

- 3,852 Rotherham learners last year attended Chelsea's Choice awareness sessions in schools.