

Drugs have been discovered by police at more than 85 different schools and colleges across Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire during the last four years. But do these new figures tell the whole story? Education correspondent **VICTORIA LEGGETT** reports.

Amphetamine, cannabis and mephedrone are among the drugs found by police at the region's schools and colleges over the past four years.

Since 2009, officers in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire have been called out to more than 85 different educational establishments to deal with a total of 169 incidents.

Norfolk charity The Matthew Project, which works with the county's schools to offer support and advice to pupils, said the information – released following a Freedom of Information Act request – represented just a fraction of the problem it saw among young people.

But police, schools and the local education authority insist the problem of drugs in schools is not a major one and is dealt with rigorously by headteachers.

Sgt Tim Horribin, strategic leader for Norfolk Police's safer schools partnership, said schools had the power to deal with discoveries of drugs on their premises themselves and did not have to involve officers every time.

But he said the force's increasing presence at school sites – with nine secondaries now with full-time officers and PCSOs usually visiting the remaining 42 once a week – meant it was more aware than ever of those incidents that took place.

He said: "There probably are other incidents that we are not called to but, if you had asked me three or four years ago, I would have thought the issue was worse. Yes, there are drugs in schools but the level of drug use and the number of times young people are found in possession is very, very small."

Naomi Selim, under 18 service manager for The Matthew Project, said the charity was seeing an average of 20 to 25 referrals every month to its specialist service for young people with a recognised drug or alcohol problem.

There are a further eight to 12 referrals to its targeted service for under 18s whose usage is not yet considered "problematic" and may have only just started trying drugs.

"That's quite a steady stream coming in every month," she said. "They are out there. How many are getting caught may be a different thing."

In Norfolk, the majority of cases involved cannabis but among the 33 schools and colleges included in the list for the county was Hellesdon High School, in Norwich, where someone was reprimanded by police following the discovery of a quantity of mephedrone – the former "legal high" reclassified as a class B drug in April 2010.

Headteacher Gerry Batty said incidents of drugs and alcohol at the academy were rare but all were



**INCIDENTS:** In Norfolk, the majority of cases of drugs in schools involved cannabis.

# Educating our youngsters about the perils of drugs



**THE MATTHEW PROJECT:** Naomi Selim.



**FIRM MESSAGE:** Gerry Batty, head at Hellesdon High.

treated extremely seriously. He said police would be called in all cases and staff worked closely with officers to ensure students were given a "firm message".

He said: "If it changes their ability to function as they normally function, we come down very hard on it. But we also believe in giving a kid a chance. Before they are re-admitted after any offence, they have to sign up to drug counselling.

"As much as I'm not proud that we

have had drug incidents, the one thing I am proud of is that we haven't had any repeat incidents."

The police log also said officers had been called to a report of cocaine at Norwich School some time between 2009 and 2012. The Cathedral-based independent school said it was unable to comment publicly on "pastoral matters affecting individual pupils" but stressed the substance found on the school premises turned out to be a harmless white powder and not the

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Sgt Tim Horribin

counselling is available to students as well as courses linked to substance misuse.

Mrs Wycherley added: "Our students are of smoking age. We have moved our smoking areas to much more open areas which are full of staff going up and down all day. We have taken steps to try to control it."

In Suffolk, substances discovered included ketamine and morphine while in Cambridgeshire police logged finds of a "white substance" and a "bottle of pills" in addition to 29 incidents where the drug was identified as cannabis.

Police in all three counties dealt with the finds through a range of measures from warnings and restorative approaches to charges.

Sgt Horribin, schools and support workers all agreed charging young people was often not the best approach, particularly for a first offence, and it was far more important to offer support to them than leave them with a criminal record early in life.

Mrs Selim said: "There is a huge difference in the amount of time people are in treatment if they are under 18 compared to over. If we can stop it now, a lot won't re-present when they are older."

Five Norfolk primary schools also appear on the police log however in all cases officers said the crimes did not relate to any pupils at those sites.

None of the cases in Norfolk involved teachers employed by the school or college.

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