

Title	Drug and Substance Awareness Policy
Cross References	Internal:  Confidentiality Policy  Staff Code of Conduct  Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy  Online Safety Policy  Curriculum Policy
Date	October 2026

1. Purpose

Apricot Online recognises its responsibility to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of students and to provide age-appropriate education that supports informed and responsible decision-making about drugs and other substances.

This policy sets out Apricot Online's approach to drug and substance education and the action staff should take where there is a concern that a student may be using, misusing, supplying or being affected by drugs or other substances.

Because Apricot Online provides education remotely, concerns may arise through online lessons, conversations, disclosures, changes in behaviour or information shared by students, parents/carers, commissioners or other professionals.

2. Scope and Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, 'drugs and substances' may include illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and nicotine products including vaping, prescription and over-the-counter medicines when misused, solvents and other psychoactive or intoxicating substances.

The policy applies to concerns about a student's own use as well as concerns about exposure to substance misuse within the home or community, supply or dealing, criminal exploitation, peer pressure or other circumstances that may affect the student's safety or welfare.

3. Underlying Principles

Students should be provided with accurate, age-appropriate information that supports them to make informed and safer choices.

- Drug and substance education should be considered within the wider context of health, wellbeing, relationships, safeguarding and personal development.
- Students affected by substance misuse should be treated with dignity and supported appropriately rather than being defined by the behaviour or concern.
- Use, possession, supply and dealing may raise different welfare, safeguarding, behavioural and criminal concerns and should be considered according to the individual circumstances.
- Safeguarding and the welfare of the student are paramount.
- Apricot Online will work with the commissioning school or local authority, parents/carers where appropriate, and relevant support or statutory agencies to promote the student's safety and wellbeing.
- Staff must not attempt to diagnose intoxication, dependency or substance misuse. Their role is to recognise concerns, respond to immediate risk and follow safeguarding procedures.

4. Immediate Concerns During Online Provision

If a student displays behaviour during an online lesson that gives reasonable cause to believe that they may be intoxicated, impaired or otherwise at immediate risk because of drugs or substances, staff must prioritise the student's immediate safety.

The following procedure should be followed:

1. Remain calm and, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, maintain contact with the student while establishing the basic facts necessary to assess immediate risk.
2. Inform Apricot Online's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL immediately through the agreed safeguarding route.
3. Where the student is commissioned by a school or local authority, the relevant safeguarding contact/DSL at the commissioning body should be informed in accordance with Apricot Online's safeguarding procedures.
4. Where appropriate, contact with a parent/carer or responsible adult should be coordinated through the safeguarding response. Staff should not delay emergency action while attempting to contact another adult.
5. If there is an immediate threat to life or serious risk of harm, emergency services must be contacted without delay. Staff should provide the student's known location and relevant information where available.
6. Record the concern and all action taken promptly and factually in accordance with Apricot Online's safeguarding procedures.

5. Suspected Drug or Substance Misuse

Concerns may arise from a disclosure, something overheard during a lesson, observed behaviour, information from another person or a pattern of changes in a student's presentation or engagement.

Staff should not investigate suspected drug use themselves. The concern should be recorded factually and referred promptly to Apricot Online's DSL or Deputy DSL, who will consider the appropriate safeguarding response and liaison with the commissioning body.

The response will be proportionate to the circumstances and may include discussion with the commissioning school's or local authority's DSL, parents/carers where appropriate, health or substance-misuse services, children's social care or the police.

6. Supply, Dealing and Criminal Exploitation

Information suggesting that a student may be supplying or dealing drugs must be treated seriously. Such information may indicate criminal activity but may also be a sign that a child is being coerced, groomed or exploited.

Staff should be alert to the possibility of child criminal exploitation, including county lines activity, where children may be used to store, transport or supply drugs or money.

Any concern about exploitation, coercion, trafficking, threats, violence, debt, unexplained money or gifts, frequent unexplained travel or other indicators of criminal exploitation must be reported immediately through Apricot Online's safeguarding procedures. The DSL will determine the appropriate referral and information-sharing response with the commissioning body and statutory agencies.

7. Confidentiality and Disclosures

Students should be treated sensitively and respectfully when discussing drugs or substances. However, staff must never promise a student absolute confidentiality.

Where information indicates that a student or another person may be at risk of harm, or otherwise raises a safeguarding concern, the information must be shared with the DSL or Deputy DSL and with other appropriate professionals on a need-to-know basis.

Where appropriate, the student should be told what information needs to be shared, with whom and why. Staff should not delay sharing information where doing so could increase risk.

Information will be handled in accordance with Apricot Online's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Confidentiality Policy and applicable data-protection requirements.

8. Curriculum and Drug Education

Where commissioned as part of a student's programme, Apricot Online provides drug and substance education through PSHE and other relevant curriculum areas. Teaching is appropriate to students' age, understanding and needs.

Education may include:

- accurate information about legal and illegal drugs and substances;
 - the physical, emotional, social and legal consequences of substance use and misuse;
 - alcohol, smoking, vaping and nicotine;
 - safe and responsible use of medicines;
 - peer pressure, risk-taking, decision-making and strategies for seeking help;
 - media, advertising and online influences;
 - criminal exploitation, county lines and the risks associated with drug supply; and
 - where to obtain reliable information, advice and support.
- External agencies or specialist resources may be used where appropriate to complement curriculum delivery, provided their involvement and materials are suitable for Apricot Online's students and safeguarding arrangements.

9. Working with Parents, Commissioners and Other Agencies

Apricot Online recognises that effective support may require partnership working. Depending on the nature of the concern, we may work with the student's parent/carer, commissioning school or local authority, health services, specialist drug and alcohol services, children's social care, police or other relevant agencies.

Decisions about information sharing and parental involvement will take account of safeguarding, the student's age and circumstances, confidentiality requirements and the advice of relevant safeguarding professionals.

10. Staff Training and Responsibilities

Apricot Online is committed to ensuring that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to drugs and substance misuse.

Relevant training, guidance and professional development will support staff to:

- recognise possible indicators of substance misuse, intoxication and exploitation;
- respond appropriately to disclosures and immediate safety concerns;
- understand that substance-related concerns may be safeguarding concerns;
- follow Apricot Online's reporting and recording procedures; and
- know when concerns require escalation to the DSL, commissioning body or emergency services.

11. Recording and Review

All safeguarding concerns relating to drugs or substances must be recorded in accordance with Apricot Online's safeguarding procedures. Records should be factual, timely and include the concern, action taken, advice received and any referrals or information sharing.

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner where changes to statutory guidance, safeguarding practice, curriculum requirements or Apricot Online's operating arrangements make this necessary.

Authorised by: Jodie Phillips, Operations Director

Date: October 2026

Review Date: October 2027