

The US version of a **drug education** programme once popular (and probably still influential) in Britain has been shown to modestly retard growth of substance use in 12–13-year-old school pupils. The first **rigorous follow-up study** of *Skills for Adolescence* randomly allocated 34 schools matched for initial substance use levels to either undertake the programme or to continue as usual.¹ Lessons focus on lifeskills generally and managing the transition to the teenage years as well as drug-related skills. From the full set of 40 lessons, programme schools undertook to deliver at least eight 'key' sessions to seventh-grade (age 12–13) pupils. Preliminary results are available from over 6000 pupils followed up at the end of that year. Among children not using these drugs the year before (the great majority), fewer from programme schools went on to smoke cigarettes (3% v 4% in past month) or try cannabis (9% v 12%, borderline significant). No impact was noticeable on drinking except for Hispanic pupils, among whom initiation of drinking was retarded on all three measures (ever, recent, binge). There was no impact on use levels among pupils who had already used drugs the year before, but some transitions to more 'advanced' forms of drug use (eg, from past-month drinking to past-month smoking) did occur less often after the *Skills for Adolescence* lessons. Though unusually rigorous, the study could only test the programme in schools willing to undertake a heavy drugs teaching commitment and may not be a guide to how it would work if more broadly implemented. Also nearly 1 in 3 pupils were not given parental consent to participate in the study. Further follow-ups are planned.

1 Eisen M. *et al.* "Evaluating the Lions-Quest 'Skills for Adolescence' drug education program: first-year behavior outcomes." *Addictive Behaviors*: 2002, 27, p. 619–632.