



Survey summary

A comprehensive study involving three pilot schools, approximately 3500 students, 200 teachers and a series of questionnaires and focus groups was carried out over a period of 8 months. Key findings are summarised below. Research was carried out by an externally accredited independent market research company, the Railson White Partnership.

Key objectives of the research were;

- investigate current student drinking water behaviour
- explore attitudes to tap water as a drink
- assess views on current provision of drinking water in schools
- obtain student views for increasing water consumption
- explore student proposals for promoting water to their peers.

In September 2006 an initial consultation involving student focus groups from the three pilot schools showed that;

The main problems cited with regard to accessibility of water were :

- too few or no water fountains in schools
- poor state of repair of existing water fountains
- taps in toilets were main source of free water but students understandably reluctant to regard this as a suitable source of drinking water
- lack of time between lessons
- long queues at fountains, particularly in summer
- lack of refillable water bottles
- drinking during lessons discouraged
- cost of bottled water.

Groups were asked to produce their own ideas for promoting the benefits of drinking tap water

- the younger pupils (Years 7 and 8) were spontaneously more enthusiastic. Their promotional ideas included water monitors, rewards for drinking water, stickers etc
- special promotions appeared less relevant to the older students
- this age group will simply drink more if it's made available
 - 'give us decent water fountains and we'll drink water'
- for older teenagers the more important issues are:
 - health: e.g. complexion, weight
 - style: e.g. well designed fountains & bottles.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- students are not drinking enough water in the course of the school day
- the major issue: A lack of drinking fountains, in easily accessible locations, that are hygienic and well maintained
- students need more information about the benefits of drinking tap water as opposed to bottled water
- they also need more information about the benefits of plain water as an aid to concentration in class

- for older students, availability of fountains rather than promotion appears the key to increased consumption.

In response to these initial findings, Anglian Water launched a pilot study to further investigate issues relating to drinking water by installing mains-fed coolers, introducing refillable water bottles for sale at school, and carried out a before and after survey of the pilot study

In November 2006.....(before)

The questionnaire was completed by total of 3368 students in 3 pilot schools across Years 7-13.

MAIN FINDINGS

- just 1% drank the recommended amount of 8 glasses of water per day
- almost a quarter (24%) of students claimed never to drink water at school
- 77% wanted more water fountains to be available
- 69% thought refillable bottles should be available to buy at school

CONCLUSIONS

- students are not drinking enough water in the course of the school day, with many not drinking any water at all! This clearly has a negative effect on health, learning and concentration, all affecting a child's ability to perform well at school
- younger students are clearly ahead of the older students in positive behaviour and attitude to drinking tap water. This may be explained by the popularity of drinking water in primary schools, with Year 7s bringing this experience to secondary school (see below)
- attitude, as well as availability, is an issue with older students
- older students are less inclined to make an effort to drink tap water but more enthusiastic if facilities are easily available
- a lack of accessible, hygienic and well maintained drinking fountains is preventing good hydration practice
- refillable water bottles need to be on site and readily available
- poor toilet facilities are causing students to limit their water intake so they can avoid visiting them
- good practice in primary schools may be a factor in the more positive attitude of Year 7 and 8 students towards tap water.

In April 2007.....after the installation of mains fed coolers, provision of bottles and positive promotion of drinking water

Student questionnaire completed by total of 2,925 students and 200 teachers in our 3 pilot schools across Year7– Year13

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- students (83%) now find it easier to get a drink of water for free, especially between lessons
- the proportion of students never drinking water at school has fallen significantly
- 39% of students claim to drink more water – 3.5 extra glasses per day
- increases particularly noticeable in older children
- students who drink more claim to be: less thirsty in class; concentrating better in class; performing better at sport/PE; feeling healthier than those not drinking more
- nearly 70% of students claim to use a refillable water bottle at some stage during the week
- consumption up at key times (at breaks, lunchtime, after sport)
- those students drinking more like the experience of the new coolers, the chilled water and the taste
- further refinements are possible, e.g. more coolers, different locations, maintenance issues, delivery speeds.

Link with Education and Health

The National Healthy School Programme (NHSP) is a joint initiative by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Health (DH), and it is responsible for implementing the government's strategy for schools in the field of health and social well being. Water in schools comes under the healthy eating criteria. The School Food Trust is the Government appointed body to implement their strategy on nutritional standards in schools. The nutritional standards which came into effect in September 2006, will become part of Ofsted reporting from September 2007, making it mandatory for all schools to have access to free fresh water under the standards for drinking water.

By 2009, the Government wants every UK school to be working towards achieving national Healthy School status a criteria of which is access to free, fresh drinking water.