



Student may be charged for smelly hair

HALIFAX, Canada – A Halifax-area teenager may face criminal charges for wearing Dippity Do hair gel and Aqua Velva deodorant to school after his teacher complained about his ‘fragrant abuse’ of the school’s no-scent policy.

Gary Falkenham, 17, has been suspended twice from Duncan MacMillan High School in Sheet Harbour, Nova Scotia, for violating the school’s strict policy banning perfumes, aftershaves and scented hairsprays and deodorants. Last month, he was forced to stay home for two days. His latest violation led his teacher, Tanya MacDonald (who is asthmatic) to launch a formal complaint with the police. “If her reaction was severe enough you could actually even look at a possible assault charge²⁾,” Constable Scott Manning said.

The school’s strict policy is designed to prevent scented products from bothering sensitive students and staff, including those with allergies and asthma. “It’s a touchy area,” Manning said. “You can’t let your teachers become ill because of it, but it’s also a difficult thing to prove and a lot of kids, I think, don’t see the seriousness of it.”

Meanwhile, Gary’s mother, Shelley Falkenham, thinks calling police over the breaking of a scent rule is ridiculous. “The boy cares about his hygiene and he’s being punished for it.” She was called to the police station last month to discuss a complaint filed against her son because of his smell. “I just looked at the police officer and said: ‘Are you serious?’”

The formal policy was brought in at the start of this year after two years of trying in vain to get the 275 students at the rural school to follow the rules willingly, said Paulette Tate, the vice-principal. A student caught wearing smelly deodorant or other body products is given a warning the first two times and sent to wash off the offending fragrance. A third violation results in a suspension from school. As many as 10 students have been suspended this year, Tate said.

The majority of schools around Halifax have some sort of scent policy, joining public buildings and a growing number of private companies that are banning strong smells in the city. A few schools in Ontario have joined the crusade as well. A school in Stratford, Ontario, has a ban on scented products, and Peel District School Board, one of Canada’s largest, has run awareness campaigns that tell students: “No scents is good sense.”

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assault charge (a legal term): if somebody is ‘charged with assault’ it means he is accused of having attacked a person violently