

Health and safety responsibilities in school

Staff meeting 21/11/2022



Introduction

Employers, school leaders and school staff all have responsibilities with regard to health and safety, and a duty to take care of pupils in the same way a sensible parent would.

Children should be able to experience a wide range of activities and the school's health and safety measures should not hinder this.

Children should be taught to understand and manage the risks that are a normal part of life.

Risks should be assessed and managed with common sense, and health and safety procedures should always be proportionate to the risks of an activity.

Staff should be given appropriate training to ensure they can keep themselves and children safe, and manage risks effectively.

Employers' responsibilities

The school employer, such as the LA or proprietor, is responsible for ensuring that risks to staff and pupils are managed in a way that is reasonably practicable.

The overall legal accountability for the health and safety of all employees and others belongs to the employer; however, some health and safety functions can be delegated to members of staff in the school.

The employer should ensure that policies are in place to manage health and safety – these include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Working at Heights Policy
- COSHH Policy

These policies are put in place, and should be adhered to at all times, to guarantee the safety of yourselves and others.

The employer is also responsible for:

- Implementing arrangements that manage the risks to staff, pupils and visitors who may be affected by the school's activities.
- Informing employees about the significant risks in school and precautions they can take to mitigate them.
- Ensuring employees have the relevant information and training to manage risks on a daily basis, including access to competent health and safety advice.
- Checking that the control measures have been implemented and remain appropriate and effective.

The responsibilities of the governing board

The governing board may have control over the premises during and after the school day, and may also oversee a delegated budget for some maintenance activities.

If the governing board is also the trustee of the charity that runs a school, and/or directors of the company responsible for the school, its role is identical to that of the employer.

The governing board must:

- Take reasonable steps to ensure the school is following the employer's policy and procedures, e.g. through regular discussion at governance meetings.
- Ensure staff receive adequate training that allows them to carry out their responsibilities.
- Promote a sensible approach to health and safety.
- Work closely with the headteacher and SLT to support sensible health and safety management.

Leaders' responsibilities

The headteacher and SLT must manage risks sensibly, rather than try to eliminate them altogether. Visible leadership should be provided to the whole school so that staff feel motivated, supported and empowered to focus on the things that matter.

School leaders must:

- Ensure the school is following the employer's health and safety policy, and has effective arrangements for managing health and safety risks.
- Maintain effective communications with employers, governors and school staff, and give clear information regarding significant risks to all pupils, parents, contractors and other visitors to the site.
- Confirm that staff have the appropriate training to deal with risks in their areas of responsibility, and ensure that staff understand their responsibilities, how to access support and how to manage risks responsibly.
- Work with the school's safety representatives and safety committees to ensure health and safety is managed appropriately.

- Manage and monitor the school's purchasing and contracting procedures to ensure associated risks are managed.
- Advise contractors of specific risks, and oversee their activities whilst on site.
- Make sure that all staff and visitors are aware of the on-site procedures and precautions to follow.
- Oversee the implementation, monitoring and review of training procedures.
- Prepare reports and returns.
- Lead in accident and incident reporting.

Due to their expertise in topic areas, subject leaders are best placed to advise on the arrangements for assessing and managing risk in their department. Schools should appoint nominated safety leads in each department to take a primary role in providing support across the school's range of activities.

Nominated health and safety leads will have:

- Sufficient authority to take the lead responsibility for health and safety.
- Time, resources and the ability to fulfil their role.

Staff responsibilities

All staff have a duty to protect their own health and safety, and that of others around them; it is a priority to maintain and protect the safety of the pupils in their classroom.

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Meet and Brief

Staff must:

- Work in compliance with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
- Use or wear any safety equipment, protective devices and/or clothing when required, e.g. when conducting science experiments.
- Use the right equipment, such as a stepladder instead of standing on a desk.
- Not remove, or make ineffective, any protective devices required by their employer.
- Lift and carry equipment in line with any instructions.
- Report to their employer on any violation of the Act and regulations.
- Report hazards, such as breakages, spillages or unsafe equipment.
- Maintain a safe environment and mitigate risks as much as possible.

Getting the balance right

Health and safety rules should never hinder pupils' learning – hands-on lessons are an essential part of learning. These can include science experiments and classroom demonstrations which can help pupils learn about managing risks and taking precautions.

It is impossible to prevent pupils from ever encountering harm. Well-managed risks are good for them; it engages their imagination, helps them learn and teaches them to manage risks in the future. If pupils understand risks they will be aware of what is happening around them and will be prepared for life outside of school.

Sensible health and safety management means that:

- The SLT understands the health and safety policy and applies it practically to the real risks in the school.
- Staff have clearly established roles and responsibilities with regard to health and safety.
- Paperwork is kept to a minimum: all risks and hazards are clearly documented and kept under control.
- Leaders are regularly consulting with staff when seeking practical solutions to health and safety issues.

Training

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to provide adequate information, training and supervision to enable work to be carried out safely.

Teachers must be provided with proper training and equipment to do their job.

This training should cover:

- Emergency procedures, e.g. fire or first aid
- Safe use of equipment
- Electrical safety
- Manual handling
- Safe use of display screen equipment
- Possible exposure to asbestos – this is mapped where there is non in classrooms
- Stress management
- Personal safety
- Control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH)

All members of staff and contractors must be given an appropriate level of information on the risks they may face, the measures that are in place to mitigate these, and how to follow emergency procedures.

Training should be provided in a form that is easy to understand, and will take place during working hours.

What's next?

- Reinforce your knowledge of the health and safety responsibilities by reviewing the documents and videos on the school H&S website page.
- Know who the nominated safety leads are within the school: Sarah Gill and Kevin Fryer.