QBE

## Insight – a closer look at

# Classroom safety

Education

# Education

## Classroom safety contents



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# Classroom safety

Schools should provide a healthy and safe place for all who use them including pupils, staff, visitors, holiday clubs and foreign language students.

Written risk assessments are not required for every classroom activity so a checklist that enables schools to feel confident that they comply with legislation at the same time as practically ensuring classroom safety is essential. Checklists provide a useful tool for the school management team for reviewing whole-school risk assessments. The use of checklists can generate findings that form short, medium and long-term action plans to help schools continually improve their risk management approach.

## The basics

The checklist below has been produced to allow a record of classroom assessments to be made. Class teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and the school management team can use such a checklist to focus their attention and record the process of identifying and reducing classroom risks. The checklist can be used as required e.g. at the start of a week or at the start of term to provide reassurance to teaching staff that the most common areas of risk in the classroom are being adequately controlled.

## Classroom specifics

### Laboratories

Portable power tools and a wide range of gas, electrical and mechanical appliances are increasingly used in schools. The potential dangers, the special safety requirements and the importance of proper electrical and gas connections must be known and understood. In relation to general environment consider:

- ☐ Providing a non-slip floor surface that is impervious to chemicals.
- ☐ Ensure that flooring manufacturers cleaning instructions are incorporated into the school cleaning procedures.
- ☐ Good levels of ventilation (making sure that upstairs windows have opening restraints that can be opened in an emergency).
- ☐ Fitting light stop pale coloured blinds to prevent sun glare and allow the classroom to be dimmed for some demonstrations and experiments.
- ☐ Control lighting zones with separate switches and avoid energy saving lighting as the lights could go off part way through an experiment. The lighting levels should be at least 300 lux at the work surface.
- ☐ Two maintained $CO_2$ fire extinguishers and a fire blanket should be provided in the laboratory.

Special safety requirements relate to school laboratories and workshops include the need for professionally installed and serviced electrical and gas connections. In particular:

- ☐ Faulty equipment should be withdrawn from use until repaired. Electrical equipment should be switched off after use and plugs removed from sockets.
- ☐ Providing one electrical socket per pupil is recommended. Portable low voltage supply units should be provided if necessary.
- ☐ Main switches and valves should be turned off at the end of the school day as a safety precaution and to maintain their efficient working order.
- ☐ All gas, water and electricity supply into the laboratories should be able to be isolated as they enter the lab with an easy to reach shut off control. An additional emergency control valve is required within the lab.
- ☐ Electrical outlets should ideally have warning lights and safety signs and should be switched off when gas or power is cut off to them.
- ☐ A notice should be prominently displayed in the classroom giving information on first aid treatment for electric shock.
- ☐ A competent person who is trained in accordance with HSE standards should service gas appliances regularly.
- ☐ A-level chemistry laboratories should be supplied with at least two fume cupboards. The cupboards should be ducted and have the end of the duct at least 1 metre above roof level.
- ☐ There should be one gas tap per pupil and gas taps should not be positioned under curtains, blinds, under cupboards or in front of windows. Taps should have definite on/off positions, anti rotate fixings and non-return valves.
- ☐ Cables and pipes should not hang from the ceiling. They should be colour coded and have the direction of flow indicated. Gas and electricity outlets should be within 600mm of where the pupil is sitting.

### It's all in the preparation

Science block preparation rooms should be provided with a first aid box, eyewash, a suitable $CO_2$ fire extinguisher, a fire blanket, an alarm and a telephone. The preparation room floor should have no drain to ensure that spillages do not enter the drains. A suitable set of steps should be provided to allow the technicians to reach items off storage.

The preparation rooms should have appropriate signs on the door and the door should be kept locked when the room is not in use. The door should have a viewing window and should provide 30-minute fire protection. Light fittings in the prep rooms should be flameproof. Ventilation systems should provide ≥ 2 air changes per hour usually by forced extraction with quiet operation (≤ 65bD at 300mm) from the fan.

Gas cylinders should be kept chained in racks and kept away from flammable liquids and radioactive materials.

**Science block preparation rooms should be provided with the following:**

- first aid box
- eye wash
- $CO_2$ fire extinguisher
- fire blanket
- alarm
- telephone

## Workshops

Schools and colleges with woodworking machines will need to comply with the requirements of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (1998).

- ☐ A wall mounted emergency stop for each electrical machine maybe necessary within the classroom environment. The risk assessment will also need to adequately address the risk of 'kick-back' and classroom management.
- ☐ All machinery must be to a standard that meets statutory regulations in relation to guarding provision and safety mechanisms such as braking of moving parts, safety interlocks etc. and be subject to regular, systematic maintenance.
- ☐ The machine must be positioned in an appropriate location to prevent users being contacted by other people using the classroom and to ensure that the teacher can see the activity on the machines.
- ☐ Ensure that a competent person inspects local exhaust ventilation every 12 months with appropriate records being retained.

Appropriate storage facilities are essential in laboratories and workshops. The storage for any flammable chemicals should provide secure half-hour fire resistance storage that can contain any spilled contents. Appropriate storage should also be provided for radioactive materials, glassware, equipment, cleaning material, pupils' coats and personal belongings etc.

Ensure that the children are provided with adequate personal protective like eye protection and ensure that the equipment is kept clean and in good condition.

Gas and electricity outlets should be within

**600mm**

of where the pupil is sitting

## Slips and Trips

Statistics show that slips and trips are a major cause of accidents in educational establishments for pupils, students, visitors and staff. Key issues to consider when assessing the potential for slips and trips in a classroom include:

- ☐ Suitability of flooring surfaces.
- ☐ Pedestrian routes and overcrowding at lesson change over time.
- ☐ Quality of lighting.
- ☐ Slopes and steps in old buildings
- ☐ Hazards introduced by maintenance work.

Actions to take in preventing slips and trips include:

- ☐ Procedures for the quick and effective clean up of spillages.
- ☐ Following floor surface manufacturers instructions on cleaning.
- ☐ Use of barriers, cones and warning signs to keep pupils away from wet floors and demarcate the areas being cleaned.
- ☐ Do not leave out barriers and signs once the floor is clean and dry, as pedestrians will ignore them in the future.
- ☐ Educate staff in housekeeping issues.

## Summary and recommendations

The Departmental Head(s) of sciences, design technology and wood and metal working activities should all take advice from and work closely with the Bursar to ensure that health and safety legislation pertinent to their departments is adhered to. Classrooms can house hazardous activities and schools need to ensure that the classes are appropriately resourced and that activities are risk assessed. The following checklist will help teachers maintain their classrooms in a safe condition.

| Risk Areas | Questions to ask | Yes | Further Action Needed | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Movement around the classroom (slips /trips) | • Is flooring in a good condition?<br>• Do changes in floor levels or materials need highlighting?<br>• Are gangways between desks kept clear?<br>• Are trailing electrical leads/cables prevented?<br>• Is lighting bright enough to allow safe access/exit?<br>• Are their procedures for dealing with spillages e.g. water, blood from cuts?<br>For Standalone classrooms:<br>• Are steps/ramps properly maintained?<br>• Do access steps/ramps have handrails? | | | |
| Work at Height (Falls) | • Is an 'elephant foot' step stool or a stepladder used?<br>• Is a window-opener used for high-level windows? | | | |
| Fixtures and Furniture | • Check the condition and secure fastening of cupboards, display boards, shelving?<br>• Is furniture in good condition and suitable for the size of user (children or adult)?<br>• Are portable TVs, PCs etc. stable, are trolleys used safely?<br>• Are all window restrictions in good repair?<br>• Are radiators and heaters protected to avoid them burning people? | | | |
| Manual Handling | • Are trolleys used for moving heavy equipment e.g. computers? | | | |
| Computers and similar equipment | • Have workstation assessments been completed for computer users?<br>• Have pupils been instructed on good practice when using computers? | | | |
| Electrical equipment and services | • Are fixed electrical switches and plug sockets in good condition?<br>• Are plugs, cables, extension leads in good repair? | | | |
| Asbestos | • Has the location and condition been provided and explained?<br>• Has guidance been given regards use of asbestos walls or ceilings? | | | |
| Fire | If a classroom has fire exit doors, are they:<br>• Unobstructed, kept unlocked and easy to open from inside?<br>• Is fire-fighting equipment in the classroom?<br>• Are fire evacuation instructions clearly displayed?<br>• Is the fire drill procedure known to staff and pupils? And for disabled/ vulnerable staff and pupils? | | | |
| Classroom ventilation and heating | • Is the room naturally ventilated?<br>• Can a comfortable room temperature be maintained in the classroom?<br>• Are blinds/other measures in place to protect from heat or glare from the sun? | | | |

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