

# Risk Assessment Guidance for Schools



LONDON BOROUGH OF  
**BEXLEY**

# RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR SCHOOLS (revised June 2013)

## 1. Introduction

It is a legal requirement for all employers to carry out risk assessments. Risk assessments are simply a formal examination of what could cause harm to people. This process enables those involved to weigh up whether precautions are adequate or if more should be done to prevent harm to staff, pupils or others eg: visitors, parents, contractors etc.

Accidents and ill health can ruin lives, damage reputations and cost money. So apart from being a legal requirement, risk assessments make good sense, focusing on prevention rather than reacting when things go wrong. In many cases simple measures are very effective and not always costly.

In Community or Voluntary Controlled Schools the responsibility to carry out risk assessments in schools has been delegated to the Head Teacher. In Academies, Foundation or Voluntary Aided schools the governor is the employer, therefore it is their responsibility. The Head Teacher or Governor may delegate the task of actually assessing the risks to a nominated person in their employment, but the responsibility remains theirs.

As well as the general requirement for risk assessment, some legislation also specifically requires risks to be assessed. These include regulations relating to manual handling, use of hazardous substances, display screen equipment, work equipment, fire and noise.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance Five Steps to Risk Assessment

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf>

## 2. Risk assessment in practice

There are no fixed rules about how a general risk assessment should be carried out. The HSE advises a simple 'five step' approach to risk assessment:

- **Step 1** Look for the hazards
- **Step 2** Decide who might be harmed and how
- **Step 3** Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
- **Step 4** Record your findings
- **Step 5** Review your assessment periodically and revise it if necessary

It is important to evaluate or 'rate' the risks and deal with the highest risks first.

- A **hazard** is anything that can cause harm.
- A **risk** is a combination of the likelihood of harm occurring and the severity or consequences should it occur.

### **Ask yourself:**

- can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- if not ..... are sufficient precautions already in place to protect people; or does more need to be done?

### **How to identify hazards and Information sources**

There are many sources of information about controlling hazards and Head Teachers are expected to take reasonable steps to identify risks by looking at relevant legislation, guidance, supplier manuals, manufacturers' instructions, reading trade press and seeking advice from competent sources. You should also use relevant examples of good practice within schools.

### **Sources of information include:**

- [www.bexley.gov.uk/saferschools](http://www.bexley.gov.uk/saferschools)
- [www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/healthandsafety](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/healthandsafety)
- HSE Infoline for telephone enquiries on health and safety issues (telephone 0845 345 0055)
- The Health and Safety Executive website ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))
- HSE Books (for free leaflets and priced publications) (telephone 01787 881165)
- The London Fire Brigade ([www.london-fire.gov.uk](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk)) (telephone 020 7587 4601)
- [www.cleapss.org.uk](http://www.cleapss.org.uk) and Helpline 01895 251496 or e-mail [science@cleapss.org.uk](mailto:science@cleapss.org.uk)

### **3. Deciding who might be harmed**

Identify the groups of people who might be harmed, consider staff, pupils, visitors, contractors, the public etc.

Extra thought may be needed for new staff, young people, new or expectant mothers and people with disabilities.

### **4. How can I control hazards?**

Your risk assessment should identify the ways in which you control the identified hazards and reduce the risk. These are usually called 'control measures' or 'precautions'. Because risk management is about preventing loss or injury it is vitally important that the precautions that you identify are put in place. The precautions must be maintained and reviewed in the light of experience or when working conditions or practices change.

When looking at most hazards - supervision, employee consultation, provision of adequate safety information, training and employee awareness are common precautions that should be included.

The use of personal protective equipment should be considered as a last resort – effective risk management means avoiding, controlling and reducing risks at source.

Because it is not always possible to put in place the precautions that are needed immediately, you may need to consider short, medium and long-term solutions.

Keeping good records (for maintenance, repair, inspection and training) will enable you to show that the precautions you have identified are in place.

### **Successful health and safety management**

Schools that design out the risks are much more successful and in control of health and safety. Ensure you carry out a risk assessment at the planning stage of any works, new building/refurbishment or before new equipment or staff are brought into the premises. This will help to prevent accidents and could save money in the long run.

Events or ideas considered by PTA's or PA's should be risk assessed at the planning stage, and advice and information sought as necessary to ensure safety.

Be cautious with offers of gifts, unless you are certain there are no health and safety concerns it is often better to say a polite no thank you. For example, some toys or play equipment are only designed for domestic use etc.

### **Model RA5 Form**

A new model risk assessment form has been developed based upon the 'five step' approach. See the form at the end of this guide.

The new RA5 form is a more simplified format. On the back of the form there is a risk rating system to allow you to evaluate and prioritise the risks so you can address the highest risks first. The actual risk rating you decide upon in your risk assessment for each hazard should be inserted in the column marked "risk rating\*" as for example "A2 H" – likely and extremely harmful to give a rating of High.

Recording the exact rating "A1 through to C3" allows you to justify how you came to your decision of high, medium or low.

Eg: A3 is extremely harmful but unlikely leading you to give a rating "medium".  
C1 is slightly harmful but highly likely also leading you to a rating of "medium".  
By recording A3 or C1 respectively you can justify your rating decision of medium.

Each of the ratings is associated with an action phrase to enable you to prioritise the hazards eg: A2 H – is a high priority – urgent attention required to reduce severity and likelihood.

The blank form can be downloaded and completed as a word document from [www.bexley.gov.uk/saferschools](http://www.bexley.gov.uk/saferschools)

Schools are advised to use this form to allow consistency in approach. Remember that risk assessments are a preventive approach to risk management – the precautions that you identify by risk assessment must be implemented and monitored to ensure that a safe working environment is achieved and maintained.

### **Model Assessments**

CLEAPSS provide many model risk assessments for Design and Technology and Science. The models for science can be downloaded from the CLEAPSS website at [www.cleapss.org.uk](http://www.cleapss.org.uk) Contact the CLEAPSS helpline 01895 251496 for security access details.

You should check that any measures are correct for your own school and adapt/tailor the assessment as necessary to show how you manage the risks locally.

Model risk assessments have been produced in WORD for general and curricular assessments in response to a request from Head Teachers to allow models to be more easily tailored to the school.

The models are **not** a full assessment, and not all hazards that may exist in your school have necessarily been included.

The model RA5 forms have been produced for particular hazards with a list of suggested control measures. They present common considerations for controlling risks in a format that shows the hazards in the first column and illustrates how someone might be hurt. The column “Further controls necessary” includes suggested actions or controls.

Depending on your particular circumstances you may find some or all of the hazards exist and you will need to tailor the models to suit your needs.

There is a need to then review the relevant model assessments and for you to place control measures into the correct column i.e. are they existing controls that you already have in place, or are they further control measures that are needed. The risk is assessed on this basis of the existing control measures you have in place, and then as a result of further control measures you should be able to bring the risk rating down (see column “new risk rating\*\*”).

Some of the models are based on generic assessments produced by volunteers from various staffing groups in schools to make sure the contents are realistic and a true reflection of school activities and conditions.

Others include suggested control measures identified by the HSE to help give confidence in the management of the risks. However, the suggested controls are not exhaustive and it is vital that you consider all the control measures possible within your school and include these in your assessment.

It is important that you have identified all the significant hazards within the school and have assessed these. The models are not an exhaustive list and you may need to complete some risk assessments using the blank RA5 form from first principals.

The action you need to take is to review the suggested control measures in the “further controls necessary” column and cut and paste any measures you already implement into the “existing controls” column. You should then assess the risk using the guide on the reverse of the RA5 form (shown at the end of this guide).

As previously mentioned in the section on blank model RA5 forms, the actual risk rating you decide upon in your assessment for each hazard should be recorded on the table, so that you can always justify how you came to your decision eg: A1 U, B2 H etc.

It is then important to identify who is responsible for any further control measures needed and give a target date for them to be implemented.

Obviously some measures may have budget implications or have a need to be carried out during school holidays etc. You can identify short, medium and long term control measures to demonstrate that you have fully assessed the risk and are taking or planning appropriate action by completing the action column.

Identifying a person responsible makes them accountable so the action is more likely to be taken. The Head Teacher will need to review the action targets to ensure adequate progress is made.

The risk assessments are intended to form part of every school’s management system and, in simple terms, formalise working arrangements and practices in a systematic way. They are a valuable tool for identifying and monitoring conditions which could cause harm and for making sure the necessary precautions are in place to reduce the risk of injury.

By using this technique we check on our working standards, environment and arrangements in a consistent way. This allows reassurance that existing precautions are satisfactory or can help to identify the gaps you need to work on.

Staff should be consulted in the risk assessment process to ensure that all hazards and control measures have been identified.

The assessment should be signed and dated by the Head Teacher or senior representative and a sensible review date inserted (see below).

## **What are the realistic benefits?**

By looking at the way we do things, the places we work, and the people around us we can make sure that preventative or precautionary measures are in place to reduce risk and injury. Where not enough is being done, additional action can be taken, such as arranging training, providing the right equipment, introducing inspection and testing regimes or, simply, changing the way people work or do activities. The production of suitable assessments enables the education authority, and those managing schools directly, to demonstrate good management practice which complies with legal requirements. Certainly, any Health and Safety Executive Inspector visiting a school will expect Head Teachers and staff to be familiar with risk assessments and to be able to produce documentary and practical evidence of their existence. The availability of risk assessments has also become an expectation within the OFSTED inspection process.

## **Monitoring the implementation of risk assessments**

The enforcing authority, the Health and Safety Executive, are aware that all schools have received Manual's with advice on risk assessment. This is an update for your manual. Any visiting or enquiring inspector will be interested in judging the effectiveness of the assessments by looking for evidence that they work in practice. It is likely that inspectors will ask to see copies of relevant assessments during investigations of accidents and incidents. You may be aware that reforms were introduced to secure the exchange of information between parties involved in personal injury claims. Risk assessments may be requested by legal and insurance representatives as part of the disclosure requirements. Such claims are subject to tight deadlines so assessments must be readily available.

## **Review of assessments**

Developing or adopting risk assessments is not a 'once and for all' activity. The interval between origination and review depends on the nature of risks and the degree of change likely to occur. Review if any of the following take place:

- If the nature of an activity, practice or process alters
- If there are changes to the building
- If new equipment is purchased
- In the light of new legislation
- If staff medical conditions change
- Following investigation of an accident or ill health

Each school that adopts any RA5 model risk assessments must make sure they review them to check they remain relevant as time moves on. Should conditions remain stable, with no indications suggesting a need for reconsideration, then a reasonable interval would be a year from the date shown on the front of the assessment.

These local reviews should be initiated by Head Teachers or nominated senior representatives within the school.

### **Circulation of risk assessments within the school**

Headteachers should establish arrangements to ensure relevant assessments are available to teachers, assistants, caretakers, helpers, safety representatives, contractors and any others who may need the information. Staff should be involved in the whole process and training given where appropriate so that there is an understanding of the need for control measures to ensure implementation.

Re-inventing the wheel is often very time consuming and frustrating. If you develop any risk assessments that you feel would be beneficial to other schools, please send them to [schools.healthandsafety@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:schools.healthandsafety@bexley.gov.uk) so that more models can be included on the website:

### **What about risk assessments for individuals?**

There may be an occasion where an individual risk assessment is needed for someone to be able to return to school after ill health or an accident e.g. a member of staff or pupil on crutches, post surgery etc.

A blank RA5 form can be used to consider all the hazards that may arise so that control measures are pre-planned and already in place before their return. Other staff and pupils can then be made aware if necessary.

It is important to consider all the activities that may be undertaken, including curriculum activities in the classroom, playtime etc. and identify any hazards you can. Consider the potential for harm to themselves and others e.g. the injury may get knocked causing pain, infection or complications, but also they may trip up other members of staff or pupils with their crutches.

Additional space may also be needed to accommodate crutches or wheelchairs in the classroom and various other locations in the school, this should be worked out and accommodated before they come back. Entire seating arrangements may need to be altered where specially designed wheelchairs are used, particularly ones that involve the person almost lying down, or the legs to be raised out front of the chair, maneuvering of such chairs also takes up more space than you might think. Consider busy times e.g. class changes, lunch times, beginning and end of the day etc. and put in place measures to avoid the rush.

It is helpful if you are able to discuss the risk assessment and activities with the person returning where possible, and it may be advisable to seek the advice of their GP/consultant as to what they can and can't do, especially post operative, as activities may need to be restricted in the early days. Any risk of infection etc. also needs to be considered if a wound has not completely healed.

If the consultant/GP has a full list of their duties/activities this will help them determine when it is safe for them to return to work and when they can carry out their full duties/activities or what should be restricted for how long.

In the case of a pupil also consult with the parent and check that they are happy with the risk assessment that you have prepared.

If the return to work is for someone who has been to occupational health you may have a report of their limitations e.g. manual handling, strenuous activity etc. Run any draft risk assessment past them if you have any concerns.

The risk assessment should always be reviewed as soon as possible after return, at the end of the first day, and regularly after that, and the person should be asked to advise you immediately of any concerns. The time period between reviews can slowly be increased e.g. daily, weekly, monthly etc. as appropriate. Alterations should be made to the risk assessment wherever necessary and you must ensure that relevant persons are informed of any changes.

As well as a risk assessment you must consider whether there is a need for a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) in the event of an emergency to ensure their safe evacuation. Guidance on PEEPs is available on the saferschools website and a questionnaire and action plan for completion.

Please note you cannot rely on the London Fire Brigade to get them out safely, this is your responsibility.

Other situations where an individual risk assessment may be carried out can be for a pupil who has been violent or excluded for bad behaviour. You may be asked to complete a risk assessment before a suspended or excluded child is permitted to return to school. Other situations may be for medical conditions and PE inclusion, you can again use a blank RA5 form for these or similar circumstances using all the information within this guidance. Seek advice from professionals with experience in preparing such risk assessments.

### **Where to get help or advice**

If you have any concerns or enquiries please contact schools Health and Safety on 020 3045 5642 or [schools.healthandsafety@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:schools.healthandsafety@bexley.gov.uk)

<b>Topic:</b>		<b>People at Risk:</b>	
<b>Assessment carried out by:</b>		<b>Date :</b>	<b>Date of Review:</b>

<b>Hazards</b> (Potential to cause harm & consider how a person may be hurt)	<b>Existing Controls</b>	<b>Risk rating*</b>	<b>Further controls necessary</b>	<b>Target Date &amp; By whom</b>	<b>New Risk Rating**</b>

## RISK RATING FORM

RISK RATING – Risks need to be prioritised to ensure the most serious risks are dealt with first. There are many methods of risk rating and the following is an example that can be used. Risk rating usually uses a formula to help prioritisation. The formula given below is based on an assessment of the consequences and likelihood of the hazard resulting in harm.

### USING THE RISK RATING FORMULA

Assign a rating from box 1 (extremely harmful to slightly harmful) to denote the probable severity of harm or consequences of the hazard.

Assign a rating from box 2 (highly likely to unlikely) to denote the likelihood of the event occurring.

Look up the combination in the risk-rating chart (table 1) and link it to the action phrase.

BOX 1 – RATE SEVERITY/CONSEQUENCE
<b>Extremely Harmful</b> = death, major injury, major damage or loss to property or equipment
<b>Harmful</b> = over 3 day injury, damage to property or equipment
<b>Slightly harmful</b> = minor injury, minor damage to property or equipment

BOX 2 – RATE LIKELIHOOD
<b>Highly likely</b> = extremely or highly likely to occur
<b>Likely</b> = frequent, often or likely to occur
<b>Unlikely</b> = slight chance of occurring

**TABLE 1 – RISK RATING CHART**

	Extremely Harmful (A)	Harmful (B)	Slightly Harmful (C)
Highly Likely (1)	Unacceptable (U)	High (H)	Medium (M)
Likely (2)	High (H)	Medium (M)	Low (L)
Unlikely (3)	Medium (M)	Low (L)	Trivial (T)

### ACTION PHRASES:

- A1**            **U - Unacceptable** - must receive immediate attention – activity should be halted until adequate controls implemented.
- A2/B1**        **H - High** – high priority - urgent attention required to reduce severity and/or likelihood
- A3/B2/C1**    **M - Medium** – medium priority, must receive attention to reduce severity or likelihood
- B3/C2**        **L - Low** – lower priority, but must receive attention to verify if risk can be reduced
- C3**            **T – Trivial** - lowest priority