

RAISING THE STANDARD

ABLS Briefing Note

January 2018

Fire safety in your school

Fire safety is one of the most important concerns when running a school. Ensuring the school offers a safe environment for the public requires a number of checks, training and management awareness. While it is unusual to find accredited schools with major fire safety issues, all schools should remember that fines, suspensions of business and even imprisonment of responsible persons can result from a failure to meet statutory requirements.

The key focus for fire safety is on the school premises. Confirming these are fit for purposes should be a key requirement of purchasing or leasing the space. Owners should understand the suitable loading of the space, the quality of escape systems and routes, and any history of fire safety issues in the building. This is particularly important in leased buildings where landlord services may include oversight of fire system checks and fire equipment provision. Overall responsibility for the student safety rests with the school and landlord activity must be rigorously monitored.

But schools should also be aware of the fire safety provision in homestay accommodation and places visited as part of social programmes. Schools' duty of care to students could extend to a range of facilities if they are part of services that are paid for, and selected by, the school.

How to prepare your school

The best place to start in preparing and reviewing fire safety is by running a fire risk assessment. This is a statutory requirement and it provides an excellent tool for school managers to ensure they have taken a comprehensive approach.

The *Short Guide to Making Your Premises Safe from Fire* (HMG, 2005) provides a brief list of areas to consider in a fire risk assessment : identify fire hazards; identify people at risk; evaluate and act; record, plan and train; review.

How to train your staff

Training will vary depending on the facility, activity and role of staff. Everyone should be trained in raising the alarm, in good practice with combustible materials and in basic operational procedures (such as keeping exits unblocked).

Fire Wardens will be trained to a more detailed level and work to ensure evacuation procedures are executed correctly. A wide range of courses and providers are available for this purpose, both in-person and online.

In This Note

- Fire Safety overview
- Staff considerations
- Relevant ABLS Standard Criteria
- Inspectorate view
- Useful links

'As an employer you must take account of the risk to both your employees and other relevant persons to the extent to which you have control of the premises and other employers in the building must do the same.'

London Fire Brigade

[FAQ](#), January 2018

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Relevant ABLS Criteria

Fire safety is considered across a number of criteria including indirect consideration in areas such as welfare policy and environmental safety. The directly-relevant criteria occur in *1.3 Emergency Planning*, *2.3 Fire Equipment and Practice* and relevant sections of homestay and residential accommodation.

In many cases, criteria require evidence of correctly-applied procedures or equipment checks. As such, good document management is very important, along with records of activities, such as training, system tests and fire drills. These key events can be overlooked in busy schools unless a formal plan of activity is agreed and publicised amongst management staff.

Fire risk assessments and smoke detectors are expected in homestays while more significant fire systems and checks are required for residential accommodation. Where a school sells such accommodation (or maintains a privileged or unique relationship), the criteria are applied as part of the school inspection. Schools should check providers meet ABLS criteria and are recommended to detail requirements in any contractual arrangements.

View from the Inspectorate

As ever, inspectors will expect to find evidence in place of regular checks and use of responsible agencies to provide specialist services, such as equipment checks or fire safety assessments. Fire safety represents one of the most important themes within the ABLS Standard and so incomplete or unsuitable documentation is considered a serious concern.

Schools are strongly advised to consider daily practice - for example, avoiding wedging open doors, incomplete attendance registers and faulty smoke detectors. Assessment against ABLS criteria relies on this type of practical application as much as documentary evidence. Interviews with staff and homestay providers are also used to confirm that a good level of awareness of policy and procedure is maintained.

Inspectors will expect schools to have confirmed the nature of fire safety requirements across school premises. Where schools make use of space in multi-use buildings, and particularly in leased buildings, there will be an expectation that the school is working in harmony with the landlord to assure safety. Introduction of combustible material, sources of ignition, internal partition or changes to exits should be carefully considered and built into the school's fire risk assessment.

Useful links

Click on the following organisations to receive further advice on this area:

- [Fire Safety Risk Assessment : Educational Premises \(GOV.UK\)](#)
- [The Fire Protection Association](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive - classroom assessment](#)
- [Fire Safety Advice Centre](#)
- [London Fire Brigade](#)

The ABLS Briefing Notes are designed to help schools consider how to improve school management and access useful links. ABLS cannot accept any responsibility for third party information however and schools are encouraged to critically review all materials and advice.

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