

RISK ASSESSMENTS (612)

A. Risk Assessment Policy Statement

Risk Assessment is one of the keystones of good health and safety management; it can make a significant contribution to promoting welfare and reducing health and safety risks to employees, pupils, visitors and others who may be affected by the way in which the school operates.

All GDST schools, academies and Trust Office must complete comprehensive risk assessments for all potentially hazardous activities and situations, regularly review them, and implement the controls necessary to reduce the risks to an acceptable level following the principles of prevention: eliminate the hazard at source, reduce the hazard, prevent contact with the hazard, implement safe systems of work, employ personal protective equipment.

The school will provide training and comprehensive guidance for staff on how to complete risk assessments.

Risk Assessment Procedures

a) What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is a systematic method of looking at the school environment and activities to identify things that could happen or go wrong and cause injury or ill health, and deciding on the actions needed to prevent this. It is not always possible to remove all the risks, but they should be reduced or minimised to an acceptable level. It helps to protect:

- pupils, employees, visitors, contractors and members of the public,
- the school and its reputation,
- the GDST and its reputation.

b) What are the legal requirements?

Risk assessments are required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. They must be 'suitable and sufficient', ie they should show that:

- A proper check was made;
- All the people who could be affected were considered;
- All the obvious, significant hazards and risks were considered;
- The precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low;
- The relevant staff were included in the process.

Risk assessments must be written down if the organisation has more than 5 employees.

c) What are the Different Types of Risk Assessment?

There are three main types of risk assessment:

- **Risk assessments required by specific legislation** such as the Fire Safety Order, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, or the Work at Heights Regulations.
- **Area / activity** risk assessments such as classrooms, laboratories or offices and sports activities, educational visits and drama productions.
- **Individual (personal) risk assessments** triggered by a specific event such as a member of staff announcing she is pregnant, or if an individual pupil or member of staff has

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special needs relating to H&S e.g. as a result of a disability or illness - for more info follow the links in the right hand column.

d) Who Should Complete the Risk Assessment?

Heads of Department are responsible for completing and regularly reviewing the risk assessments for all the areas, activities and people that they are responsible for.

It is good practice for all the relevant staff in the department to be involved with completing and reviewing the risk assessments as they will have useful information about how the tasks or activities happen in practice, what can (and sometimes does) go wrong, and they are the people who will implement the controls – so they need to know what they are!

e) Who should be told about Any Significant Findings from the Risk Assessment?

If the risk assessment identifies significant risks which need specific action to control them, these must be brought to the attention of the affected people, e.g. staff, pupils or visitors. This could be in the form of a training session for staff, e.g. if a new piece of equipment is introduced; safety reminders at the beginning of a practical science lesson for pupils; or in a letter to parents prior to pupils going on a school trip or to an adventure activities centre.

f) Where Should the Risk Assessments be Stored?

The risk assessments should be easily available to the staff that they apply to. A master set should be stored on the [shared drive](#)

Each department should list all their risk assessments on an **index sheet**. This should include the following information and be stored with the Risk Assessments electronically.

- Name of risk assessment,
- Date of completion / last review,
- Name of person who completed / last reviewed RA,
- Date RA is next due for updating,
- Where RA is stored (soft or hard copy)

g) How Long Should Risk Assessments Be Kept?

There are no official requirements for the length of time records relating to risk assessments should be kept. However it is recommended that records should be kept for three years at the very least, since this is the period in which a civil claim can be made by an employee following an incident. If health risks are involved, then the length of time may have to be much longer e.g. 40 years, as claims can be made within three years of the disease or ill health being diagnosed.

h) Reviewing Risk Assessments

Risk assessments need to be reviewed regularly (normally annually) to ensure they are complete and up to date.

They must also be reviewed and updated if an accident occurs or there is a change in the circumstances, e.g:

- New or changed activities
- New or altered equipment
- New or altered environment
- People involved who are unfamiliar with the activity
- An incident occurs that casts doubt on whether the risk is adequately controlled?

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If nothing has changed since the last review, and the person reviewing the risk assessment is confident that all the risks have been considered, and appropriate controls are identified and implemented, then they simply re-date and re-initial the assessment.

i) Example and Template Risk Assessments

There are many examples and templates on the H&S page of the GDST HUB including ones suitable for general area and activity risk assessment - click [here](#)

j) Where Can I Get Training and More Information About Risk Assessments?

The GDST H&S e-learning system has a module on risk assessment - contact your DFO for more information on how to access this. The HSE website is very helpful, and there is a lot of useful information on risk assessments – click [HSE risk assessment guidance](#)

3 UNDERTAKING THE RISK ASSESSMENT

Schools are complex places and a significant number of risks exist. These can be broken down into seven groups:

- The site
- Curricular and pupil activities
- Employee activities
- Foreseeable emergencies
- Equipment chemicals and substances
- People who need extra care
- Events

The DFO will give guidance on the risk assessments that need to be completed. However, it is not exhaustive and the schools may identify other significant risks that need to be assessed.

a) SET THE LIMITS

First, set the limits of the risk assessment. What is being assessed? If it is an area, define it, e.g. ‘sports hall and associated changing rooms and store rooms’. If it is a task, where does it start and finish? Take the example of putting up a display. The task starts when the teacher goes to fetch the steps and finishes when s/he has put them away again.

b) IDENTIFY THE HAZARDS

The next step is to identify the HAZARDS in the task being assessed. A hazard is something with the potential to cause harm to people, or damage property, reputation or less tangible assets such as course work. It may not be very likely to do so, but that will be revealed in step 6. If a hazard exists, and it is not trivial, it needs to be identified and recorded.

Hazards include:

- Electricity
- Gas
- Deep water
- Flammable liquids/gases, e.g. petrol or LPG
- Fire and explosions
- Extreme ambient temperature (hot or cold)
- Inadequate ventilation
- Asbestos
- Hazardous substances, e.g. chemicals or dusts

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- Manual handling
- Working at height
- Slippery surfaces
- Confined spaces (where there could be inadequate air or toxic gases, or difficulties escaping in an emergency, e.g. under a stage, or in some plant rooms)
- Ionising radiation, e.g. from radioactive ‘sources’ in the physics dept.
- Poor housekeeping or storage
- Inadequate lighting
- Falling or moving objects
- Sharp edges
- Animals / birds / insects (zoonoses / allergies / stings)
- Hot water/hot surfaces/steam
- Adverse work environment (layout)
- Noise
- Vibration
- Lone working
- Adverse weather
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of training

Where relevant hazards should be made more specific, so that it is more informative to third parties looking at the assessment. For instance, in an Art room slipping hazards could include:

- Slipping on wet floors by the external entrance door
- Slipping on wet floors by the sinks
- Slipping on spilt art materials such as paint or clay
- Slipping on wet floors after cleaning

Taking the example of a teacher putting up a display, the following hazards can be identified:

- Falls from height (using the stepladder)
- Manual handling (carrying the stepladder and items to be displayed)
- Work equipment (eg staple gun)
- Impact injury (objects, e.g. hammers / staple guns falling onto people assisting the task from below, or person climbing ladder bumping against ceiling door frames etc)

There could also be a risk of striking against something e.g. if the ladder is kept in a crowded cupboard; contact with hot surfaces if hot pipes are in proximity; electrocution if there are low light fittings with bare bulbs/tubes. This explains why risk assessments have to be done for each particular job, situation, and individuals undertaking the task – each task will have unique hazards and a generic risk assessments are therefore less useful.

c) IDENTIFY THE RISK

Using the example of a teacher putting up a display, the risks are:

- Serious injury - broken bones, concussion - from falling from the step ladder
- Serious injury - back strain from poor manual handling techniques
- Serious injury - inserting staple into body if staple gun used incorrectly or malfunctions
- Serious injury - if objects such as hammers or staple guns fall from a height onto people assisting the task from below

d) IDENTIFY WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE RISK

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This is simple to determine. Remember that risks may be different for different groups of people - assess them separately if this is likely to be the case. For instance, the risk from a harmful chemical used in chemistry demonstration differs depending on whether you are the teacher doing the demo, or the pupil watching it.

Always identify any group or individual likely to be particularly affected by a risk, e.g. staff and pupils suffering from asthma might be more at risk from a harmful solvent than those that do not. Do not forget to think about visitors, contractors and parents.

e) ASSESS THE SEVERITY OF THE INJURY IF THE RISK OCCURS

Refer to the Risk Rating Matrix (link below). Take each hazard in turn. Consider the most likely worst case scenario outcome that could result from the identified hazard if an incident were to occur. This is the SEVERITY, consequence or harm.

- Catastrophic – 5 (multiple death)
- Major – 4 (single death, permanent disability, life altering injury)
- Moderate – 3 (broken bones, several days off work)
- Minor – 2 (basic first aid treatment required)
- Insignificant – 1 (minor scratch or bruise)

Example - For an electrical accident, the most likely ‘worst case scenario’ outcome is electrocution, which could be fatal for the individual concerned – a hazard score of 4. This will usually be the case with falls from height too. On the other hand, the most likely ‘worst case scenario’ outcome from use of simple equipment such as scissors, staplers, compasses etc, will probably be a cut or scratch – a score of 1 or 2.

f) CONSIDER EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES

How each hazard is currently controlled needs to be considered in turn. In many cases there will be adequate controls in place, often arrived at over years of establishing good practice.

The controls need to be listed in the ‘Existing Control Measures’ section of the assessment. It is important to make sure the control is relevant to the risk, and that it is practicable, achievable and reflects likely practice.

The controls might be a system, such as prohibiting people from doing something, or from using a piece of equipment (like a ladder or a dangerous piece of machinery). They might include having written instructions for a job or using protective equipment, or making sure people have had particular training. They might be simple physical measures – like having window restrictors on a second storey classroom window.

Particular control measures to be considered include:

- elimination
- substitution by something less hazardous
- guarding
- safe system of work (written procedures)
- supervision
- training

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- information/instruction – signs, etc
- personal protective equipment

g) ASSESS THE LIKELIHOOD OF THE HAZARD OCCURRING

Now determine how likely it is that an incident could occur (both expected outcome or worst case scenario). It will be determined by a number of factors including:

- How hazard is controlled
- Who is exposed to hazard and for how long
- Level of training and experience
- Age / maturity of those exposed to the hazard
- Understanding of the hazard by those exposed to it
- What protective measures are in place

Take the example of slips and trips in a Junior School playground. Slips and trips may be caused by uneven surfaces, steps, slippery surfaces as a result of moss, ice, objects such as bags on the ground, loose or unsuitable footwear, or just children tripping over their own feet as they play. The risks will vary depending on whether or not:

- Any uneven surfaces are cordoned off, or are only in small infrequently used areas, as opposed to main play areas/walkways
- Steps are even and in good condition and clearly marked
- Areas where moss grows are regularly treated, and play areas are salted to clear any ice if the children are to be allowed out to play
- Children are encouraged to leave unnecessary bags, coats etc inside, or in a safe place, e.g. on a bench
- Children wear sensible shoes, and if necessary adults help younger children tie up any loose shoelaces
- Pupils are well supervised during playtimes and clearly understand the playground 'rules'

Certainty – 5 (could happen at any time and on any day)

Probable – 4 (could happen perhaps once a term)

Likely – 3 (could happen perhaps once a year)

Conceivable – 2 (might happen perhaps once in 5 years)

Improbable – 1 (will probably never happen)

h) CALCULATE THE RISK RATING

To obtain the risk rating, multiply the severity by the likelihood.

Risk = Severity x Likelihood

i) ACCEPTABLE, TOLERABLE, ACTION REQUIRED OR ACTIVITY PROHIBITED?

Acceptable: Risk is either no greater than everyday living or is deemed to be so minimal that management decide to accept the risk. (Risk score is probably 0 – 6)

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Tolerable: Risk has been reduced or controlled as far as is reasonably practicable given current technologies, best practices and resources. This does not negate the need to keep the risk under review and will require further action once developments allow. If Severity Moderate, ensure contingency plans are in place. (Risk score is probably 7 or 8)

Action Required: Risk should not be tolerated and all reasonably practicable controls should be applied to reduce risk. (Risk score is probably 9 or more)

Prohibitive: Cease this activity or isolate risk area until substantial risk reduction is achieved.

Sometimes the existing controls will give very satisfactory control of a risk. For instance, window restrictors will stop a girl or staff member from falling out of the window whilst allowing the window to be opened for ventilation, so a high risk is reduced to low by this control. In this case, although there is still a small residual risk, the overall benefit of having openable windows against the unlikely event of a girl falling out (due to the restrictors) allows the risk to be deemed 'tolerable'; this is saying that all reasonably practicable controls have been implemented given current resources and technology.

On the other hand, if the only control to prevent drowning in the swimming pool is the provision of a float and throw line, this will not have much impact on the risk, as a person could still drown. Further action is required to reduce or eliminate (if possible) the risk, e.g. the provision of lifeguards at all times when swimmers use the pool, and keeping the pool locked so no-one can gain access without a lifeguard being present. If further controls are necessary it is important to ensure that the controls you are planning to introduce will reduce the risk adequately.

j) IMPROVEMENTS/ACTION REQUIRED TO MAKE RISK ACCEPTABLE, TOLERABLE

If you cannot conclude that you have taken all reasonably practicable control measures then you must develop an action plan to implement further improvements. Even if the risk rating is low, consider whether there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce it further.

For instance, if window restrictors are fitted to reduce the risk of falls from 2nd storey and above windows it would be an improvement if they were checked occasionally to ensure that nobody had removed them or interfered with them.

If there are improvements to the way the risk is currently managed and the improvements are practicable, list them down in the 'Improvements / Actions' column on the Risk Assessment. The measures taken to manage a risk should always be proportionate to the risk. For example, it is not expected that £20,000 should be spent to prevent a bruise but it might be to prevent a serious injury.

11. IMPLEMENT CONTROLS

Take all necessary steps to ensure all the controls identified in the risk assessment are implemented.

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