

# The role of school leaders – Safety, Health and Wellbeing

Overall accountability for health and safety lies with the employer of the members of staff in the school. However day-to-day running of the school including responsibility for the health and safety of staff and pupils is **normally delegated to the head teacher and school management team**. They have a key role in making sure risks are managed effectively on site.

Sensible and effective management of health and safety relies on every member of the management team making sure risk is managed responsibly and proportionately. Good communication by all parties is critical to getting this right.

Where you have employee health and safety representatives or a safety committee they can play a valuable role in contributing to the development of a positive health and safety culture.

**Advice on health and safety roles for key school staff are set out below.**

## The Employer

Who the employer is will vary according to the type of school. This can be a local authority, a proprietor, an Academy Trust, a charity, company or partnership, or a Board of Governors. Further guidance on who the school employer is can be found online.

It is the employer that is responsible for making sure that risks, particularly the risks to staff and pupils, are managed so far as is **reasonably practicable**.

The employer's health and safety functions are often delegated to members of staff in the school to fulfil on behalf of the employer. However overall legal accountability for the health and safety of employees and others cannot be delegated and remains the responsibility of the employer.

In Scottish state schools the local authority is the employer. The local authority also provide a governance and leadership role for their schools.

## *What you need to do*

- Put in place sensible approaches to health and safety, with clear policies that focus on the real risks, and do not encourage unnecessary paperwork.
- Implement arrangements that manage the risks to staff, pupils and visitors who may be affected by the school's activities.

- Tell your employees about the real and significant risks in the school and the precautions they need to take to manage them.
- Make sure your employees have the relevant information and training to manage risks on a day to day basis, including access to competent health and safety advice where needed.
- Check that the control measures have been implemented and remain appropriate and effective (even where funding is delegated in the case of local authority controlled schools).

### *Key message*

Good health and safety is about keeping things simple, being proportionate and focusing on the real risks. Procedures should be clear and concise with assessment of risk being practical – not a paper chase or an exaggeration of risk.

### **The Governing Body**

In local authority controlled schools in England and Wales (community and voluntary controlled schools) the Board of Governors role is to ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. The Board of Governors may have control of the premises both during and outside the school day, and may oversee a delegated budget for some maintenance activities. They are not the employer.

In England an increasing number of Boards of Governors are also trustees of the charity that runs the school, and/or directors of the company responsible for the school. If this is the case, their role is identical to that set out for the employer.

In Wales governing bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools are likely to include trustees of the charity that run the school.

In Scotland, in state run schools, there are no Boards of Governors: the local authority provides governance in its role as the employer. In independent and grant aided schools the board of governors or trustees' role is the same as that of the employer.

### *What you need to do*

- Take reasonable steps to make sure that the school is following the employer's policy and procedures e.g. through regular discussion at governance meetings.
- Ensure staff receive adequate training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.
- Promote a sensible approach to health and safety, making use of competent health and safety advice when required.

- Work in close partnership with the head teacher and senior management team to support sensible health and safety management and to challenge as appropriate.

### *Key message*

The governing body have a key part to play in tackling risk aversion, helping to provide a wider sense of perspective and helping the school to get the balance right on managing risk.

## **Headteachers and School Management**

Head teachers and the school management team/ manager have considerable autonomy in the day-to-day running of their schools. It is important that head teachers exercise this autonomy in line with their employer's policies, procedures and standards.

### *What you need to do*

- Ensure that the school is following the employer's health and safety policy and has effective arrangements for managing the real health and safety risks at the school.
- Maintain effective communications with employers, governors, and the school workforce, and give clear information to pupils and visitors, including contractors, regarding the significant risks on site.
- Make sure that the staff have the appropriate training and competencies to deal with risks in their areas of responsibility.
- Consult and work with recognised TU safety representatives/employee representatives and safety committees.
- Make sure that staff understand their responsibilities and know how to access support and advice to help them manage risks responsibly.

### *Key message*

Getting health and safety leadership right is about managing risk sensibly – not trying to eliminate it altogether. Head teachers should provide visible leadership to the whole school so that staff feel motivated, supported and empowered to focus on the things that really matter.

## Other School Leaders

In some schools the business manager, business leader or bursar takes the lead for health and safety on site. They often provide the focal point for the school's health and safety management arrangements. Their school wide roles may include:

- management and monitoring of purchasing and contracting procedures to ensure risks are effectively managed
- advising contractors of site specific risks and overseeing their activities on site
- ensuring staff and visitors are aware of the on-site procedures and the precautions to follow
- accident and incident reporting
- implementation, monitoring and review of training procedures
- preparation of reports and returns for the school leadership team

Heads of Departments and/or Curriculum Leaders have expertise in their topic areas and are often in the best position to advise or lead on the arrangements for assessing and managing risk in their department.

Some schools may appoint a subject specialist or other nominated lead to take a primary role in providing support across the school's range of activities.

### **Nominated health and safety leads should:**

- have sufficient authority to take the lead responsibility for health and safety
- have time, resource and competence to fulfil the role

### ***Key message***

Health and safety is not there to constrain learning or to entangle staff in bureaucracy and excessive paperwork. Concentrate on the real risks and involve staff in the process of finding practical and sensible solutions.

### **Staff**

All of the school workforce play an important part in sensible health and safety management in schools. Staff involvement makes a vital contribution towards achieving safer and healthier workplaces, and helps develop sensible rather than over cautious approaches.

Health and safety representatives whether trade union appointed or employee representatives, also have specific functions and can make a vital contribution to maintaining and improving health and safety in the workplace.

### *What you need to do*

- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by what you do, or fail to do.
- Cooperate with your employer, fellow members of staff, contractors and others to enable them to make and keep the workplace safe.
- Raise health and safety concerns in line with local arrangements.

### *Key message*

When developing learning opportunities, the focus should be on controlling the real risks, not eliminating all risks. Health and safety is about doing things safely, not finding reasons not to do them.

### **Reference:**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/sensible-leadership/school-leaders.htm>