De La Salle College

INDIVISA MANENT

Conducting a School Risk Assessment Policy

Compiled by: The Head Master	Date:	July 2014
Policy Holder: Dave Sharrock	Revision date:	July 2017

- Emotional wellbeing
- Headteacher
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Risk assessment and needs analysis are key areas of school security. Gill O'Donnell and Brin Best guide you though the systems that need to be in place to ensure that your school is prepared for all eventualities

Risk assesment and risk management should be seen as just one part of a comprehensive health and safety and security policy for your school. Without an effective whole school policy, none of the individual strategies recommended will be particularly effective.

Terminology

In Health and Safety terms a 'hazard' is any situation with the potential to cause harm or damage. Hazard can describe unsafe conditions e.g. a physical condition which can make the workplace unsafe, such as a slippery floor; Unsafe acts e.g. rushing, horseplay, taking shortcuts. Unsafe omissions such as the failure to follow safe systems or wear protective equipment can also be termed hazards.

A 'risk' in this context, is the likelihood that the harm from a particular hazard will be realised. To analyse the extent or magnitude of a risk, we need to take into account the total number of people who might be affected, and what the harmful consequences could be for each one. A risk assessment should hence examine the likelihood of harm and the probable severity of the harm, taking into account immediate consequences and also any long-term effects.

Risk assessment and risk management

Schools (and indeed others too) often confuse risk assessment and management but they are two separate things, both essential to the safety and security of your school. Schools should begin by properly assessing the risk posed by hazards in their school, and then go on to manage those risks, thereby reducing the
likelihood of harm.

Risk assessment
This is predominantly a health and safety term which refers to the process through which hazards are identified, and the risks that they pose evaluated.

A risk assessment is a means of auditing the potential for unwanted situations to occur, enabling decisions to be made about steps which could minimise the possibility of the situation arising. Effective risk assessment leads to the development of effective and informed risk management strategies which in turn reduce the likelihood of serious incidents and/or losses and can thereby significantly reduce costs.

Risks to consider when undertaking a school risk assessment:

- **Strategic risk** – covering policy issues and longer term aims. Something would be considered a strategic risk if it was considered able to damage longer term strategy and policy within the school.
- **Financial risk** – covering investment, pricing and costs. A financial risk would be an occurance with the ability to negatively impact upon school finances – for example if

expensive equipment was stolen or damaged the school might need to find additional funds to replace these items unless they were fully covered by insurance.

- **Operational risk** – covering reliability and actual teaching issues. Would, for example, loss of computer equipment have a negative impact upon the ability of some teachers to follow their lesson plans and hence inhibit the teaching process?
- **Compliance risk** – covering the quality of service provided, meeting national and professional standards and legal obligations. This is important to consider, especially in Local Authority maintained schools.
- **Reputation** – this can be severely affected by failing to manage any of the above four risk areas or failures in health and safety. A good reputation is important when attracting and retaining staff, students and investments and is generally reflective of a well run school.

When assigning resources such as time and money, risks in all these areas must be considered.

Risk management
This describes how best to eliminate or reduce the damage which may be caused by any particular hazard, using the resources available.

It is predominantly a business term which explains the process of assessing how best to use and conserve assets, to eliminate hazards where possible and to plan for every eventuality. A risk here, is seen as an issue which could impact on an organisation's ability to meet its objectives. Schools must take into account of each of the risks identified and work out how to manage them using the money, time and other resources to best effect. All risks are important, and it is up to individual schools to determine which are most important or relevant in their own context.

Completing risk assessments

Multiplying the likelihood and severity of any risk together, will result in a risk rating. The issue at stake at all times when carrying out risk assessment is to ensure the safety and welfare of all those involved.

What extra measures need to be put in place?

A risk assessment should not be an isolated process, but something which is ongoing across the whole school. Effective risk assessment always follows the five key stages outlined below:

1. Make a list of all hazards or potential security issues. These should include the various types of hazards as mentioned earlier including unsafe acts, physical conditions and omissions.
2. For each one, decide who might be harmed, how severe the harm might be, and what the full impact on the school is likely to be in the worst case scenario.
3. Evaluate the risks (the likelihood that the harm from a particular hazard will be realised) arising from each hazard and decide whether your existing precautions are adequate or if more should be done
4. Record your findings and monitor the situation
5. Review your assessment and revise as necessary

The simplest way of assessing risk is to use a numerical system, in which calculations could be made taking into account the precautions which are already in place and imagining the

'worst case' scenario if nothing further is done. Once all these ratings have been recorded, the school can examine further measures which could be put in place to reduce the risk, if the risk rating appears to be too high. The key advantage of using a numerical approach to rate risk, is that it is a simple way of working out which areas need most urgent attention.

Another approach is the system generally used by the British Standards Institute which categorises risk on a scale of trivial to intolerable; this matrix highlights the issue that at no point is a risk ever totally removed. It can be used as a good estimate of the risks which need to be addressed first.

The overall aim with any risk assessment is to reduce the level of all residual risks to a level where all those concerned accept and tolerate them.

Conducting a full school security review

A comprehensive school security review is an essential step when addressing the security needs of your school. This should involve a tour of the inside and outside of the school ideally carried out by the person responsible for school security, accompanied by the headteacher or a senior leader. During the tour, key hazards should be noted down, photographs taken and a fundamental review of all security issues and measures undertaken. It is important to imagine worst-case scenarios. **The key is to be able to spot your own vulnerabilities before unwelcome visitors do so, or an accident takes place.**

Such a review should not be a one-off activity – instead it should be part of an ongoing monitoring plan. This will ensure that you keep on top of any issues that need addressing and monitor how they progress. In particular the following should be checked, and the risks reported on a regular basis:

Doors and windows: be aware of the general state of repair and ensure that an ongoing programme of maintenance is carried out. A broken or damaged window is not only an open invitation to an opportunist thief it is also a signal that security is not a high priority. External doors need to be solid and it is wise to consider steel lined doors in some areas. There should also be high specification locks on doors and a well monitored system for access to keys. It may be worth investing in toughened glass in certain areas of the building
Perimeter fences: again always ensure that these are well maintained and of high specification. Ensure that they carry the appropriate safety signs where relevant.
School grounds: trees and foliage should always be well trimmed and allow for good visibility.
Outbuildings: ensure that all outbuildings have appropriate locks which are able to protect their contents, older buildings tend to be more vulnerable in this respect. Similarly outbuildings that are merely used as "junk stores" can soon become fire hazards and can attract undesirables – thus compromising site security.
Public access areas: all schools are accessible to the public to a certain degree however public rights of way sometimes actually cross school premises. Members of the public who use the path should not stray from it onto school property, however it is advisable to keep records of the number and type of incidents where trespassing occurs. These can be walkers straying on to school premises and getting into the buildings; vandalism and break-ins; used syringes, broken bottles or condoms littering the area. Keeping a record of these will highlight how much of a risk the right of way may present. Security measures to combat these issues might include fencing off the path, fencing around school buildings, or introduction of CCTV. A diversion or closure of the public right of way can be sought under The Countryside and Public Rights of Way Act 2000 if such an action is deemed necessary to protect the health or safety of staff and students.

Plans to cover school visitors

Beyond the internal and external security, schools should have measures in place to reduce the risks as follows:

- **Contractors on site:** the important security feature, is to ensure that contractors actions do not compromise the overall security of the site. This would include things like leaving ladders accessible at night; leaving full skips accessible causing a fire hazard; parking vehicles in places which block fire routes etc. Liaison with the contractor's safety officer should prevent issues like this arising.
- **Control of visitors to site:** whatever the duration of the visit there should be a system in place to ensure that all visitors to the premises are logged and monitored. This is always useful in case of an emergency evacuation.
- **Community access:** this frequently takes place outside of school hours. If this is the case, it is important to be able to isolate sections of the school premises so that the public do not have access to the whole site at times when it is not fully staffed. Where access is taking place during school hours the need for a controlled means of entry is important as outlined above. Additional personnel on site will also increase the number of vehicles on the premises and therefore it is important that all vehicle routes and speed limits are clearly marked.

Getting your priorities right, managing details

Keeping a record of all incidents, accidents and near-misses can prove invaluable when making judgements about how to prioritise spending on risk related issues. This record will highlight particularly vulnerable areas and allow you to spot trends (For example, do most attempted break-ins take place on a certain night and if so what else is happening in the area on that night? Is there a certain part of the building which is more prone to vandalism in which security could be tightened?)

When making decisions about your key priorities, it is always tempting to focus on your finances first and the risks which are identified afterwards. However, it cannot be stated clearly enough that **the key concern must always be for the safety of the people involved in the situation, followed by the potential risk to your organisation whether it be financial or not.** There does need to be a balance between financial resources and security, and the law itself states it is essential to look at what is 'reasonably practicable' in the situation. This simply means that where funds are limited, the risks must be carefully assessed and prioritised to ensure those which are higher risk are quickly and thoroughly dealt with. It is recognised that all risks cannot be totally eliminated, merely controlled and planned for.

In determining how to prioritise resources, you should look at both cost and time factors. A large investment of money can be daunting, but over a long period of time could prove extremely cost effective (e.g. investment in CCTV cameras). Similarly, small scale, inexpensive work (e.g. repairs to broken window catches) which can seem time consuming for a relatively small impact, and which might be left for months, can have a dramatic effect not only in improving security but also boosting confidence of staff or pupils if done quickly and efficiently. As a general rule in health, safety and security terms, a bad situation is always made worse by neglect and a short time spent on routine maintenance can prevent hours of expensive work being required at a later date.

Preventative security may seem expensive, but it is important to recognise that not acting has costs too – in terms of repairs to damaged buildings, broken equipment and stolen items, not to mention your insurance premiums. If a major incident should occur, the financial implications of poor or disorganised security planning could be catastrophic. This is not an area where you should be looking to spend the minimum and hope for the best!

Imagine the worst case scenario for each hazard and assess the levels of damage which could occur in terms of disruption, the damage to reputation, financial implications etc. Once these levels have been clarified you will be able to work out those which pose the most severe risk and where money must be spent straight away.

Collaborative approaches to maintaing strong security links

Often the best security service which a school can have is one that money can't buy – nosey neighbours, (or at least caring ones!) If a school is at the heart of the community which it serves then the community will be far more willing to report incidents and be more at ease about approaching the school when situations occur (e.g. spotting a suspicious car in the area, noticing panes of glass which need repairing etc.) They are also more likely to become involved in fundraising events and so feel that they have a stake in the premises which they wish to protect.

Local firms too will feel more committed and may be prepared to help with issues such as shared premises patrols on adjoining premises and help with maintaining or providing security equipment or advice.

Working with other schools in the area is also a good way of cutting costs through purchasing items in bulk. This helps to build closer links between the schools, thus fostering a greater sense of commitment and community amongst students, staff and parents.

It is important to realise that you are not alone. There is a wealth of specialist information available on security and safety issues – often from independent advisors and specialists. You might consider contacting the following:

Local police – most forces have a schools advisor who will discuss security issues and who will have the benefit of local knowledge and issues.
Fire Brigade – as well as advising on fire prevention they will be able to suggest ways to encourage students to consider the implications of fires in the school and help to combat arson.
Fire Protection Association – their website offers advice to industry on general fire prevention issues and a number of downloads. Much of this can be adapted for schools. They also offer training and consultancy services. Contact www.thefpa.co.uk
Local Youth Courts and youth services – mainly as an educational support to examine the effect of vandalism and the long-term implications of this kind of action.
Health and Safety Executive – their website provides a number of free downloads (particularly useful is "five steps to risk assessment") dealing with legal aspects of health & safety in Schools as well as practical guidance. Contact www.hse.gov.uk
HSE Expo/ IFSEC – this combined annual exhibition at the NEC showcases the latest developments in health & safety provision, fire-fighting equipment and security equipment. It is one of the largest in Europe, is normally staged in May and includes a number of specialist seminars. For details contact www.ifsec.co.uk
Books on external fundraising are invaluable for schools wishing to fund their school security work and The Fundraising for Schools Pocketbook, co-written by one of the authors of this chapter, has been written specifically to demystify the subject and present a clear

strategy for success. See www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk for details.

Specialist magazines and newsletters, such as School Financial Management, also focus on these kinds of issues. Information on risk assessment and emergency planning can be found in issues 55, 57 & 62 of SFM respectively. This newsletter also regularly carries information on health & safety issues and how they relate to financial management in schools.

Emergency planning

If the worst does happen, it will be easier to handle if you have taken rational steps and thought about how to deal with the situation in advance. Emergency planning is an important element of any risk management strategy. There is a legal requirement for all organisations to provide an emergency procedure or plan under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999. There are many other practical reasons why an organisation should carry out Disaster and Emergency Planning (e.g. insurance, social expectations, environment). The most important reason for educational institutions is because of the duty they owe to the young people in their care. The human cost of not planning for disaster, can be very significant and in an education establishment the scope for added anguish if a disaster should occur is immense.

The type of emergency facing a school is likely to vary according to its individual circumstances. Some sites may face higher risks of flooding, for example, while others might have greater problems with vandalism. Some crises to consider when developing emergency strategies are:

- Extreme weather conditions (floods, gales etc) and natural disasters
- Major criminal incident alerts
- Terror alerts
- Fire
- Leak of toxic gas in the vicinity of the school
- Structural problems
- Epidemic or disease outbreak

The emergency plan should show how the organisation will cope with any of the above in both the short and long terms. The short term will involve aspects such as reporting of the incident, ensuring a clear chain of command, procedures for shutting down various operations and/or checking that areas have been cleared, evacuation procedures, process to account for control of visitors to the premises and to monitor their evacuation, notification of authorities, parents and so on. A longer-term plan will consider how the organisation will cope with the aftermath of any of the above and how it will then return to a normal operating situation. This could be anything from the use of alternative premises as emergency classrooms following a fire, to the provision of counselling services to students.

In order to ensure prompt action in an emergency, these procedures need to be familiar to all parties both external and internal and to be reviewed frequently. The most expensive fire alarm system in the world will not save lives if no-one in school has ever heard it function and doesn't recognise it in a crisis. To ensure the plans can be successfully followed, an information pack should be prepared to assist the emergency services. The pack should be made available to local fire and police services beforehand as well as being accessible to them at the time of the emergency. The following information would be valuable:

- Details of vehicular access/egress at the site and details of an alternate route should the preferred access be blocked

- Details of the location of water hydrants
- Details of the location of any hazardous substances on site e.g. chemical stores, gas bottles
- Site plan and buildings plan showing evacuation routes
- Details of the location of the evacuation point
- Details of any area which can be used as a holding area if required
- Details of emergency contact/liaison officers

All of the above are vital steps in maintaining the safety and security of the site and personnel and – other than the time invested in compiling and updating them – are relatively inexpensive to carry out.

Summing up

In summary the following seven steps help to guide you through the key features of managing school security:

7 steps to a more secure school

1. Be clear about the difference between risk assessment and risk management and ensure both are carried out effectively
2. Carry out a detailed school security review inside and outside your premises.
3. Identify the risks and carry out risk assessments
4. Prioritise actions and spending based on the highest risks, but be practical in addressing smaller issues which are easily dealt with through day to day good practice.
5. Above all bear in mind the risk to individuals as this has high legal status.
6. Investigate sources of funding for school security within the LEA and externally, being imaginative to harness a wide range of sources.
7. Review school security on an ongoing basis and make sure it is enshrined in the health and safety culture of the school.

Key questions to consider

The following questions should act as prompts when reviewing security arrangements:

1. Do you have external lighting? If so, is it positioned so that it illuminates the most vulnerable areas?
2. Is there an alarm on the premises? If so is it directly linked to the police? If not, how far away can it be heard?
3. Are the premises covered by CCTV? Is this known in the area?
4. Is access to the site controlled and monitored at all times? Is this entrance clearly signposted?
5. Is a visitor pass system in operation?
6. Are all school vehicles security marked and secured with locking wheel nuts?
7. Is there a school safe? Is all cash stored in this at night? How well known is the combination?
8. Are all pieces of equipment such as computers and DVDs security marked? Where are they stored during school holidays?
9. When did you last have a fire survey? How effective was your last fire drill?
10. When were the fire extinguishers last tested?
11. Are all staff trained in security and safety awareness?

Funding school security initiatives

This publication aims to highlight the range of measures that can be taken by your school to ensure that you are effectively reducing the risks from security-related issues. There is no doubt that some of the steps which need to be taken could be costly and some schools may be reluctant to address this area because of fears over how they will fund any new work.

There are now record amounts of external funds available to schools in the UK, with over £1.5 billion documented in a recent DfES survey. This is in addition to the £23 billion in central funding provided by the government and either sent directly to schools, or channelled through LEAs. However, it must be stated that few external funders are willing to support solely school security, with the vast majority preferring to support projects that will have wider benefits for your students and the wider community. The key to unlocking funds for school security may be to include measures that address security-related issues as part of larger bids with broader aims such as community benefits.

It is worth looking out for announcements from central government and your Local Education Authority regarding funding specifically for school security. In recent years there have been a number of initiatives designed to fund such things as secure fencing/gates, CCTV cameras and floodlighting, with the direct aim of making schools more secure. Some of these funds are linked in to European funding which may only be available to schools in specific wards within your area –often those in the more disadvantaged areas would be fast-tracked. The key contact is your Local Authority funding officer with whom you should make contact in order to register your interest in finding out about these schemes.

More specifically, the following funders have an impressive track record of supporting school projects.

Awards for All (www.awardsforall.org.uk; tel: 0845 6002040)
Up to £5,000 (£10,000 from 2006) is available for projects which extend opportunities and enrich the education of young people and communities. The benefits of any project must be clearly related to the community, rather than being focussed on the curriculum, collaborative security and crime prevention could be an option to consider.

School travel plans
Up to £10,000 is available for individual schools to design and implement a school travel plan thanks to a major government grant issued to the charity, Sustrans. School travel plans allow you to focus on reducing car dependency by spending funds on such things as secure bike sheds and safer pedestrian routes to school. Some schools have managed to improve the security of their grounds through additional lighting using funds from their school travel plan. Each Local Education Authority has a school travel plan coordinator who you should contact in the first instance to find out more about funding arrangements in your area.

British Council awards (www.britishcouncil.org.; tel: 020 7930 8466)
The British Council offers funding for overseas visits to learn about good practice in education management to school teachers and leaders. A suitable focus for a study visit could be school security, and would allow you to learn from colleagues in other countries how they are tackling this issue. Those schools who have participated in this innovative scheme have found the opportunity to learn from colleagues overseas particularly enriching, with widespread benefits in their own schools.