St. Helen's College

Fire Risk Policy

This is a whole-school policy which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage

1 Introduction

Fire can be destructive and deadly. This policy outlines the procedures and safeguards which will minimise the risk of fire at school. It should be read in conjunction with the DfE document 'Fire Risk Assessments: Educational Premises' which will be found in the Fire Safety section of Google Drive.

2 Arrangements

The person with overall responsibility for fire safety in the school is Dominic Crehan, the Proprietor. The person with day to day responsibility at an operational level is Sharon Cargill, School Business Manager who is the designated Fire Safety Manager (FSM).

Duties of the Fire Safety Manager (FSM)

The appointed FSM must ensure that standards of fire safety are maintained. The main duties regarding fire safety management are to:

- produce a fire risk (prevention) policy which includes the elimination or reduction of risks from dangerous substances;
- manage the school to minimise the likelihood of fire (fire prevention);
- make hazard and risk assessments;
- be responsible for fire safety training;
- produce an emergency plan and put up fire notices;
- identify fire assembly points, make sure these are known to staff, pupils and visitors and conduct fire drills;
- check the adequacy of fire-fighting apparatus and its maintenance;
- conduct annual fire safety inspections;
- make more frequent informal checks to confirm that the fire safety rules are being followed;
- ensure fire escape routes and fire exit doors/passageways are unobstructed and doors open correctly;
- check fire detection and protection systems are maintained and tested and records kept;
- ensure evacuation procedures are followed and
- include fire safety in the regular health and safety committee meetings.

The School has designated the maintenance team to provide competent assistance on fire safety matters in accordance with Article 18 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

They are also responsible for carrying out daily and weekly checks of the fire protection systems and escape routes and conducting weekly alarm tests, monthly emergency lighting testing and managing periodic fire drills. These checks are recorded on Google Drive under Fire Safety.

In addition the school has appointed 14 Fire Marshalls to provide cover during normal school hours across all school sites. These fire marshalls have received training in their role and in the practical use of extinguishers from an external Fire Safety Consultant. Training is renewed every three years.

Our Fire Safety Manager has undertaken a fire safety risk assessment of our premises and reviews this on an annual basis. The risk assessment is held in the School Business Office and Sharon Cargill is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations arising from the assessment are implemented.

3 Fire Safety Management

Priorities:

- To minimise the risk of fire
- To protect the means of escape
- To limit the spread of fire

The Law and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, implemented in October 2006, replaced The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997. The Regulatory and Reform Order applies to both new and existing school buildings. It provides for minimum fire safety standards and emphasises the duties of 'The Responsible Person' to ensure that every school has risk assessments carried out.

In November 2007 the DFE published new guidance on managing against the risk of fire in schools, which was updated in March 2014 by the Education Funding Agency. A copy is available here.

It represents a determined attempt to address the alarming cost of arson in schools and bring together the plethora of documentation on fire safety which has appeared over the past couple of decades as well as impose strict guidelines on the construction of future school buildings (School Premises Regulations) and changes to existing buildings.

To ensure there is no doubt as to where the responsibility for fire safety rests, and to enable consistency of approach, it is essential that every educational establishment appoints a designated Fire Safety Manager (FSM). At St. Helen's College the FSM is the School Business Manager.

3.1 Hazard & risk assessment

It is the responsibility of the employer to carry out risk assessments for all of the hazards faced in schools, including fire. Fire risk assessments are carried out annually by the FSM and are recorded in Google Docs. They are also completed/reviewed by an external contractor every three years or when major structural alterations are made to the school buildings. All risk assessments are reviewed and updated at least annually.

Guidance notes and checklists on fire hazard and risk assessment can be found in DFE document 'Fire Risk Assessments: Educational Premises' (see link in section 7- references).

3.2 Evacuation procedure checklist (see DfE Fire Risk Assessments: Educational p.43)

The most important steps in fire prevention are good housekeeping and proper evacuation procedures, particularly in higher risk areas such as kitchens, laboratories, boiler rooms and workshops. The FSM will remind staff including cleaning contractors of these procedures regularly.

3.3 Security (see DfE Fire Risk Assessments: Educational p.42)

The large number of fires started deliberately underlies the importance of maintaining good security measures. Security measures must be thorough and will include physical measures (e.g. locked gates), social measures (e.g. challenging strangers) and electronic (e.g. CCTV).

3.4 Emergency drill and fire notices

All staff receive fire training at the time that they are first employed, as part of their induction.

All visitors to the school are issued with a Visitor Pass with fire evacuation instructions, which they are asked to read.

An emergency fire drill is included in the Staff Handbook and posted in Google Docs. The plan is explained to pupils at least once every year.

Fire action notices are displayed conspicuously in all occupied rooms informing occupants of:

- how to raise the alarm if they discover a fire;
- the action to be taken on hearing the alarm;
- the escape routes to their assembly point and
- the location of their assembly point.

Escape routes are signposted with a running man pictogram.

3.4 Electrical fire safety

Computers and other equipment can impose heavy demands on the school's electrical system. Wires, plugs and sockets that are overloaded or in poor condition are a fire hazard. Overloading of sockets is a particular problem in winter if supplementary heaters are used. Electrical equipment should be switched off when not in use unless it is designed to be permanently connected.

Procedures are in place for the regular testing and inspection of electrical circuits and portable equipment.

Flammable material should not be kept close to electrical switchboards or in boiler rooms. All combustibles should be kept well clear of electrical equipment and switchgear.

3.6 Potential high risk areas

Teaching areas e.g. science and art. Particular care must be taken where there is a higher than normal fire risk.

Non-teaching areas e.g. workshop, boiler rooms, store rooms, kitchen. Particular care must be given to the fire regulations. All storage areas should be kept clean and tidy.

3.7 Displays

The card, paper and plastic that is used in displays can be a means of rapid fire spread. To reduce the risks, staff should:

- not put inflammable displays down stairwells as they are designated fire escape routes;
- in corridors, keep displays away from curtains, doors and heat sources, so that fire cannot easily spread to the building fabric;
- keep displays away from exits and
- keep displays away from ceiling voids which lack fire barriers.

Displays must not obstruct escape routes or obscure fire notices, fire alarm call points, firefighting equipment, emergency exits or signs or lights.

Glass door panels must not be covered by displays or for any other reason.

3.8 Furniture & furnishings

Upholstered furniture should comply with the Furniture & Furnishings (Fire safety) Regulations 1988. These regulations require that the filling and covering materials meet certain criteria in respect of their resistance to ignition.

The layout of loose furniture must not obstruct escape routes and must take account of the needs of occupants such as wheelchair users or others who require assistance with mobility.

3.9 Flammable liquids and chemicals

The storage of flammable liquids must be strictly monitored, with the amounts of flammable liquids and chemicals stored inside the school kept to the minimum necessary for day to day use. Chemicals and flammable liquids must be stored in locked COSHH cabinets.

Staff should know how to deal with spills and there must be no sources of ignition present where dangerous concentrations of vapour might be expected. There must be no smoking in any place where a highly flammable liquid is present or anywhere else on the school premises.

3.10 Portable heaters

The use of portable heaters must be strictly controlled. All portable heaters must be guarded and located so that there is no possibility of them coming into contact with flammable material, including clothing worn by staff, pupils or visitors.

3.11 Waste handling

Waste must not be allowed to accumulate and should never be stored in the school overnight.

External waste storage areas are a prime target for the fire raiser. Bins should be positioned and secured so that they cannot be pushed close to a building and set on fire.

3.12 Smoking and Vaping

Smoking and vaping is not permitted anywhere in the school buildings or grounds.

3.13 Building contractors

Building contractors working in the school can significantly increase the risk of fire and may cause obstruction to escape routes. These risks can be anticipated and mitigated against through advance discussions and agreements with the contractor. For advisory notes, see the DfE document 'Fire Risk Assessments: Educational Premises' p.48.

See also the Contractor General Policy which can be found on Google Docs.

4 Training

4.1 General training

Every pupil and member of staff must receive training in:

- general fire prevention;
- action to be taken if they discover a fire;
- how to raise the alarm;
- action to be taken on hearing the alarm;
- location of escape routes and assembly points and
- evacuation and roll call procedures.

4.2 Staff training

Members of staff should also be given instructions in:

- the operation of the fire control panel(s);
- how to call the Fire Brigade;
- the location of firefighting equipment;
- the use of firefighting equipment;
- the arrangements for the safe evacuation of physically disabled staff and pupils with Special Educational Needs and
- stopping machinery.

4.3 Evacuation procedures

Fire drills should be held termly for all pupils, and at least once a year for Funtasia pupils. Some drills should be based on the assumption that one or more of the escape routes is affected by fire and cannot be used. At least one senior member of staff should act as observer. They should make notes of lessons to be learnt and feedback to staff and pupils so that improvements can be made.

Details of fire drills which should be entered in the logbook include:

- date;
- duration;
- name of observer(s);
- type of drill e.g. full/part of school and
- observations/action points.

5 Fire Fighting Equipment

5.1 Types of fire extinguisher

Fire extinguishers are provided in all school buildings and are designed to deal with three types of fires which occur in schools:

1. Class A - ordinary combustible materials – water extinguisher
2. Class B - flammable liquids – foam, dry powder or carbon dioxide extinguishers
3. Class E - Electrical fires – dry powder or carbon dioxide extinguishers

Each of the four types of extinguisher can be identified by a distinctive colour band:

Water	-	red
Foam	-	cream
Dry powder	-	blue
Carbon dioxide	-	black

5.2 Maintenance of fire extinguishers

Weekly checks (Business Manager/maintenance staff):

- Check safety clip & indicating devices to determine whether extinguisher has been activated and
- Check for external corrosion, dents or other damage.

Annual checks are done by the supplier. A maintenance contract is in place.

5.3 Location of extinguishers

Extinguishers must be located so that they are:

- conspicuous;
- accessible when needed and
- protected from accidental damage

6 Fire Detection and Alarm systems

Purpose:

- For the prompt and reliable detection of fire.
- To alert the occupants so that evacuation can begin.
- To minimise damage to the buildings and their contents.

Electronic alarm systems are fitted in the Lower School (all buildings), Cambria, Windsor, the Kitchen and Upper School (main building). The electronic fire alarm systems consist of automatic detectors, break glass call points, the control panel, smoke detectors and fire alarm sounders.

Alarm system specifications, layouts and installation are determined through professional advisors. Each individual fire alarm system is tested weekly by the maintenance team, using a different call point each week on a rotation and is subject to termly, yearly and three yearly maintenance and testing by a qualified engineer. Checks are recorded on Google drive under Fire Safety.

Emergency lighting systems are tested monthly (this is sometimes referred to as a 'flick test'), and serviced by an external contractor, including an annual 'drop test' whereby the system is tested for its full rated duration.

7 References on Fire Safety

A fire safety maintenance checklist is available at Appendix A to the gov.uk guidance at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-educational-premises which will be found in the Fire section of Google Docs.

Other advisory documentation:

1. Education (School Premises) Regulations 2012. Guidance is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-school-premises

2. the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1541/contents/made

3. Risk Assessment: A Brief Guide to Controlling the Risks in the Workplace' available at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm

4. DfE Design for fire safety in schools https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-bulletin-100-design-for-fire-safety-in-schools

Further sources of advice and help, and more references, can be found in DfE document 'Fire Risk Assessments: Educational Premises' which will be found here.

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