



Headteacher and Chair of Governors Health and Safety (H&S) Briefings

Where there is reference to suggested documents, templates or resources, these are available via the [Hampshire Services for Schools - Health & Safety Resources webpage](#).

May 2026 - Follow-up to questions

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Why this matters - context for recent changes

Q: Has this update been driven by an increase in accidents or concerns about risk assessments?

Recent serious accidents involving pupils have been subject to detailed investigation. These investigations have identified weaknesses in risk assessment quality, oversight and day-to-day control measures. The changes and strengthened expectations being communicated are directly informed by these findings, with the aim of preventing recurrence and improving consistency across all schools.

Q: There are many competing priorities in schools - how does this fit?

We recognise the significant pressures on school leaders. However, health and safety underpins all school activity. The intention is not to increase burden unnecessarily, but to focus effort on the critical controls that prevent harm and ensure that schools can evidence that risks are being effectively managed.

Roles, responsibilities and liability

Q: Is the Local Authority liable, or are headteachers/governors personally liable?

Headteachers (as Responsible Managers) are accountable for the day-to-day management of health and safety within their setting. They hold delegated responsibility for ensuring sensible approaches to H&S, clear local policies, suitable risk management arrangements, competent staff, and effective monitoring and review, taking account of guidance provided. Liability depends on the circumstances of each case, particularly whether duties have been fulfilled and risks appropriately managed.

Q: Who is legally responsible (“the employer”) in a voluntary aided school?

In voluntary aided (VA) schools, the governing body is the employer and therefore holds overall legal accountability for health and safety, not the Local Authority. Day-to-day H&S management is usually delegated to the headteacher and senior leadership team, but legal accountability remains with the governing body. There is no legal requirement for VA schools to adopt Local Authority H&S policies or procedures, although they may choose to buy into Local Authority support.

Q: Are risk assessments an operational or governor responsibility?

Risk assessments are operational. Governors are not responsible for completing them, but they are responsible for gaining assurance that appropriate systems, oversight and monitoring arrangements are in place.

Q: What happens where a school identifies a risk, but the Local Authority assesses it as low priority?

Schools must continue to manage the risk locally through appropriate control measures. Where concerns remain, escalation routes should be used. Responsibility depends on the nature of the risk and the actions taken by each party. The Corporate Health and Safety Team (CHST) can be contacted to support the most appropriate escalation route. Email address:

corprisk@hants.gov.uk

Q: Will training be updated to reflect clarification of roles and responsibilities?

All relevant training will be reviewed and updated to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly and consistently reflected across materials.

Q: Is access to AI making parents more likely to litigate?

The increasing use of AI may result in a higher volume of H&S complaints or compensation enquiries, as it enables the production of confident, well-presented correspondence. Having robust systems and procedures in place, such as suitable and sufficient risk assessments, training records, incident reporting and corrective action logs, supports effective responses. This enables leaders to evidence that hazards were identified, controls implemented and actions taken, reducing the potential for escalation.

Risk assessment - quality and expectations

Q: What does a 'good' risk assessment look like?

A good risk assessment is not simply a document, but a process that leads to effective action. Investigations into serious incidents consistently show that avoidable accidents rarely occur because there was no risk assessment; they occur because the assessment was generic, incomplete, out of date, or not embedded in practice.

A good risk assessment is not defined by the quality of the form - it is defined by:

How well it identifies real risks, puts effective controls in place, and ensures those controls are consistently applied in practice.

This is the critical difference seen in investigations between:

- Schools where incidents occur, and
- Those where similar risks are successfully managed

A strong risk assessment has the following key characteristics:

	A good risk assessment reflects:	Strong practice example	Common weakness example
It is specific to your school – not generic	• Your actual environment (buildings, layout, equipment) • Your pupils (age, needs, behaviours, SEND profile) • Your staffing and supervision arrangements • Known patterns of incidents or near misses	A risk assessment for playground supervision that considers blind spots, specific behaviours of certain pupils, and staggered breaktimes.	Copying a generic template or using broad statements like: "Children may fall over – staff supervise."
Hazards are clearly identified (including less obvious risks)	• Physical hazards (e.g. equipment, doors, flooring) • Behavioural risks (e.g. aggression, dysregulation) • Environmental factors (layout changes, crowding) • System risks (staffing levels, supervision gaps)	Identifying hinge-side finger trap risks on doors, particularly in high-traffic areas or with younger pupils.	Only identifying obvious hazards after an incident has occurred.
It considers who might be harmed and how	Identifies the different groups of people: • Pupils (including vulnerable groups) • Staff • Visitors and contractors	Recognising that a risk may affect staff and pupils differently (e.g. violence and aggression risks).	
Control measures are practical, specific and effective – this is the most critical area.	Control measures must: • Be clear and actionable (what actually happens day to day) • Go beyond vague statements like "staff to supervise" • Reflect the hierarchy of control (remove, reduce, manage)	• Installing physical controls - e.g. guards, barriers where appropriate • Adjusting supervision ratios at specific times • Changing layouts to remove congestion • Implementing clear behaviour or de-escalation strategies	• Over-reliance on supervision alone • Controls that exist "on paper" but are not consistently applied.

	A good risk assessment reflects:	Strong practice example	Common weakness example
It reflects real practice (not just intended practice)	A good risk assessment matches what actually happens in the school.	• Staff understand the controls and follow them consistently • New or temporary staff are aware of expectations	• Risk assessment says one thing, practice does another • Controls depend on ideal staffing levels that are not realistic
It is informed by more than one perspective	The strongest assessments are developed with input from: • Staff who carry out the activity • Staff trained in risk assessment • Leadership oversight	• Including staff who understand the day-to-day risks, as well as someone who can provide challenge.	Common weakness: • One person completing and reviewing their own assessment repeatedly.
It is dynamic and regularly reviewed	A good risk assessment changes when: • There is an incident or near miss • The environment changes (e.g. room layout, building works) • Pupil needs change (particularly in SEND contexts)	• Staff understand the controls and follow them consistently • New or temporary staff are aware of expectations	• Reviews done purely to meet a deadline (e.g. every 3 years) • No change made despite repeated similar incidents
It links to monitoring and checks	A risk assessment should not sit in isolation. It should link to: • Inspection regimes (e.g. premises checks) • Daily/weekly routines • Incident reporting • Training requirements	• Regular checks confirm that controls remain effective • Issues identified feed back into the risk assessment	
It is proportionate and focused	• Focuses on real risks that could cause harm • Avoids excessive paperwork that adds no value	• Clear, concise assessments that staff can understand and use.	• Overly long documents that are not used in practice • Trying to cover everything instead of focusing on key risks
Leadership oversight and assurance is evident	Headteachers and senior leaders should: • Know what the key risks are in their school • Be confident that controls are in place and working • Have systems to check, challenge and verify	• Spot-checking risk assessments and practice • Seeking assurance, not just assuming compliance	• Delegation without effective oversight • Lack of visibility of whether controls are actually working

Q: Is there a list of “standard” risk assessments schools should have?

Guidance on common school risk areas is available on the [Hampshire Services for Schools webpage - Risk Assessment Template List](#).

Q: Could the risk assessment templates include strong examples of best practice?

Within the [A-Z section of the Hampshire Services for Schools webpage](#), there are suggested hazards and control measures for different risk areas. All risk assessment templates include examples of suggested hazards.

Q: Why are templates being changed if it is about practice, not paperwork?

The risk assessment template is intended to support consistency, structure and clarity, but the focus remains firmly on the quality of thinking and how control measures are implemented in practice.

Risk assessment training is aligned to the corporate template. It is therefore important that schools use this template. This ensures that:

- staff are trained against a consistent approach
- key elements of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment are not missed
- there is a shared understanding of expectations across all settings.

The template provides a framework to support good practice. However, it is the quality of the assessment, the appropriateness of the control measures, and how effectively they are applied day to day that determines whether risks are managed safely.

Q: How do we know if someone is competent to carry out risk assessments? Is support available for more complex areas?

Competence includes a combination of training, experience and understanding of specific risks. Risk assessment training is available.

For complex areas, schools should contact the Corporate Health and Safety Team (CHST) at: corprisk@hants.gov.uk for specific support.

A risk assessment is only effective if it is shared with, and understood by, all relevant staff within the school.

Training, competence and support

Q: What support is available for new headteachers?

A H&S checklist for headteachers is available on the Hampshire Services for Schools webpage. Additional support can be obtained through the Corporate Health and Safety Team (CHST), including advice, guidance and training. Contact corprisk@hants.gov.uk for tailored support. The commissioned New Headteachers' Induction Programme also includes a focus on health and safety.

Q: Can governors access health and safety training, specifically risk assessment training?

Yes. Training is available and will be reviewed to ensure it is accessible and timely. In addition, a H&S checklist for governors is available on the [Hampshire Services for Schools webpage](#). Governors cannot automatically access the schools' H&S pages but can access the Governor Services pages.

Q: Is there a clear list of mandatory health and safety training?

Yes. The [Corporate Health and Safety Training Matrix](#), available on the Hampshire Services for Schools webpage, sets out core training requirements linked to specific roles, including who must complete training, whether it is mandatory, and refresher periods.

However, it does not cover all training needs. Additional training must be identified locally, based on roles, activities and risk assessments. Headteachers, as line managers, are responsible for ensuring that staff receive the training they require to be competent and that training records and refresher requirements are maintained.

In summary, the matrix provides a clear corporate framework. Schools must supplement this based on their specific risks and responsibilities.

Q: How are schools supported with H&S?

H&S support is provided through a framework of assurance, guidance and reactive support, rather than direct day-to-day oversight of each school's H&S system. This includes:

- **assurance:** periodic monitoring visits, typically every three years, and annual self-assessment to review arrangements, provide constructive challenge, and identify improvement actions
- **reactive support:** incident support and tailored advice following events, to capture learning and drive improvements
- **communication and resources:** termly H&S newsletters, urgent safety updates, and a dedicated schools H&S webpage with guidance, templates and reference materials
- **advice and development:** training, including eLearning, online and in-person sessions, and a query response service for timely advice on specific issues
- **leadership engagement:** online briefings and committees to clarify expectations, share lessons learned, and maintain senior focus on emerging risks.

Q: Is more ongoing support available?

Yes. Schools can contact the CHST at corprisk@hants.gov.uk for further support.

Pupils who may be at higher risk due to SEND and/or presenting behaviours

Q: How should schools manage risks from violent or highly dysregulated pupils?

This is recognised as a significant and growing challenge. Schools are expected to:

- conduct specific, regularly reviewed risk assessments
- implement proportionate control measures
- seek support from relevant services.

However, it is acknowledged that in some cases risks cannot be fully mitigated at school level alone.

Q: What about situations where placement decisions increase risk?

Placement decisions sit within a wider system. Schools should continue to escalate concerns where risks to staff or pupils remain significant despite all reasonable control measures.

Q: How do we balance inclusion with safety?

This is a complex issue. Schools must take all reasonably practicable steps to reduce risk, while working with partners to identify appropriate provision. This will be addressed through planned awareness-raising and targeted focus sessions.

Premises, maintenance and estates

Q: Who is responsible for addressing building-related risks?

The Local Authority is responsible for maintaining the condition of maintained school buildings. However, schools must manage risks arising from those conditions in the interim.

Q: What if repairs, e.g. roofs or toilets, are delayed?

Schools should implement interim control measures and escalate concerns where risks remain significant.

Q: Why are issues such as Legionella or trees not always up to date?

The Council has clear procedures in place to manage risks such as Legionella, designed to ensure compliance with legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations.

For Legionella specifically:

- schools are required to carry out regular checks, flushing and descaling
- these activities must be recorded on Concerto by the required dates
- local management of these tasks is essential to maintaining compliance and up-to-date records.

The Council provides guidance, training and supporting resources to help schools meet these requirements. Where there are concerns or uncertainties, schools should seek advice directly from the Corporate Health and Safety Team (CHST) at corprisk@hants.gov.uk.

For trees specifically:

- There is a team of tree inspection officers within Property Services dedicated to schools. For queries please contact: alex.searle@hants.gov.uk
- The Corporate Premises Inspection Form includes reference to trees and low branches, which should be used to inform inspection arrangements.

Q: Should finger guards be included as part of installation, rather than added later?

For newly built or refurbished schools, the need for finger guards should be considered at the design and installation stage. This should be informed by risk assessments undertaken during the planning process, particularly taking into account the age of pupils and how spaces will be used.

Where there is a foreseeable risk of finger trapping, for example in early years or primary settings, it may be appropriate for finger guards to be included as part of the initial installation rather than treated as a retrospective measure.

Once installed, it remains the responsibility of the school to monitor their condition and effectiveness. This includes ensuring they are well maintained, checked regularly, and that any damage or defects are promptly reported and addressed.

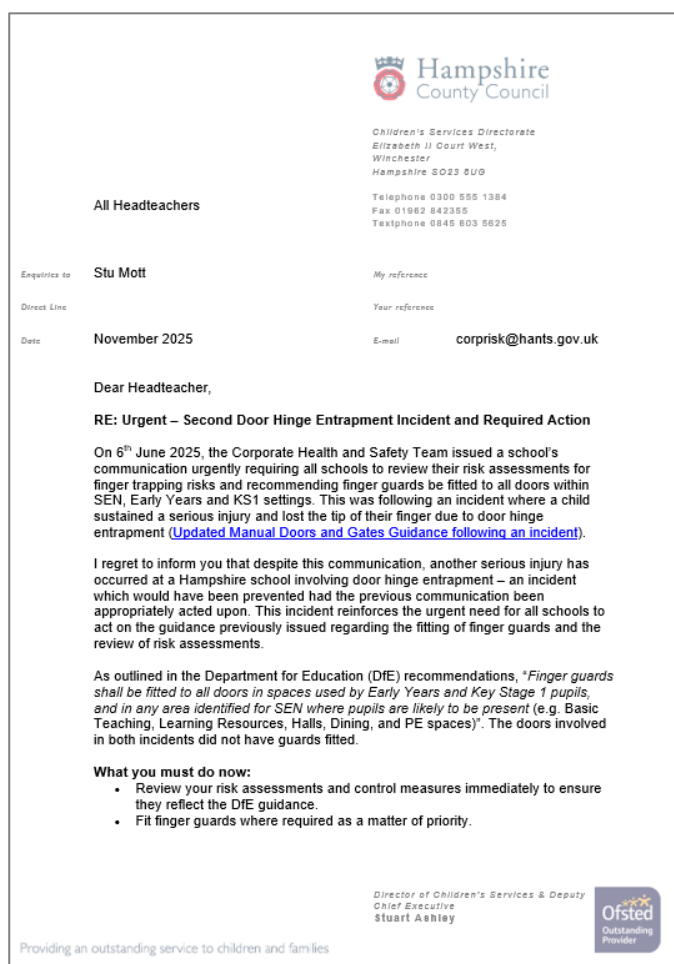
Q: Why have finger guards been prioritised for Key Stage 1 and special schools? Should Key Stage 2 also be included?

The focus on Key Stage 1 and special schools aligns with Department for Education (DfE) H&S risk management principles, which prioritise controls where risk is highest.

Evidence relating to finger trapping incidents indicates that most injuries involve younger children, particularly those in early years and Key Stage 1, due to reduced hazard awareness and coordination. As a result, guidance recommends that finger guards are fitted as a priority in these settings, where both the likelihood and potential severity of harm are greatest.

This does not exclude Key Stage 2. DfE guidance expects schools to apply local risk assessment and extend control measures, including finger guards, where justified by factors such as door location, supervision arrangements or incident history.

Q: Can the content of the letter sent to all headteachers regarding finger guards be shared?



- Take a comprehensive approach by considering all potential hazards, not just door hinge risks.
- As Headteacher, you must confirm in writing to HCC these actions have been completed. This formal return must be sent to corprisk@hants.gov.uk by COP 5 Jan 2026.

To support you, we have updated the Manual Doors and Gates guidance, which includes the latest DfE advice and risk assessment templates. These are available on the Schools Health & Safety Pages via Hampshire Services for Schools. [School's Health & Safety Website](#)

I expect all schools to adhere to this guidance and act upon this communication as a matter of priority. Any changes to your control measures must be reflected in your risk assessments and shared with all staff.

I have also requested the Corporate Health and Safety Team undertake a programme of visits to sample compliance with this directive, and to report back to me with their findings. If your school is chosen as part of this sample, I expect you to fully cooperate with the team ~~so~~ as to facilitate their visit.

For further advice or support, please contact the Corporate Health and Safety Team at corprisk@hants.gov.uk

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Ashley
Director of Children's Services & Deputy Chief Executive

Systems and processes

Q: Accident and incident forms are not fit for purpose - will they change?

The accident and incident reporting system is designed to operate across the whole Council and must meet the needs of a wide range of services, settings and risk profiles. As a result, it cannot always be tailored specifically to individual environments such as schools.

It is recognised that some aspects of the forms, particularly dropdown options, may not always reflect the specifics of incidents in a school context. All feedback provided has been noted and will continue to inform future reviews where possible.

In the meantime, schools should:

- use the most appropriate available options
- provide additional detail in free text sections where needed
- ensure that the quality of the investigation and the learning identified is clear.

Q: Are there too many health and safety documents?

There are a large number of documents, which are organised in an A-Z format to support users of the [Hampshire Services for Schools webpage](#).

Q: Who completes RIDDOR reporting?

The Corporate Health and Safety Team (CHST) completes all Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) reporting on behalf of Hampshire County Council (HCC) maintained and controlled schools. Voluntary aided, trust, foundation and academy schools are responsible for submitting their own RIDDOR reports.

However, it is essential that schools:

- report all relevant incidents to the CHST promptly
- provide sufficient detail to allow an appropriate assessment to be made.

This is critical because RIDDOR reporting is subject to strict statutory timescales, and delays in receiving information may result in non-compliance.

Q: How do we access systems such as Concerto?

Concerto access is managed by Property Services. Access can be arranged through the school's Management Surveyor, and any queries should be directed to businessintelligence@hants.gov.uk.

Schools are encouraged to use a shared login based on the school's unique reference number, rather than an individual's details, to help ensure access is retained if staff leave.

Funding, resourcing and capacity

Q: Who pays for required safety improvements?

This depends on the nature of the work. Some responsibilities sit with the Local Authority, while others fall to schools. Clarification should be sought for specific cases.

Q: Why are safety measures such as finger guards not universally funded?

The funding and implementation of finger guards is a local responsibility for the governing body. Costs are met from the school's delegated budget.

Q: How can small schools realistically meet all expectations?

Expectations are based on legal requirements. However, proportionality is an important consideration. Support and guidance will continue to be developed with this in mind.

Q: What about staffing pressures, particularly site management roles?

This is recognised as a challenge. Schools should consider how responsibilities can be managed and seek advice where capacity is an issue.

Communication and information sharing

Q: Can important messages be communicated more effectively?

Yes. Feedback has identified that reliance on School Comms alone is not always effective. Communication methods will be reviewed to ensure that the most appropriate mechanisms are used, including School Comms, email and other channels as required. The effectiveness of communication approaches across all areas is currently under review.

Q: Can governors receive communications directly?

This will be considered, particularly for key messages and newsletters.

Q: How can schools access newsletters and updates?

Newsletters and updates are shared via School Comms, with all editions available on the [Hampshire Services for Schools webpage](#). These can be circulated internally by the school.

Q: Can learning from incidents be shared more widely?

Yes. This is a key area for improvement, and work is underway to strengthen how learning is shared and disseminated across schools.

Assurance, monitoring and governance

Q: What is the purpose of H&S assurance visits? Is there anything specific we need to prepare for the meeting?

Assurance visits are intended to:

- review systems and processes
- provide guidance and support
- identify areas for improvement
- offer assurance that risks are being managed effectively
- take account of the school's completed H&S self-assessment.

Q: What should governors be checking?

Governors should focus on assurance, including:

- whether risk assessments are in place and reviewed
- whether inspections and checks are carried out
- whether actions are followed up.

Q: Would a H&S scorecard or data-led approach be helpful?

This is a helpful suggestion. The use of data, including near miss reporting, is encouraged to strengthen monitoring and oversight. At directorate level, this information is shared.

Future changes and local government reorganisation

Q: How will local government reorganisation affect H&S support?

Details are still emerging. Schools will be kept informed, and continuity of key services is being considered. However, locally held, school-based roles and responsibilities for H&S will not be affected.

Q: Will systems and tools still be available?

This will form part of transition planning. Further updates will be provided as arrangements are confirmed.