

Health and Safety - what does the GB do?

Legally, the governing board has responsibility for health and safety in **voluntary aided** schools, **foundation** schools, **academies**, and **independent** schools.

In **community** and **voluntary controlled** schools, the local authority (LA) is the employer so you should follow any direction from them. Your LA is likely to delegate responsibility to your board.

As the employer, the board has duties which are set out in the Health and Safety Policy, and almost certainly delegated to the headteacher to arrange the necessary measures. However, **governors still retain responsibility for H&S**, so must monitor compliance.

Governors must assure themselves that the Health and Safety Policy complies with legislation and meets best practice. They should establish at least one KPI for H&S to help keep it a high priority.

Although it's not a statutory requirement, it's good practice to delegate strategic responsibility for H&S to a nominated governor, although a committee is acceptable. Don't be complacent though – your board has a collective responsibility for H&S so it's very important that the H&S Governor formally reports regularly and often to the board.

It is recommended that you draw up terms of reference for the governor or committee who has delegated responsibility. This helps to give governors and school leaders a clear framework for the role, and ensures important checks or challenges aren't missed. Email us if you would like help with this.

If you have a large enough board, consider a two-person team, one leading, one shadowing. Not only does that ensure no gaps in succession, but also gives the H&S governors the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the issues they find.

The Health and Safety Governor – what should they do?

Role and responsibilities

- take the lead on the governing board's health and safety responsibilities, but be sure to keep your role strategic
- **never** carry out any health and safety checks or inspections yourself, but **do** hold school leaders to account for completing them

Monitoring visits

- aim for termly visits (i.e. 3 per year). ***Note that, while school visits are possible from September, you may be unable to carry these out while pupils are in school. Take your lead from your chair and headteacher about when you can start these up again.***

- whether you're monitoring in person or virtually, meet with those school leaders that have operational responsibility for health and safety.
- ask them strategic rather than operational questions – for example, ensuring that the school has a long-term health and safety spending plan and isn't just addressing health and safety issues as and when they arise. If you are unsure as to what kind of things to ask, email us, and we can help you.
- try and combine the monitoring visit with a site walk, or arrange to shadow the school leader or external professional.

Site walks

Even though you shouldn't be carrying out full-blown inspections yourself, it's a good idea to be seen to participate in the health and safety function of the school by accompanying professionals and school leaders during their inspections (***bearing in mind the note above***). Observing a pre-planned inspection also ensures that you are considerate of staff workload and aren't causing unnecessary duplication.

Taking part in site walks will:

- provide evidence that inspections are undertaken
- give you the chance to ask appropriate questions in a more relaxed and relevant environment
- demonstrate the governing board's commitment to health and safety
- give you a chance to review any specific items for which you have oversight responsibility

Don't confuse these H&S site walks with 'tours' which your board might like to do say, on an annual Governor Day. Nevertheless, these are very valuable to governors to feel connected with the school, and give the school leaders the opportunity to receive praise for improvements they have made to the school environment.

Sources of information you will need to monitor compliance

- your school's H&S Policy
- risk assessments. Are they up to date?
- accidents and 'near miss' logs. Are they up to date? Is the latter being used?
- records of prior inspections, especially those carried out by external parties such as the LA or the fire service. Review any specific health and safety issues that were identified previously and check that any proposed solutions or mitigations are in place
- your school development plan. Are projects and planned spending being addressed and moved forward?
- communications or reports gathered by the school from which they have recorded issues raised by pupils, parents, staff or governors. These could be board minutes, complaints, school social media comments (e.g. a facebook page) school council notes, staff meeting notes, feedback boxes. How does your school collect information from people who have H&S concerns? Is this good enough? What are any specific issues raised and how are they being addressed?

Mitigating risk

For any identified issues, reassure yourself that:

- school leaders and staff are aware of the issue, and appropriate risk assessments have been carried out
- the hazard has been mitigated as far as possible or reasonable
- the risks are at an acceptable level with mitigation

Reporting

- report to the GB when visits have taken place, both those you have conducted and those undertaken by external professionals
- does the school's actual practice reflect procedures in the policy i.e. are you compliant?
- bring their attention to any issues which you feel are either significant, not reasonably mitigated, or not possible for the school to mitigate further but which still pose an unacceptable level of risk
- whilst it is important for the board to be sufficiently informed and have opportunity to challenge, they should not look to find solutions themselves, but to gain reassurance from the headteacher that appropriate actions are being taken