



Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

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Date: 20th April 2026

Dear Headteachers and Department for Education Representatives

PRIORITISATION OF FIRE SAFETY MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOL ESTATES

I am writing to highlight the critical importance of robust fire safety management across all school estates, in line with current expectations and duties set out by The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the Department for Education (DfE).

Effective estate management is not simply an operational requirement; it is a fundamental duty to ensure the safety, wellbeing, and protection of pupils, staff, and visitors. Fire safety must be treated as a core component of statutory compliance, supported by competent risk assessment, clear policies, and ongoing monitoring.

Schools are expected to maintain suitable and sufficient fire risk assessments, reviewed regularly and updated whenever there are changes to buildings or their use. These assessments must be carried out by competent individuals and form part of a wider safety management system.

Please see below a few links to assist you with improving your fire safety compliance:-

[The Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005.](#)

For a Qualified and Registered Fire Risk Assessor

[MyIFE > Home > Events and resources > Directories > Find an IFE Professional Fire Risk Assessors - IFSM](#)

HM Government Guides

[Fire safety: guidance for those with legal duties - GOV.UK](#)

There are however a number of common and recurring issues observed across school estates that require urgent and consistent attention. These include:-

- Ensuring corridors and escape routes remain unobstructed at all times, are adequately protected, and provide sufficient width for safe evacuation;
- Designing and managing buildings to support safe, supervised evacuation both horizontally and vertically;
- Maintaining appropriate travel distances that take into account the age, mobility, and needs of building occupants;
- Implementing fire safety strategies that fully consider pupils, staff, and visitors, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- Ensuring the design and layout of school buildings support a quick, calm, and intuitive evacuation process;
- Keeping fire doors closed or held open only with appropriate self-closing or automatic release devices, and never wedged open;
- Providing clear, visible, and appropriate fire safety signage throughout the premises.

In addition, maintaining fire detection and alarm systems, ensuring regular testing, and keeping accurate records are essential requirements. Fire doors, emergency lighting, evacuation procedures, and firefighting equipment must all be routinely inspected, maintained, and understood by staff.

Inconsistent levels of competence and understanding in estates and health and safety management across schools can lead to gaps in compliance and increased risk. It is therefore vital that leadership teams, governors, and premises staff are appropriately trained and supported.

The Department for Education's Estate Management Standards reinforce the expectation that all schools must meet a baseline level of compliance while striving for continuous improvement.

Given these requirements, can you assist us by taking ownership of:-

- Strengthening the oversight and accountability for fire safety compliance in all schools;
- Provide increased funding and resources dedicated to estate and fire safety management;
- Mandate regular, high-quality training for school leaders, governors, and premises staff;
- Ensure consistent national standards are clearly understood and effectively implemented.

Head teachers and governing bodies should also prioritise fire safety within their strategic planning, embedding it within the wider framework of estate management and organisational leadership.

Fire safety is not an administrative task - it is a life critical responsibility. A proactive and well-supported approach will not only ensure compliance but, more importantly, safeguard the lives of those within our school communities.

Further information can be found at the links below.

[Fire Safety Management for School Estates | National Alliance of School Premises Management](#)

[Good estate management for schools - Health and safety - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

[DFE School Estate Management Standard April 2025 | National Alliance of School Premises Management](#)

[Fire safety risk assessment: educational premises - GOV.UK](#)

Yours faithfully
Chris McGready

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Authorised Fire Safety Inspecting Officer
and on behalf of the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Authority