



Circular

Title: Fire Safety in Schools

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For the attention of: Protection Directors

Distribution

CFOA Members

Fire & Rescue Service

General Public

Relevant to:

England

Northern Ireland

Scotland

Wales

Related Documentation:

Guidance on fire safety and how to manage school buildings:

[Building Bulletin 100 \(currently under review\) – provides guidance on designing schools including sections on managing the occupied schools.](#)

[HM Government – Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Educational Premises.](#)

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This information has been collectively produced and endorsed by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), OFSTED and the Education Funding Agency.

The purpose of this bulletin is to dispel any misconceptions that may exist within schools regarding requirements of OFSTED encouraging the use of displays and the display of pupils work in and around school premises which may have a detrimental impact on fire safety provisions within the building.

All schools in England and Wales are required under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to provide a safe environment for their pupils, staff and visitors.

UK Fire and Rescue Services have identified reoccurring issues within schools which would put the safety of occupants at risk should a fire occur. These can be summarised in two key points:

1. Excessive learning displays on routes designated as a means of escape, for example:



2. Excessive displays of pupils work within corridors which form the means of escape, for example:



The three agencies recognise the importance of schools displaying the work of pupils and understand the importance of the learning environment and the need to encourage and promote such work. However this should be done in a safe and appropriate manner which will ensure the safety of pupils and staff and reduce the likelihood of fire spread should a fire occur.

To enable schools to comply with fire safety law and provide a fulfilling, nurturing and safe learning environment schools should minimise the amount of combustible display materials in corridors and circulation spaces.

The fire risk assessment [FRA] for the school is pivotal in successfully managing a safe school, the FRA should incorporate the use of displays, their material, location and any measures taken to remove or reduce the risk to occupants and any significant changes to these should be recorded and re-evaluated.

OFSTED inspectors do not and will not penalise schools that are unable to display work or produce additional opportunities for learning within the school due to restrictions placed upon them under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to protect the means of escape.

Displays are often located in corridors and in entrance foyers, and generally comprise materials such as paper, cardboard and plastic which provide a means for the rapid spread of fire. Schools should evaluate what material could ignite first and what would cause the fire to develop and spread. Appropriate measure to mitigate the dangers of ignition and fire spread can include the following:

1. Notice boards containing pupils work should not be more than 3m wide, and there should be a gap between notice boards on the same wall of at least 1m. Notice boards on a means of escape should be fitted with covers, preferably top hung so that the cover cannot be left 'jutting-out' into the escape route;
2. Escape routes need to be kept free of clutter;
3. Ensure that display materials (including artificial and dried foliage), scenery and stands, are fire retardant, or have been treated with a proprietary fire-retardant treatment designed to enhance their fire performance;
4. Ensure that all upholstered furniture, curtains, drapes and other soft furnishings, are fire retardant, or have been treated with a proprietary fire-retardant treatment designed to enhance their fire performance;
5. Ensure storage and display areas are adequately controlled and monitored;
6. Use fire-retardant display materials wherever possible (suppliers should be able to provide evidence of this);
7. Avoid the use of displays in corridors and foyers;
8. Minimise the size and number of display areas to discrete, separated areas;
9. Do not put displays down stairways which are part of a designated escape route or where there is only one direction of escape (i.e. dead-end conditions);
10. Treat displays with proprietary flame-retardant sprays;
11. The use of display boxes;
12. Keep displays away from curtains, light fittings and heaters;
13. Keep displays away from ceiling voids which may lack fire barriers;
14. Ensure that there are no ignition sources in the vicinity;
15. Ensure displays do not obstruct escape routes or obscure fire notices, fire alarm call points, firefighting equipment or escape signs.

Current documents exist which provide Local Authorities and school Senior Leadership Teams with guidance on fire safety and how to manage their school buildings. These documents include:

- Building Bulletin 100 – This provides guidance on designing schools but also includes sections on managing the school once occupied.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-bulletin-100-design-for-fire-safety-in-schools>

- HM Government – Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Educational Premises

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-educational-premises>