

SCHOOL HALL OCCUPANCY

School halls have a capacity limited by room size, number/width of fire exits and routes.

There is the potential to overload halls during events, endangering occupant safety. If the capacity is limited we can ensure that the correct numbers of tickets are produced.

There are criteria that seating arrangements must meet. An occupancy figure based on floor area/exits can give a capacity that possibly could be accommodated. However, practically, the limiting factor is more likely to be ensuring the seating and gangways are safely arranged.

Gangways

As far as practicable, seating should be in regular blocks, having gangways of uniform width, with free and ready access to exits.

- All gangways must be adequate for the number of seats, and at least 1050mm wide.
- The gangways should extend around the room, and at the ends of seating rows.
- The ends of rows and seats should be aligned so as to maintain a uniform width of gangway throughout its length.
- No part of a gangway must be more than 18m from an exit door, to a safe and adequate escape route.
- All exits are to remain unobstructed. Standing and sitting in gangways or in front of any exit is not permitted.

Seating in rows

- A row should be no more than 14 seats wide e.g. 7 seats to the nearest gangway.
- Seats should be secured together in lengths of not fewer than four seats (and not more than 12).
- Current guidance advises that seating should be fixed to the floor. This may be impractical or undesirable for temporary or one off events. Where seating cannot be fixed easily, the distance between the front and back of seats in the rows is increased from 305mm to 400mm. This additional distance allows for slight movement of the seats without compromising escape widths.

A team of Fire Wardens must be on standby to ensure that all visitors can evacuate, and anyone who will require assistance is provided with nominated persons to help them. A staff training session should be held before each event that is to be attended by members of the public. This is to ensure procedures are fresh in everyone's mind and routes/different scenarios are clear.

Consideration should be given to whether adjacent accommodation will be empty or may be used simultaneously, and the implications on escape routes. Careful consideration of alternative routes and exits is very important. Escape routes should be kept clear.

Accessibility

The venue should be accessible to all, have level or ramped approach from outside and no barriers to access (e.g. narrow doorway etc). Toilets should be available for all, including the provision of unisex accessible toilet facility. Thought should be given to the needs of people with disabilities e.g. people with a wheelchair or walking aid are likely to need more space in which to manoeuvre from the aisle into a wheelchair space or seat. Seating should include at least 2 wheelchair spaces, with an adjacent seat for a companion. Careful consideration should be given to how the school can assist people with a variety of disabilities to evacuate the premises during and emergency. Means of escape strategies should be devised by the building management in order to ensure safe, swift and orderly evacuation for **all** users.

Escape strategies for disabled users may differ according to the amount of assistance they require in order to leave the building. The safe and competent evacuation of disabled pupils, employees and other known, regular building users depends to a large part upon the creation of bespoke personal emergency egress plans (PEEPs). These take into account the difficulties of the building, people's requirements for assistance, and the abilities of colleagues in giving that assistance.

Generic emergency evacuation plans (GEEPs) can be devised to meet the needs of visitors. These will be fundamentally suited for the evacuation of wheelchair users, ambulant disabled people or people with visual impairments. A GEEP will facilitate the safe evacuation of disabled visitors whose needs cannot be identified in advance.

When calculating fire exit capacity, if a room has 2 or more exits, it has to be assumed that a fire might prevent the occupants from using one of these exits.

General Occupancy Notes

Prevent overcrowding.

Limited capacity e.g. number of seats.

You should not let in more people than there are seats.

The only people who are standing at the event are stewards.

When members of the public are entering or exiting stewards remain standing. If seats are provided for stewards these may be used once an event has begun.

Do not allow people to stand at the back of the venue or sit on the floor/stairs.

If there is a chance the event will be overcrowded use tickets.

If the event is not ticketed but the venue is filling up, stop people freely entering the venue, let them in one by one as seats are identified. When the venue is full close the doors and stand outside them to prevent entry. When you have to turn people away explain you cannot allow overcrowding for safety reasons.

Before the start of each event physically check all emergency exits are open and unblocked.

Read a Fire Safety announcement to the audience before each event. This should explain:

- a) The location of the escape routes.
- b) What they should do if the fire alarm sounds.

Do remember that parents will want to be re-united with their children as soon as possible.

Throughout the event regularly check exits.

During a fire alert, open the emergency exits and announce in a loud clear voice 'this way out please'.

The nearest steward to a wheelchair user should be prepared to help in the case of an emergency i.e. pushing the wheelchair etc.

Ensure that any additional car parking does not restrict access for emergency vehicles.

Fire Safety Reference Material

BRADFORD COUNCIL FIRE SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS:

Site: Bradford Schools Online

Open: Buildings then Fire Safety

Free downloads:

Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Educational Premises.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-educational-premises

Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Means of Escape for Disabled People.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-means-of-escape-for-disabled-people

Fire Protection Association – books and DVD on fire safety in schools to purchase.

https://www.thefpa.co.uk/fpa_home/publications/shop/