

Violence in Schools

Introduction

The management of violence in schools

What is violence?

The Education Service Advisory Committee (ESAC) of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) defines violence as:

“Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a student, pupil, or member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his/her employment” (ESAC 1990).

The government has made it clear that any form of violence within educational establishments, and in particular when perpetrated against teachers, is entirely unacceptable. Education and Library Boards and CCMS as Employers in the education sector within Northern Ireland, fully endorse this view.

The **“Security and Personal Safety in Schools”** booklet compiled by the Education and Library Boards and CCMS and distributed by the Department of Education to all schools, details the need to have in place a policy on violence which reflects a contingency approach in relation to the risk posed by potential sources of violent behaviour.

Violence and school security

The likelihood of violence occurring and a school’s overall physical vulnerability are directly linked. It is therefore important that a school has a security survey undertaken by the local Police Crime Prevention Officer. This service is available at no cost to the school.

In addition, all schools should themselves undertake a security risk assessment using the method outlined in pages 40-44 of the above mentioned booklet.

When completed, this should be forwarded to the Board’s Health and Safety Adviser. If this has not already been done, time should now be spent in so doing in order that the school may be prioritised for potential appropriate security hardware enhancements under the **“Schools Security Initiative Programme”**

Personal safety

Personal safety in schools, as with all other aspects of school management, is maximised by examining customs and practices which may in the past have unconsciously, or otherwise, exposed staff to behaviours by either parents, pupils or visitors which have, at the very least, been distressing, or more seriously resulted in them being verbally abused, or even assaulted.

As a starting point reference should be made to **Part 2** of the previously mentioned booklet which specifically addresses the issue of personal safety and gives advice on methods, which are designed to achieve best practice.

Please note that the Department of Education has now posted this document in its entirety on its own internet website. Site address:-www.deni.gov.uk

Do violent incidents need to be reported?

Since 1997 violence in the workplace has become a reportable issue under **RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (NI) 1997)**.

The school should satisfy itself that all instances of violence to staff are always reported using the Incident Report Form, a copy of which is located in this section. This is also located at Appendix 4 of the security booklet previously referred to. This should also occur in respect of those instances of acts of violence which happened some time ago but which may not have been previously recorded, but about which the facts of such incidents are still available.

This form should be completed promptly after the incident and subsequently forwarded to the Board's Health and Safety Adviser, and in the case of a Catholic Maintained School, to the CCMS Health and Safety Adviser also.

The school should also have written arrangements which are brought to the attention of all staff (*including substitute teaching staff*) which clearly outline what is to be done whenever an instance of violence takes place.

Specific arrangements concerning appointments between teaching staff and pupils' parents/guardians should be developed to ensure that the latter do not arrive at the school unannounced insisting upon meeting with their child's teacher.

Monitoring of all these arrangements should occur on a termly basis to ensure that they are working satisfactorily as part of the **risk assessment** process surrounding the management of violence or potential violence within the school.

How is the potential for violence in school risk assessed?

The basic principles should also be applied to the management of violence. These are:

- Identify the circumstances surrounding the potential for violence in school;
- Evaluate the risk of violence actually occurring within each circumstance;
- Prioritise the risks in terms of their perceived relative magnitudes;
- Prepare a plan for eliminating or controlling them, dealing with the most serious first;
- Put the plan into effect;
- Regularly review, and if necessary revise, the assessment to ensure that the adopted plan remains effective.

It is important that any risk control measures which are decided upon are written down and that any procedures which are adopted as a consequence are communicated to all staff. This in turn means that everyone is in no doubt as to how the school intends to manage violence, including minimising the potential for it happening in the first place.

How should the school deal with violent behaviour?

The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 requires that Employers protect employees from risks to their health and safety whilst at work.

Employees have a corresponding duty under the same statute not to put themselves or colleagues at risk as a consequence of their own behaviour.

As far as pupils are concerned, schools require from them behaviour and conduct which conforms with the school's discipline policy.

This policy and the school's health and safety policy are linked in as much as the policy on discipline should be formally deployed in relation to acts of violence perpetrated by any pupil upon teaching staff, in order that the school can demonstrate that it is pro-actively discharging both its common law duty of care in protecting employees and others, as well as ensuring their future safety as required by occupational safety law.

In relation to visitors, including parents, it is the case that such persons are guests of the school and as such do not have any automatic legal right of entry thereto. In circumstances where their behaviour becomes violent, they should be requested to leave the school grounds, with the assistance of the Police if this becomes necessary.

Further guidance

The Education Service Advisory Committee (ESAC) has published a document entitled "**Violence to Staff in the Education Sector**".

The booklet is available from: HSE Books at PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA ,
Tel : 01787881165, Price £ 6:95

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust also has published a book entitled "**Personal Safety For Schools**" available from the Trust at: Training and Resources Dept., PO Box 17818, London SW14 8WW
Price £22:00

The DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) – now the DfES (Department for Education and Skills), has published a document entitled "**Dealing with Troublemakers**" which provides further practical help in managing violence and reducing its incidence within schools. Depending on availability this may be obtained free of charge from the Department, Tel: 0845 602 2260
website address:-www.dfes.gov.uk

INCIDENT REPORT FORM

VIOLENT OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SCHOOL STAFF

(Includes physical violence, aggression, verbal abuse, sexual or racial abuse, intentional damage to personal property.)

Victims of violence or aggression should complete this form as fully as possible. Please use a continuation sheet if necessary.

Date of incident **Day of week** **Time**

I. Employee - personal details of victim

Name _____ School address _____

Position _____ Dept/Section _____

Age _____ Gender _____

What work was being done when incident occurred?

Classroom PE/Games Administration Caretaking/Cleaning

Other (please give brief details) _____

2. Details of assailant, if known

Name _____ Address _____

Age (approx) _____ Male/Female _____

Description _____

Relationship between victim and assailant, if any _____

3. Witness, if any

Name _____ Address _____

Age approx _____ Male/Female _____

Description _____

Relationship between victim and assailant, if any _____

4. Details of incident

- a. Physical violence Verbal abuse
- Specify _____
- b. Were you injured in the incident? Yes No
- Did you receive first-aid treatment? Yes No
- Did you require professional medical attention? Yes No
- Did you require time off work? Yes No
- c. Location of incident
- Classroom Assembly Canteen
- Playground Corridor Sports field
- Other _____

5. After the incident, who did you verbally inform

- No-one
- Principal Head of Department
- Colleague Police

6. Other information (to be completed as appropriate)

- a. Possible contributory factors _____
- _____
- b. Is assailant known to have been involved in any previous incidents?
- i. in school Yes No
- ii. out of school Yes No
- c. Give date and brief details of b. if known _____
- _____
- d. Have any measures been taken to try and prevent an incident of this type occurring?
If so, what? How did they fall short? How could they be improved?
- _____
- _____
- e. Even if no measures had been taken beforehand, what action in your view, may be taken now?
- _____
- _____