

Safety in School

Schools should be managed in accordance with the Department of the Environment's "Code of Practice for the Management of Fire Safety in Places of Assembly", (as published by the Stationary Office and available through any Bookseller or directly from the Government Publications Sales Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2).

All schools should have Fire Safety Register which must be available for inspection on request by a Fire Officer (Authorised under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003) as described in the above Code of Practice.

Fire Safety Routine in Schools

Attention to the following fire precautions should become a routine to be followed carefully:

1. Ensure that all escape routes from the school are maintained free from obstruction and readily available at all times. Doors on escape routes should never be locked when anyone is in the building and exit doors should be easily and immediately opened from the inside.
2. Fire doors should be kept closed at all times. These can only be held in the open position by an electromagnetic hold open device connected to the fire detection and alarm system.
3. Institute a regular system of inspection of first-aid fire fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers and hose-reels. Test fire detection and alarm system and emergency lighting regularly, keeping a of inspection results and action taken in the Fire Safety Register.
4. Maintain fire instruction notices in legible condition and accessible positions - specimen notice attached.
5. Ensure that periodic fire evacuation drills are carried out. – See below for guidelines
6. Train all members of staff in the use of first-aid fire fighting equipment and the action to be taken in case of fire.
7. Do not allow the storage of combustible materials in staircase enclosures or under any staircase and along escape routes such as corridors.
8. Take adequate precautions when using paper or other flimsy materials for decorations, and never use cotton wool for this purpose. Do not suspend such decorations from light fittings or near heating appliances.
9. Exercise great care during the performance of school plays and at school parties so that there is no likelihood of costumes or props catching fire.

After School Hours

Carry out an inspection to ensure:

- that all heating devices, gas fittings and other heat producing appliances have been turned off and left safe
- that there is no combustible material of any description near a possible source of ignition
- that all potentially dangerous chemicals in Laboratories are safely stored
- that all cleaning materials (oily rags, polishing cloths, mop-heads, etc.) are properly stored in suitable store room with the door closed
- that rubbish and combustible waste are not allowed to accumulate in Laboratories, Workshops, Craftrooms, Boiler Rooms, or elsewhere in the building

Fire Drills and Training

It is the responsibility of the Principal and Board of Management to ensure that fire evacuation drills are carried out. Below you will find detailed information about fire safety procedure.

The dangers that may threaten persons if a fire breaks out depends on many different factors, consequently, it is not possible to construct a model procedure for action in the event of fire that would be suitable for use in all premises.

Each fire routine must be based upon a simple, efficient procedure, which is specifically designed for the premises in which it has to operate.

It is therefore important that the following points must be given prime consideration:

- The Purpose of the Fire Drill
- The Occupancy of the Premises
- The Details of the Fire Drill Routine
- Instruction, Training and Recording
- The Frequency of the Fire Evacuation Drills
- Supplementary Notes

The Purpose of the Fire Drill

Fire drills are intended to ensure, by means of Training and Rehearsal that in the event of fire

- the people who may be in danger act in a calm and orderly manner
- those people who may have designated responsibilities carry out their tasks to ensure the safety of all concerned
- the escape routes are used in accordance with a Predetermined and Practised Plan
- evacuation of the building is achieved in a Speedily and Orderly manner
- to promote an attitude of mind where by persons will react rationally when confronted with a fire or other emergency at school or elsewhere

The Occupancy of the Premises

Consideration must be given to the age of the pupils attending the school and as to whether there are any children with special needs

Fire Drill Routine

One senior person must be nominated as the person in control of the fire drill.

A fire routine is based on a critical sequence of events, these being:

Alarm Operation

Anyone discovering an outbreak of fire must, without hesitation, sound the alarm by operating the nearest fire alarm call point

Calling the Fire Brigade

All outbreaks of fire or any suspected fire, however small, should be reported immediately to the Fire Brigade by the quickest means available. This task could well be designated as the responsibility of the school secretary as a telephone will be readily available at that location or another appropriate person.

Evacuation

- on hearing the fire alarm, pupils must be instructed to leave the building in single file and in a calm, orderly manner.
- the person in charge of each class must indicate the exit route to be used and everyone must be directed to a Predetermined Assembly Point.
- specific arrangements must be made for pupils with physical or mental disabilities to ensure that they are assisted during evacuation.
- no running is to be permitted to avoid panic.
- on staircases everyone must descend in single file. Overtaking of classes or individuals must not be permitted.
- lifts must not be used.
- anyone who is not in class when the fire alarm sounds must go immediately to the assembly point.
- no one must be allowed to re-enter the building until told to do so by the Fire Service in attendance, or, in the case of a fire evacuation drill the person in charge.

Assembly

- an area outside the school premises must be designated as an assembly point.
- it must be clearly marked and easily identified.
- the assembly point must be far enough away from the school premises to afford protection from the heat and smoke in a fire situation.
- the assembly point must be in a position that does not put pupils and staff at risk from emergency vehicles responding to the incident.

Roll Call

- attendance registers and visitors book should be held at a central point and must be brought to the assembly point when the alarm sounds.
- one person should be nominated to have overall responsibility to ensure that a roll call is conducted in the event of evacuation of the premises.
- immediately that classes have assembled at the assembly point, a roll or count must be made to ascertain that no one has remained in the premises.
- any visitors or contractors in the premises at that time must be included.
- the count at the assembly point must be checked using the attendance registers and visitors book to verify that everyone is out of the building.
- each teacher must report to the nominated person in charge of the evacuation procedure to verify that everyone in their charge is accounted for or to inform him/her of any persons missing.

Meeting the Brigade

The person in charge of the roll call must identify him/herself to the Fire Brigade on their arrival. In doing so vital information can be relayed to the Fire Officer which will dictate the necessary actions to be carried out by the Fire Brigade.

Typical information the Fire Brigade will want to know:

- is everyone accounted for?
- if anyone is missing: How many?
- what is their usual location?
- where were they last seen?
- where is the fire? What is on fire? (It may not be apparent)
- are there any hazardous substances involved in the fire or stored in the building? (ie. Chemicals, Solvents, Liquefied Petroleum Gas or Acetylene Cylinders etc)

Instruction, Training and Recording

During the first week of term or as soon as practically possible thereafter, all new entrants, including pupils, staff or support staff, should be conducted around the primary escape routes of the school. They should also receive instruction on the school fire evacuation routine.

All members of the staff should receive instruction and training appropriate to their responsibilities in the event of any emergency.

All members of staff should each receive a personal copy of prepared written instructions. They should receive instructions given by a competent person annually. Such instruction should include details of how to call the Fire Brigade. In the case of newly appointed staff, instruction should be given as soon as possible after appointment.

A record of the training and instructions given and fire drills held, should be entered in the Fire Safety Register and will include the following:

1. date of the instruction or fire drill
2. duration
3. name of person giving the instruction
4. names of persons receiving instruction
5. nature of instruction or fire drill

Fire drills, which may be combined with the instruction given above, shall be carried out at least once per term. The fire drill should simulate a situation where one escape route is not available. Each fire drill should be started by a pre-determined signal and the whole premises checked as if any evacuation was in progress.

In large premises a specific person shall be made responsible for organising staff training and the name of one other nominated person to co-ordinate the actions of the staff in the event of fire. Effective arrangements should be made for a deputy or deputies to carry out the above duties in the absence of the nominated persons.

In smaller premises one specific person shall be made responsible for organising staff training and for co-ordinating the actions of the staff in the event of fire. Effective arrangements should be made for a nominated deputy to be available to carry out the above duties.

Frequency of Fire Evacuation Drills

Fire evacuation drills should be held at least once per term, preferably at the commencement of each term.