



HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR SUPPLY TEACHERS

NEU Guidance for members in England and Wales

The purpose of this document is to address health and safety issues for supply teachers, including those employed directly by local authorities, schools and academy trusts and those employed via supply agencies.

Supply teachers have to adapt quickly to changing surroundings but will not be as familiar with schools' policies and security arrangements as the permanent teaching staff.

What we say

When you read through this document you may have questions about what happens in your particular school or workplace and there may be collective issues that affect other members. In most circumstances, you should initially discuss the matter with your workplace rep, as they will know whether similar concerns have been raised by other members. If you do not have a rep at the moment, it would be a good idea to get members together to elect one. Further advice on this is available at:

<https://neu.org.uk/becoming-a-rep>

Although you may sometimes feel that you are the only person affected by or concerned about a particular issue, in reality this is seldom the case. Any difficulties you may experience are likely to be linked to wider conditions at your workplace and as a member of the NEU you have the advantage of being able to act collectively with your colleagues. This should give you the confidence of knowing that you have the weight of the Union behind you.

Who is responsible for ensuring my health and safety as a supply teacher?

Schools should give the same level of attention to the health and safety of all teachers while taking specific steps to ensure that supply teachers are adequately prepared for their work. All employers are required by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASAWA) to ensure, as far as is reasonably practical, the health and safety of all employees and non-employees in their workplace. This includes assessing risks to health and safety and taking steps to reduce or eliminate these risks.

The employer varies according to the type of school. In community and voluntary controlled schools, the employer is the local authority, while in foundation and voluntary aided schools, free schools and stand-alone academies the employer is the governing body. In academies that are part of a chain, the employer is the academy trust. The day-to-day management of health and safety within all schools is normally delegated to the head teacher / principal and the senior management team.

As the duty covers non-employees as well as employees, the fact that supply teachers may be employed via an agency does not diminish the employer's duty to ensure their

health and safety. **Agency supply teachers (and pupils and visitors as well) must receive the same protection as teachers employed by the school.**

What health and safety information should be provided to me at a school?

At the start of an assignment you should be provided with a welcome pack containing details of any procedures and arrangements of which you would need to be aware. This should contain details of the school's health and safety arrangements, including but not limited to:

- **Fire Safety procedures** – including the location of fire exits and escape routes and details of any planned fire drills.
- **Security arrangements** – including door codes, and details of any specific security measures employed within the school.
- **First Aid** – the identity and contact details of first aiders, location of first aid boxes and details of any pupils in the class with medical conditions; also the procedures to be followed in the event of accident/injury.
- **Emergencies** – details of who to contact in an emergency and procedures to follow.
- **Asbestos** – the location of any asbestos or suspected asbestos in the classrooms and areas of the school you will be spending time in.

For more information see the [NEU self-help guidance on supporting supply teachers on the NEU website](#).

What happens if I am involved in an accident?

Schools must have a clear procedure for reporting, recording and investigating accidents and injuries, and information about the procedure should be given to you at the start of your placement. Any accidents and injuries to supply teachers should be reported, recorded and investigated in the same way as for permanent staff and pupils. There will then be an official record of the incident in case a supply teacher is subsequently unable to work for a period of time.

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), employers must inform the HSE of certain incidents, such as those leading to employees being off work for seven days or more and those which result in non-employees being taken to hospital. More information is available in the [NEU accidents and injuries briefing available in the health and safety section of the NEU website](#).

What must schools do to protect supply teachers from assaults?

Thankfully, cases involving serious violence against teachers are extremely rare. The fact that there have been such cases, however - including the stabbing of supply teacher Vincent Uzomah in 2015 - makes it vital that all schools establish robust security procedures to safeguard staff, pupils and visitors. Risks must be assessed, incidents investigated and policies and procedures reviewed and updated as necessary. All school staff including supply teachers must be aware of such procedures and specific risks. The NEU expects all assaults, including verbal abuse, and threats of assault to be recorded and monitored by schools.

Schools are also required to have a comprehensive behaviour policy to promote good conduct among pupils. This should set out the disciplinary steps which can be taken if pupil behaviour is unacceptable. Maintained schools are required to publish this policy on their website, and whilst academies are not obliged to do so, it is considered good practice. School behaviour policies should be made available to you on your arrival at the school.

For more information, see the NEU briefings on [security and violence in schools which are available in the health and safety section of the NEU website](#). DfE guidance on managing pupil behaviour in schools, including 'use of reasonable force', 'managing behaviour and bullying' and 'behaviour and discipline' is available [here](#).

What about individual pupil risk assessments?

School employers have a legal duty to assess risks present within the school and take steps to reduce or remove these risks. In some instances, where the risk presented is from a pupil, the school may need to undertake an individual pupil risk assessment. An individual pupil risk assessment should be considered when a pupil is deemed to pose an evident and ongoing risk to staff and pupils and when the behaviour policy has so far been unsuccessful in addressing the concerns. Whilst such risk assessments should be relevant to a school's individual circumstances, it is likely to consider issues such as:

- What risks does the pupil pose, and to whom?
- What has been done so far to reduce or remove the risk?
- What further action is required to further reduce the risk?
- Which activities cannot be safely managed in relation to the pupil?
- What is the overall level of risk posed by the pupil?

When individual pupil risk assessments are being carried out, due consideration should be given to supply teachers who are less likely to be familiar with pupils and may be more likely to face poor behaviour from pupils. You should always be made aware if any pupils in your classes may pose a risk. This information should form part of your initial briefing on arrival at the school. You should also be made aware of the control measures in place should the pupil become disruptive, for example, alerting a senior manager, or the withdrawal of the pupil from the lesson.

As an agency supply teacher, what is my position with regards to insurance?

The NEU advises that you should confirm with the agency that schools have the necessary insurance before taking up a placement, as you will not be employed directly by the school. Most employers are legally required to hold employers' liability insurance which provides insurance cover for their liability to employees should they become injured or unwell at work. Local authorities are exempt from this regulation and provide liability cover, including for schools where the LA is the employer, via their own arrangements. All other schools and academies must, however, hold such insurance.

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) advises that most employers' liability insurance covers a fairly broad definition of 'employee' including anyone hired by the insured, which would include supply teachers. The ABI also advises that policies can specify this if the insurance provider is informed of the need to cover temporary staff. Some supply agencies stipulate that schools must have employers' liability insurance which covers supply teachers.

Employers are also expected to hold public liability insurance which covers claims made by members of the public (e.g. pupils and parents) for incidents in relation to its activities, for instance on school grounds or on a school trip. The ABI has advised that typically, such insurance covers actions undertaken by all teachers, regardless of their employment status. Again, some agencies stipulate that schools must have public liability insurance which covers supply teachers.

What should be done to address the risks of asbestos for supply teachers?

All schools are legally required to identify the location and condition of asbestos or suspected asbestos. This should be done by an asbestos survey. Schools must also have an asbestos management plan. Schools have a legal requirement to provide information about the location and condition of asbestos to anyone who might disturb it. The NEU strongly believes that information about the location of asbestos should be displayed prominently in every school, for instance in the staff room.

Supply teachers are very unlikely to know if asbestos is present in the schools where they teach. Information on the location of asbestos within the school, particularly in the classrooms supply teachers will be working in, should be included in the induction pack for supply teachers. Supply teachers can then take steps to avoid disturbing any asbestos containing materials. **If for any reason you are not provided with information about asbestos, you should ask the head teacher if there is asbestos in the school and, if so, where it is located and what precautions should be taken.** NEU guidance on asbestos in schools is available in the health and safety section of the NEU website.

What can be done to support me as a supply teacher experiencing workplace stress?

Work related stress is highly prevalent in the teaching profession, and stress is also the leading cause of teachers taking time off work or leaving the profession altogether. Many teachers choose supply work in order to reduce the stress experienced in full time teaching. However, the uncertain nature of supply work and the circumstances of particular placements may themselves create stress. If so, it is vital that issues are identified as early as possible and dealt with effectively.

If you are experiencing workplace stress you should contact your GP. They will be able to discuss causes and symptoms, and recommend any treatment / make referrals if necessary. NEU guidance about tackling staff stress is available in the health and safety section of the NEU website. NEU guidance on tackling workload is available [here](#).

What about fire safety requirements in schools?

The overall legal responsibility for fire safety falls on 'responsible persons', which in schools means the employer and the head teacher. Fire safety requirements apply to supply teachers as "persons on school premises", so schools must give due consideration to them when compiling their fire risk assessment. Responsible persons must inform non-employees (such as supply teachers) about relevant risks to them and about fire safety procedures. They must also inform visiting workers' employers (e.g. supply teacher agencies) about risks and preventative and protective measures being taken.

The NEU emphasises the importance of briefing supply teachers on fire safety procedures at the beginning of their placement. Information on fire escape routes,

meeting points and any planned fire drill or fire alarm testing should be contained in the welcome pack given to them at the start of their placement. Some schools have found it useful to implement additional measures to ensure supply teachers are confident with the school's fire safety procedures. It might be helpful to print fire evacuation procedures on visitor identification badges issued to all supply teachers and visitors, so that the information can be accessed quickly in an emergency. **Further NEU guidance on fire safety is available in the health and safety section of the NEU website.**

What should I do next?

If further advice is needed, contact the NEU AdviceLine, or the Wales or N.I. offices. Their details may be found at <https://neu.org.uk/contact-us>.

Further Information

Further information and guidance for supply teachers can be found on the **supply teacher page of the NEU website**. This page also contains details of the Union's ongoing campaigning work to improve pay, conditions and pensions arrangements for supply teachers.

A comprehensive suite of guidance on health and safety issues is available on the NEU website.