



Lone Working

NEU guidance for members, reps and local officers

Teachers and school staff may work on their own, in greater or lesser degrees, for a variety of reasons. This briefing sets out advice on some of the health and safety and other issues which staff and their employers need to consider before carrying out work on their own, whether on school premises or when undertaking home visits. The law requires employers to consider carefully, and then deal with, any health and safety risks for people working alone.

Lone working on school premises

On school premises, teachers and schools staff may well remain on site after pupils have gone home. It is not always possible for staff to know the whereabouts of other staff, such as the site manager, or vice versa. Many classrooms – for example, mobile classrooms – can feel isolated and remote from the main reception area.

Most schools have effective security arrangements, but there is still a need for vigilance – not all those wishing to gain entrance to school premises may be who they say they are, or their stated reasons for requesting entry may not be valid. In addition to such considerations, there are other risks associated with working in isolated areas of a school at times when few staff are present. For example, risks may arise from a medical emergency, an accident or the discovery of a fire.

Any of the above can pose a major problem if no-one is in the vicinity to assist an employee in such a position, or even to realise they are present at all. A properly enforced signing in/out protocol is, of course, essential to avoiding such problems arising. It is also important to ensure that arrangements for covering the legal requirements with regard to fire and first aid are just as robust at times when fewer staff are on school premises as they are at busier times (see relevant NEU health and safety briefings: First Aid; Fire Safety; Slips, Trips and Falls; and Accidents and Injuries).

CCTV

Many schools now make widespread use of CCTV systems. However, the use of this technology to spot incidents and respond quickly and effectively is only effective if screens are subject to sufficient levels of monitoring. At less busy times of the day, when fewer employees are in the building, this may not always be the case. Check your school's policy on the use of CCTV to review its effectiveness in this regard.

Home visits and home tutoring

Teachers and members of school staff visit pupils at home for a variety of reasons. For some, home visiting is part of their job description. These would include home tutors providing tuition to children and young people with medical conditions which prevent them attending schools; and those involved in Traveller education or home-school liaison.



Some schools may indeed have a policy which involves teachers or support staff making visits to pupils' homes, for example, to meet children and their families prior to school entry or, to keep in touch with pupils with long-term illness. Head teachers sometimes decide to visit pupils' homes with regard to attendance or behaviour matters, or delegate others to do so.

The legal framework

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, employers have a duty to safeguard the health and safety of their employees. This duty applies whether the employee is working at the usual workplace or off-site. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require employers to assess the health and safety risks faced by employees and take appropriate preventative measures, where necessary. The main safety risk associated with home visiting is that of violence, although risks may also arise through stress brought on by the isolation experienced by some teachers working as home tutors.

Undertaking visits

The following sets out the NEU's general guidance to its members on home visiting and home tutoring. It should be noted that whereas home visits may be an unlikely (though possible) requirement for classroom teachers, they are, by definition, an essential part of the home tutor's job. Support staff employed in a school/home liaison role will also have this as an element of their job description.

The NEU advises that, unless part of a job description as indicated above, such visits should be kept to a minimum and all the preparatory steps advised here followed in full. Whether home visits take place on a regular or occasional basis, staff need to feel confident that they are not being placed at risk, either of violence or of allegations of abuse from pupils or their families. The health and safety of school staff must always take precedence when the need to make home visits is being considered. The first question should always be: "Should this visit be made by a social worker/education welfare officer (or equivalent), or someone else trained for and specialising in home visiting?"

For the majority of staff and head teachers, for whom home visiting is not part of their job description, it is recommended that, wherever possible, meetings should take place in school. Home visiting by staff should always be authorised by the head teacher and/or service manager. Wherever possible, staff should be accompanied by someone trained in home visiting, for example, an education welfare officer. For very young children it may be possible to co-ordinate visits with visits by health visitors, or even to avoid home visits by meeting at the local child health clinic, with the health visitor present.

All employers should have a policy on home visiting which should be available to all teachers and school staff who are involved in making home visits. The policy should include details of insurance arrangements so staff can check they are fully covered when undertaking home visits.



Avoiding the risk of violence - a checklist

Employers have a duty to assess the health and safety risks faced by staff making home visits and to put in place appropriate preventative measures, where necessary. The following non-exhaustive list includes a number of suggested safe systems of work, which home tutors are advised to adopt – if they have not done so already – following appropriate training and instruction from their employer.

This guidance is equally applicable to staff who make only occasional home visits who may find themselves in a more vulnerable position. They should also be provided with the information and support they need in order to ensure their own safety. Such employees should seek the support detailed in this checklist before making a home visit. Employers should ensure, via head teachers and other managers who co-ordinate the home tuition service, Traveller education and other such services, that staff:

- are fully aware of relevant risks and ways to minimise them, as set out in the employer's risk assessment
- are fully trained in strategies for the prevention of violence
- are briefed about the area in which they will be working
- are provided with all relevant information on particular pupils, their medical needs and any aggressive tendencies, as well as the background of parents/carers, including any aggressive tendencies, which can help prevent violent incidents occurring¹
- are aware of the existence of aggressive pets
- are aware of the need to leave an itinerary with expected departure/arrival times with a responsible contact, who knows how to react if the person has not returned when expected and to phone colleagues about possible changes of plan
- carry, and keep switched on, a mobile phone so they are contactable at all times
- receive a pre-arranged telephone call from this responsible contact approximately ten minutes into any visit at a new address to check all is well, and that a code word has been determined beforehand which can be used to summon assistance should this be required
- have arranged a prior appointment with the parent/carer whom they are going to meet and do not enter the house if either the child is at home alone or if the parent/carer, with whom the appointment has been made, is not there²
- ensure that doors of teaching rooms are left open for greater transparency and safety
- appreciate the importance of having a clear exit route, and for this purpose position themselves where they have easy egress through the door
- are aware of the importance of leaving the home immediately if they feel uncomfortable in any way (an ongoing risk assessment)
- should not give lifts to pupils or family members, or teach elsewhere other than the location specified on the risk assessment

¹ In certain cases the risk assessment may require another person to be present in the room when teaching, or make specific provision for two teachers to work with the child.

² In some cases it will be important to stipulate, when arranging an appointment, that, if one of the child's parents has caused problems in the past, that parent should not be present during the visit.



- are aware that they must avoid, and be seen to avoid, any act or omission which could call their professionalism into question or otherwise place them in a compromising position
- always inform the parent/carer if finishing the lesson before the agreed time
- carry forms for reporting incidents
- avoid evening visits wherever possible
- carry an identity card, which should not be worn around the neck, and show it on a first home visit
- consider carrying an alarm
- do not carry large quantities of cash or credit/debit cards when making home visits.
- All employers are recommended to keep an up-to-date record of incidents reported following home visits and visits should be discontinued where there is a known risk of violence or other unacceptable behaviour.

Malicious allegations

Home tutors and other school staff who visit pupils at home can be particularly vulnerable to allegations of physical or sexual abuse being made against them. The measures recommended above will also greatly assist in minimising the risks of allegations of abuse. Planning and organising the visit, obtaining all available information on a particular pupil and his/her family and home environment, and ensuring that another responsible adult will be present at all times to avoid being alone with the pupils, are all sensible measures as part of a safe system of work.

Staff undertaking home visits should be aware of school or employer guidance on child protection in the context of home visits and on discipline, behaviour and restraint. If there is no such advice readily available, [contact the NEU](#) and, until you have such advice, do not go ahead with the visit.

If incidents do occur, staff should record all details as soon as possible after the incident, before precise recollections of events fade. A contemporaneous account of an incident can greatly assist if a complaint or allegation is made by a pupil or parent subsequently and may provide valuable evidence. Staff should be aware of school or employer procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse and ensure that incidents are reported speedily according to the procedures. If an accusation of physical or sexual abuse is made against a member of staff, advice should be sought from the NEU as early as possible.



Resources

HSE

Working alone: health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working
Available at: hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm

[Department for Education \(DfE\)](#)

[Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs](#)

Available at:

assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269469/health_needs_guidance_-_revised_may_2013_final.pdf

[Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

This is the pioneering charity for personal safety, promoting the issues, providing training and raising awareness.

suzylamplugh.org