



Space Requirements in Classrooms **NEU guidance for members, reps and local officers**

Overcrowding is a common problem in classrooms. Unfortunately, there are no legal minimum space requirements specifying classroom dimensions. There are, however, a number of legal provisions and sources of guidance that can be drawn upon in challenging cramped teaching areas.

Legal provisions

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires the employer – so far as is reasonably practicable – to maintain a place of work “in a condition that is safe and without risks to health and the provision and maintenance of means of access to and egress from it that are safe and without such risks”.

Moreover, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place specific legal duties on employers to carry out risk assessments for all aspects of workplace health and safety. This includes assessing spaces for potential hazards such as slips, trips and falls – which would arguably be greater in crowded and confined spaces – and to take reasonably practicable steps to prevent or, where this is not possible, reduce any risks identified.

A key risk which must be assessed is that of fire. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires that “in the event of danger, it must be possible for all rooms and work stations to be evacuated quickly”. The employer has a duty under this legislation to undertake a risk assessment of the premises and give due consideration to fire hazards and safe evacuation. Should a classroom be overcrowded, safe evacuation could be impeded in the event of a fire.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced a [classroom checklist](http://gov.uk/risk/classroom-checklist.htm), which may assist in identifying health and safety issues which could be exacerbated by classroom overcrowding. It is available at: gov.uk/risk/classroom-checklist.htm

Furthermore, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 specify in regulation 10 that: “every room where persons work shall have sufficient floor area, height and unoccupied space for the purposes of health, safety and welfare”.

The Approved Code of Practice which accompanies this regulation specifies that the total volume of the room when empty, divided by the number of people normally working in it, should be at least 11 cubic metres. These regulations apply to employees rather than pupils and unfortunately the figure of 11 cubic metres does not apply to “rooms being used for lectures, meeting and similar purposes”. It could be argued, however, that this figure is a useful point of reference.



Sources of guidance on classroom space

In 2012 the government announced its intention to reduce space requirements for new school buildings that being designed as part of the Priority Schools Building Programme. The Department for Education (DfE) argued the reductions would result in cheaper, more efficient and sustainable outcomes.

Prior to the changes, Building Bulletin 99 set out that standard primary and middle school classrooms for 30 pupils should be around 70m². However, [Building Bulletin 103](#) (which replaced BB 98 and BB 99 in 2014) sets out that reception and infant classrooms for 30 pupils should be 62m² and junior classrooms just 55m². Such space limitations automatically place constraints on the amount of 'free' space available in the classroom, the types of work attempted and the ability of teachers and support staff to engage and supervise effectively. For more complex design and technology, science or art projects many schools make use of shared specialist practical areas which can be accessed as required by all classes on a rota basis. It is less likely that such space will be available in older school buildings.

As regards secondary provision, the table below gives a summary of area guidelines for different secondary subjects depending on the activities taking place in them.

Space type	Recommended size
General classroom	55 m ² for 30
General science laboratory	83 m ² for 30
Specialist science laboratory (up to A-level)	90 m ² for 30
General art room KS3/4	83m ² for 30
3D art room	97m ² for 30
3D art room (textiles)	104m ² for 32
Constructional textiles room	83m ² for 25
Graphic products	83m ² for 25
Electronics and control systems	83m ² for 25
Resistant materials (RM)	104m ² for 24 if one space, 97m ² if two spaces
RM workshop with heat bay	111m ² for 24
Food room	104m ² for 24 if one space, 97m ² if two spaces
Music classroom	62m ² for 30
Drama studio/music recital room	83m ² for 30

Again, these recommended areas reflect reductions from the earlier Building Bulletin. For instance, the earlier recommendations were 60m² for 30 pupils in a standard classroom.

Meanwhile, [Building Bulletin 104](#) (which replaced the earlier BB 102) addresses the issues of classroom space requirements for children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. These include moving around, using mobility aids, using



specialist equipment, safe vehicular movement, safe clearances around furniture and equipment, and storage of equipment and teaching resources.

Rooms other than classrooms

Classrooms are not the only areas within schools to be faced with problems of overcrowding. Other areas can be affected in this way, such as corridors, toilets, offices, staff rooms and staff work areas. Many of the suggestions made in the context of reducing overcrowding in classrooms can also be applied to other areas of the school. If in doubt, members should seek advice from their NEU health and safety rep who will be able to bring the matter to the attention of management – it may be that a suitably ‘competent person’ will need to carry out a risk assessment in order to address the matter.

Further guidance

NEU guidance on class sizes

NEU guidance on fire safety

NEU guidance on safety in practical lessons

See the website at: neu.org.uk