



Swimming Safety in Schools **NEU guidance for members, reps and local officers**

This briefing, produced in association with the Royal Life Saving Society UK, the Amateur Swimming Association and the Swimming Teachers' Association, sets out guidance to teachers and school staff who might be involved in the teaching of swimming or in the supervision of pupils being trained by appropriately qualified individuals. It identifies the safeguards and standards, which should be in place if teachers are to bear such responsibilities, and it makes clear that there can be no savings at the expense of the safety of pupils or staff.

Safety in school swimming

Swimming is an essential lifesaving skill and an enjoyable physical activity. The high accessibility to water in the UK requires individuals to have the ability both to survive in water and exploit to the full its potential for sport, leisure and exercise.

As a skill crucial to life preservation, the ability to survive in water is essential, not only to swimming but to many other water-related activities such as canoeing or sailing. Not surprisingly, youth and inexperience are major contributory factors in drowning fatalities.

Every year approximately half of the people who drown are under the age of 15. The national curriculum requires that all schools provide swimming instruction in either key stage (KS) 1 or 2 and states that, in particular, pupils should be taught to:

- swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres
- use a range of strokes effectively (for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke)
- perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

Although inclusion of swimming within the national curriculum has been a welcome development, the pressures on teaching staff have grown as teachers increasingly find themselves asked to supervise children in either the school or local sports centre pool, or even to teach swimming.

Schools which are without their own pool and which are obliged to hire sports centre facilities are less likely to rely on their own teaching staff. Sports centre managements will usually insist that, if suitably qualified teachers are not available, the centre's own staff must be used or a lifeguard hired.

There is a much heavier burden of responsibility on teachers who undertake to teach swimming or act as lifeguard in one of the approximately 4,500 school pools in the UK. Teachers should not assume such a responsibility unless they are appropriately qualified and fully confident.

The safety of the children and young people in their care is of paramount importance to school staff. The NEU believes that the teaching of swimming should, in every school, be undertaken in a safe and supervised environment by appropriately trained and qualified staff. Ideally, appropriately qualified teachers should be employed by local



authorities and other employers to teach swimming to pupils both in school pools and local sports centres, but the NEU recognises that the current funding climate limits provision in this area.

Qualifications and training

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have a clear duty to take into account employees' capabilities as regards health and safety when entrusting tasks. Employers must also ensure that employees are provided with adequate health and safety training if they take on extra responsibilities, such as the supervision of swimming sessions, thereby exposing themselves, and others, to risk. Any training should be repeated periodically to ensure continued competence. This aspect of the regulations is particularly significant in respect of school swimming.

The three main organisations which provide training in these areas are:

- the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) UK
- Swim England
- Swimming Teachers' Association (STA).

It is recommended that, unless the services of a qualified lifesaver are used, non-specialist teachers of swimming should possess, as a minimum, a current lifesaving qualification and a basic swimming teachers' certificate, such as the ASA Level 2 Certificate in Teaching Aquatics (QCF) or the STA Level 2 Award or Certificate in Teaching Swimming (QCF) for those who are taking overall responsibility and the ASA Level 1 Award in Teaching Aquatics for those assisting with the teaching of swimming.

A suitable qualification for teachers supervising swimming activities is the STA Level 1 Award in Pool Emergency Procedures (QCF) or the ASA/RLSS National Rescue Award for Swimming Teachers and Coaches. These meet fully all the recommendations on rescue skills laid down in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) [guidance](http://hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg179.htm) on health and safety in swimming pools (available at: hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg179.htm). Other suitable qualifications, which meet the same requirements are the RLSS UK National Pool Lifeguard qualification and the STA Level 2 Award for Pool Lifeguard qualification.

The rescue skills which are required of lifeguards and which these awards cover are as follows:

- to work effectively as part of a team
- to observe the water and effect a prompt rescue, using any emergency equipment provided
- to give effective resuscitation by expired air resuscitation and by cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- to give emergency first aid if no fully-trained first aiders are available.

All lifeguards need at least basic first aid training to recognise serious injury and give immediate care until further assistance arrives.

All the above lifeguarding/lifesaving qualifications remain valid for only 24 months at a time to ensure that skills are updated regularly.



The ASA Level 1 Award (QCF) qualifies the holder to assist with the teaching of swimming under the guidance of the holder of an ASA or STA Teachers' Certificate. These courses run for 12 hours, six of which must take place on the poolside and cover safety, hygiene, teaching aids and equipment, and teaching methods with non-swimmers and beginners up to intermediate level.

The ASA Level 2 Certificate in Teaching Aquatics, the STA Level 2 Award in Swimming Teaching or the STA Level 2 Certificate in Swimming Teaching should be held by any teacher in charge of teaching swimming to a group of school pupils.

To be awarded the ASA or STA Level 2 Certificate, candidates must be capable of teaching the whole range of pupils from non-swimmers to those approaching a good competitive standard. These certificates contain a practical assessment of teaching ability and a written examination.

Number of lifeguards

Guidelines on lifeguard numbers are given in the HSE [guidance](#).

In that document, the HSE does not make specific recommendations on lifeguard numbers as it is felt that this is a matter for the pool management to determine. However, the document does recommend minimum numbers for certain standard sizes of rectangular pool when used for general public swimming and without diving or other special equipment.

These are as follows:

Standard pool size in metres	Area m ²	Minimum number of lifeguards	Minimum number of lifeguards in busy conditions
20 x 8.5	170	1	2
25 x 8.5	212	1	2
25 x 10	250	1	2
25 x 12.5	312	2	2
33.3 x 12.5	416	2	3
50.0 x 20.0	1000	4	6

Additional lifeguards may be required if there are hidden areas of water or where there are extensive areas of water deeper than 2 metres. Conversely, fewer may be required where the pool only contains water of 1m or less in depth, or during programmed school swimming sessions, taking into account the ages and swimming abilities of the pupils, and the numbers being supervised.



Where a school is using a public pool it will have to comply with the lifeguarding policy set down by the pool management. In school pools, the school should adhere to employer guidelines, which should, as a minimum, cover the points mentioned in this guidance.

Density of swimmers

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has recommended that a minimum water area of 3m² per bather should be allowed. This is only a recommendation. A higher density may be reasonable in a pool with a large area of shallow water and a lower density may be necessary where diving is permitted or where water slides are in use.

An assessment will also have to be made of the time available for the session, the number of pupils taught in each session and how much time can then be devoted to each pupil. Clearly, as class sizes increase, direct contact time is reduced and the ability of the teacher to correct faults and encourage individuals falls to a level where the educational benefit to individual pupils becomes negligible.

Diving

Swimming teachers and those involved in lifeguarding activities need to be particularly aware of the hazards of diving into water of insufficient depth. Diving into water of insufficient depth can lead to concussion or injury to the head or spine. The most serious of these accidents can lead to tetraplegia (total paralysis below the neck).

The latest safety guidance recommends that children should not be taught to dive where the water depth is less than 1.8m. ASA guidance states that when diving is being taught, ideally the water depth should be at least full standing height plus arms and fingers fully extended. Very few pools can provide water of sufficient depth to meet this requirement, particularly for tall children. As it would be far less safe not to teach diving at all to a proportion of the population, the ASA recommends a minimum depth of 1.8m, with the exercise of additional caution. The pool freeboard (distance from the water surface to poolside) must not exceed 0.38m.

A forward clearance (horizontal distance at which the above minimum depth is maintained) of 7.6m must be available. It is also recommended in the document *Diving and Jumping in Swimming Pools*, published by the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), that pupils should be instructed in flat racing dives only. 'Plain header' dives should be avoided.

To ensure maximum safety, teachers should not attempt to instruct pupils in diving techniques unless they have obtained at least the ASA Level 2 Certificate in Teaching Aquatics or the STA Level 2 Certificate in Swimming Teaching.

Water clarity

Although this is unlikely to be a problem for schools using managed leisure facilities, those schools with their own pools need to be aware of the hazards of unclear water. Cloudy water makes it more difficult for divers entering the water to see swimmers below



the surface, or for a casualty to be spotted. If the clarity of a pool's water begins to deteriorate, the pool should be cleared until a satisfactory standard has been reached.

Grille covers in school swimming pools

Schools with their own pools need to be aware of the hazards posed by uncovered sump outlet pipes at the bottom of pools. In 1999, a fatal accident occurred in a school swimming pool, where a child's hand became trapped in the sump outlet pipe at the bottom of the pool.

Grille covers need to be securely fixed to the sump. Current industry guidance recommends that grilles should not have holes or gaps wider than 8mm in size.

However, the HSE recommends that, where a risk assessment shows that total exclusion of fingers and toes of children and adults is necessary, due to a significant risk of drowning if entrapment occurs, then it is suggested that grille openings do not exceed 4mm in size. If smaller grille sizes are adopted, two other things will change: the water velocity into the sump and the amount of water being passed into the treatment plant. Therefore, the decision to change grille sizes needs to be taken after full consideration of the effects on water circulation and treatment, the position of the outlet sump and the age of the users.

In pools which only have one sump outlet, there may be a real risk of a swimmer being able to cover the outlet with part of their body and being held by the suction effect of the pump. In this case, pool operators should make suitable modifications to their swimming pools. These could include:

- the installation of a second outlet sump located at a sufficient distance away so that a lone swimmer cannot cover both outlets
- provision of a pressure operated interlock switch on the pump which will isolate the pump if a significant change in suction pressure is detected
- provision of a second outlet line from a spillway or drain, which is permanently open to the suction line.

Operating procedures and emergency plans

Teachers involved in school swimming sessions, whether in school or public pools, should always be aware of the normal operating procedures of the pool as well as the plans established to deal with emergencies.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require that employers have a system in place to cover health and safety in all aspects of their activities. This could be set out in the health and safety policy statement which is required under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. Such a system should cover such matters as:

- planning – adopting a systematic approach so that risks are minimised by the careful selection of facilities and equipment
- organisation – putting in place the necessary structure to ensure progressive improvements in health and safety performance
- control – ensuring that systems for maintaining health and safety are being implemented



- monitoring and review – ensuring that policies are kept under review to take into account changing circumstances.

More specifically, in respect of swimming activities, the normal operating procedures for swimming pools should cover the following points:

- details of the pool, including dimensions, and a plan of the building
- potential risk factors
- first aid supplies and training
- conditions for hire to outside organisations
- emergency equipment and maintenance arrangements
- lifeguards' duties
- systems of work, including lines of supervision and numbers of lifeguards for particular activities.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations also require the preparation of emergency plans to operate in the event of serious danger. For swimming pools, such a plan should include action to be taken in the event of:

- disorderly behaviour
- sounding of the alarm to evacuate the building
- lighting failure
- structural failure
- lack of water clarity
- emission of toxic gases
- serious injury to a bather
- discovery of a casualty in the water.

Schools operating their own pools should adapt guidelines issued by their local authority to their own individual circumstances.

Further information and help

Further contacts

[The Royal Life Saving Society](#)

[Swim England](#)

[Swimming Teachers' Association](#)