

Further information

Management of health and safety at work. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L21 (Second edition)
HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 2488 9

Managing health and safety in schools Guidance
HSE Books 1995 ISBN 0 7176 0770 4

Preventing slip and trip incidents in the education sector
Education Information Sheet EDIS2 HSE Books 2003

Preventing slips, trips and falls at work Leaflet INDG225(rev1)
HSE Books 2003 (single copy free or priced packs of 15
ISBN 0 7176 2760 8)

Safety policies in the education sector (Second edition)
Guidance HSE Books 1994 ISBN 0 7176 0723 2

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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01/04 C10

Printed and published by the Health and Safety Executive

Keeping safe when working at height



Advice for teachers and classroom assistants



Falls from a height account for around 70 deaths and 4000 major injuries in the UK every year. The education sector as a whole produces a significant number of falls – five deaths over the last six years and more than 3000 injuries. This means that if you are a teacher or classroom assistant, you could be at risk.

Most major injuries in schools are caused by ‘low’ falls (below two metres) and involve stairs. But other activities are also involved, such as falls from desks/chairs while putting up displays and falls from ladders while putting up stage lighting. Falls can and do happen anywhere in schools. They are most likely to happen when you are under pressure towards the end of term. You can be more at risk in older schools, as they may have high ceilings, stone stairs that can become slippery and windows that do not open easily.

The following examples are taken from one month.

- A teacher fell off a chair while putting material in a cupboard.
- A teacher stood on a bookcase to put up a display and fell off.
- A teacher stood on a stool to close a window and fell.
- A teacher climbed onto the frame of a wheelbarrow and fell off.
- An adult sitting on a junior-sized chair reached for a pen and fell when one of the legs of the chair gave way.

But it is not all bad news - there's a lot you can do to cut the risk and protect yourself.

- Always ask yourself if you can avoid or minimise work at height if possible, eg use lightly weighted strings to pull display items up over beams, prepare displays as far as possible before putting them up.

- Always use suitable equipment for working at height, eg ‘kick-step’ type stools, properly designed and maintained low steps, poles for opening high windows etc. Your school should have this sort of equipment. If you still can’t reach without over-stretching, ask for help from a premises manager.
- Be aware of your school’s health and safety policy and risk assessment, which should cover the possibility of falls from height.
- Always think of your personal safety and assess the risk from what you propose to do.
- Remember that school furniture was not designed for you to stand on.
- Be aware of obstructions at all times.
- Wear suitable footwear.
- Report poor maintenance, such as damaged window mechanisms, which could create hazards.
- Be aware of slippery surfaces, particularly stairs.
- Reduce accidents on stairs by encouraging people not to run or push.
- If you are worried about the lack of equipment or its poor quality, inform your head teacher or safety representative.

Alertness is the key

Keep your mind on what you should be doing and how you should be doing it.

Avoid becoming another statistic