

Assaults on staff - how can schools reduce the risk?

The risk of assault against staff is, sadly, something that all schools need to consider carefully. Here one legal expert explains what they can do to protect staff and ensure they fulfil their duty of care.

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Injuries to teachers and support staff due to assaults by pupils can be serious and unfortunately, on occasions, life-changing.

What's more, [as identified by recent research covered by Tes](#), an assault is something that many in the sector have experienced.

So how can schools manage the risk in a way that keeps staff safe without impacting on learning?

Reducing the risk of assault on school staff

Carry out risk assessments

Risk assessments are key.

All schools should ensure that they have a specific assessment dealing with the risk of violence between pupils and against staff, even if such incidents are rare.

The risk should also be considered in assessments of specific situations that may increase the risk of violence, such as the supervision of break times or pupils leaving the site at the end of the day.

In the case of pupils with special educational or behavioural needs who are known to present a risk of violence, there should be a pupil-specific assessment that highlights the particular risks or triggers and identifies specific safeguards for that pupil.

This assessment would be expected to cover measures such as de-escalation techniques, pupil-to-staff ratio, the need for additional staff support in certain high-stress situations, ensuring that staff working with the pupil have received appropriate restraint training and, in extreme situations, personal protective equipment.

If there are situations where a member of staff may be alone with a pupil, such as where a pupil is permitted to leave the classroom with their one-to-one support to go outside or to a quiet area, the risk assessment should cover this heightened risk and identify additional mitigation, such as issuing staff with radios or panic buttons.

It is essential that risk assessments deal adequately with the risk of violence and identify all reasonably practicable safety measures that can be deployed to:

- Reduce the risk of assault.
- Properly manage a pupil who is showing signs of violence.
- Minimise the impact of aggressive behaviour.

Any risks identified should be addressed, and consideration should be given to alternative strategies if the preferred strategy is not successful. Outlining a "plan B" is often necessary.

Provide training

Ensuring that staff have sufficient training to deal with potentially violent situations is important.

While de-escalation is often the primary response to potential violence, training should also include safe restraint techniques, even where it is identified as a last resort.

Where training is provided to staff, it is essential that records of the training are retained for future reference. Training records should include:

- Confirmation of who has received the training, such as a signed attendance log.
- The date the training was provided and when any refresher training is expected to take place.
- The scope and content of the training, such as a copy of the slides or handouts.

Provide personal protective equipment

During the assessment, consideration should be given to the need for personal protective equipment ('PPE'), such as bite resistant arm guards, safety clothing and personal radios or alarms.

PPE should be seen as a last resort in circumstances where the risk cannot be managed adequately by other means.

Where PPE is provided to staff, it is important to ensure that it is safe, suitable, available and is used as instructed.

You should also ensure that there is a signed acknowledgement that the member of staff has been provided with PPE.

There should be evidence that staff know how to obtain replacements if necessary and that the equipment is checked regularly and replaced if required.

Depending on the nature of the PPE, it may be necessary to provide training in its use. In the case of radios or personal alarms, provision will need to be made for issuing these each day, storing them when not in use, and checking that they are charged and operational.

Spot checks to ensure that PPE is being used as instructed might also be considered and documented.

Other parties at risk

The points above relate primarily to teachers and teaching assistants who have day-to-day contact with pupils, but the risks could extend to others who are working with pupils.

These might include lunchtime supervisors, sports coaches, music teachers, parent volunteers and supply teachers.

It is important that these individuals are made aware of the relevant risks and the safety measures in place.

In low-risk scenarios, a simple warning to defer to the class teacher may be sufficient, but other circumstances may require more stringent measures and it may be necessary to issue copies of risk assessments, check for relevant training, and provide guidance or supervision.

There may even be cases where it is inappropriate for anyone who is not a regular trained member of staff to work directly with high-risk pupils.

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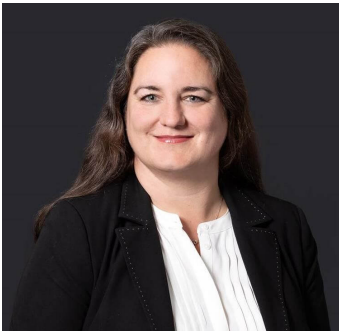
Contact

Katherine Langley

Senior Associate

katherine.langley@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)115 934 2038



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