

## **Birmingham City Council** **Schools Lockdown Guidance**

### **Introduction**

It is advisable that all schools should have effective lockdown procedures and that they are regularly practised and reviewed. This guidance is intended to be used both by schools that already have lockdown plans, to develop and refine their plans as necessary, and by those schools where no such plans currently exist.

### **Creating Lockdown Procedures**

All schools should consider the need for robust and tested school lockdown procedures. Lockdown procedures should be seen as a sensible and proportionate response to any external or internal incident which has the potential to pose a threat to the safety of staff and pupils in the school. Procedures should aim to minimise disruption to the learning environment whilst ensuring the safety of all pupils, staff and visitors. You may wish to identify on a map those rooms most suitable for lockdown situations and which entrances need to be locked. Any confusion as to where staff and pupils will congregate could lead to them making themselves more vulnerable to an intruder. If pupils are outside when the lockdown alarm is raised it may be more appropriate to take them to the nearest building that can be secured, or even tell them to hide or disperse if this will aid their safety.

Lockdown procedures may be activated in response to any number of situations, but some of the more typical ones might be:

- A reported incident or civil disturbance in the local community which potentially poses a risk to the school community.
- An intruder on the school site with the potential to pose a risk to pupils, staff and visitors.
- A warning being received regarding a local risk of air pollution (e.g. smoke plume, gas cloud).
- A major fire in the vicinity of the school.
- The close proximity of a dangerous dog roaming loose.

It is impossible to prescribe generic details of a school's lockdown plan as there are a number of variables that will dictate exactly how an individual school responds to those situations identified, for example:

- Access to school bell controls to raise an alarm in an emergency.
- Other means of internal communications - messenger, two-way radios, mobile phone, internal email, texts, etc.
- School site plan including the layout of buildings and their proximity to one another.
- Age of students.
- Any disabilities of the students involved.
- Geographical location – urban/rural, presence of secure perimeter fence.

Nonetheless, many schools have found it helpful to incorporate the following basic principles in their plans:

- Staff are alerted to the activation of the plan by a recognised signal, which should be audible throughout the school.
- Pupils who are outside of the school buildings are brought inside as quickly as possible.
- Those inside the school should remain in their classrooms.
- All external doors and, as necessary, windows are locked.
- Depending on the circumstances, internal classroom doors may also need to be locked.
- Once in lockdown mode staff should notify the administrative office immediately of any pupils not accounted for, and instigate an immediate search for any missing pupils.

- Staff should encourage pupils to keep calm.
- The school should establish communication with the Emergency Services as soon as possible where this is deemed appropriate.
- Birmingham City Council School and Governor Support should be notified on 0121 464 3174 (North), 0121 303 2193 (Central), 0121 303 8394 (South).
- Where the incident may have a wider impact than just the school itself the Birmingham City Council Resilience Team should be notified on 0121 303 4825.
- If necessary, parents should be notified as soon as it is practicable to do so via the school's established communications system.
- Pupils will not be released to parents during a lockdown.
- If it is necessary to evacuate the building, the fire alarm will be sounded. (NB: This alarm should be different to the lockdown alarm.)
- Staff should then await further instructions.

It is of vital importance that the school's lockdown procedures are familiar to members of the senior management team, school administrators, teaching staff and non-teaching staff. To achieve this, a lockdown drill should be undertaken at least once a year. Dependent upon their age, pupils should also be aware of the plan and regular practices will increase their familiarity. Parents should also be made aware that the school has a lockdown plan. It is not advisable to circulate the actual plan as if copies fell into the wrong hands it could render the plan ineffective.

It would also be good practice to:

- Conduct a number of table top exercises with the senior management team to test the procedures against a variety of scenarios.
- Rehearse lockdown arrangements with all staff and pupils.
- Display lockdown drill information in every classroom alongside information relating to fire drills.

### **Lockdown Arrangements**

Lockdown arrangements should be determined by schools on an individual basis as they will be dependent to a large extent on local circumstances such as building design and layout, class arrangements, resources available, etc. An example of a lockdown procedure might be:

#### ***1 Partial Lockdown***

##### **Alert to staff: "Partial lockdown"**

This may be as a result of a reported incident or civil disturbance in the local community with the potential to pose a risk to pupils, staff and visitors in the school. It may also be as a result of a warning being received regarding the risk of air pollution, etc.

##### **Immediate actions:**

- All outside activity to cease immediately with pupils and staff returning indoors. (NB: There will need to be a means of communicating the alert to duty staff at break times.)
- All pupils and staff to remain indoors and external doors and windows should be locked.
- Free movement may be permitted within the building, dependent upon the circumstances.

All situations are different; once all pupils and staff are safely indoors, senior staff will conduct an ongoing and dynamic risk assessment based on advice from the Emergency Services. This can then be communicated to staff, who can inform pupils if they are old enough to understand. "Partial lockdown" should be seen as a precautionary

measure which puts the school in a state of readiness should the situation escalate, whilst retaining a degree of normality.

In the event of an air pollution issue, air vents can be closed where this is possible, as an additional precaution. Emergency Services will advise as to the best course of action in respect of the prevailing threat.

## **2 Full Lockdown**

### **Alert to staff: "Full lockdown"**

This signifies an immediate threat to the school and may be an escalation of a partial lockdown.

#### **Immediate actions:**

- All pupils return to base (classroom, form room or other agreed location e.g. sports hall, assembly hall, dining room).
- External doors locked.
- Classroom doors locked, where a member of staff with key is present.
- Windows locked and blinds drawn.
- Pupils sit quietly out of sight (e.g. under desk or around a corner).
- Register taken - the administrative office will contact each class in turn for an attendance report if this is possible.

Staff and pupils remain in lockdown until it has been lifted by a senior member of staff or the Emergency Services. At any point during the lockdown, the fire alarm may sound which is a cue to evacuate the building.

During the lockdown, staff will keep agreed lines of communication open but not make unnecessary calls to senior management or the administrative office as this could delay more important communication.

Examples of discreet communication channels might be:

- Where staff have access to an internal email system then they could access their account and await further instruction. In practical terms, staff would need to be familiar with accessing their account through a variety of means e.g. laptop, smartphone or tablet.
- Where a school uses "Parentmail" then staff could be placed into a defined user group which could then be used to communicate instructions via text message in an emergency

### **Communication With Parents and Carers**

School lockdown procedures, especially arrangements for communicating with parents and carers, should be routinely shared with parents and carers, although it is not advisable to share entire lockdown plans. In the event of an actual lockdown, it is strongly advised that any incident or development is communicated to parents and carers as soon as is practicable. Parents and carers will obviously be concerned but regular communication of accurate information will help to alleviate undue anxiety.

Parents and carers should be given enough information about what will happen so that they:

- are reassured that the school understands their concern for their child's welfare, and that it is doing everything possible to ensure their child's safety,

- do not need to contact the school as calling the school could tie up telephone lines that are needed for contacting emergency service providers,
- do not come to the school as they could interfere with access by emergency service providers and may even put themselves and others in danger,
- wait for the school to contact them about when it is safe to come to collect their children, and where this will be from.

This part of the plan must reassure parents and carers that the school understands their concern for their children's welfare and that everything that can possibly be done to ensure children's safety will be done. However, it may also be prudent to reinforce the message **"...the school is in a full lockdown situation. During this period the switchboard and entrances will not be staffed, external doors locked and nobody will be allowed in or out..."**

### **Emergency Services**

It is important to keep lines of communication open with Emergency Services as they are best placed to offer advice as a situation unfolds. The school site may or may not be cordoned off by Emergency Services dependent upon the severity of the incident that has triggered the lockdown. Emergency Services will support the decision of the Headteacher with regarding the timing of communication to parents.

In the event of a prolonged lockdown or more severe scenario, Birmingham City Council has the capacity to provide humanitarian assistance by establishing a Reception Centre for family members outside of the cordoned off area.

### **Documenting Your Plan**

The plan does not need to be a massive document as it is something to refer to in an emergency situation.

It should include:

- The people with authority to manage the lockdown (e.g. Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, with two others as back-up in case of absence).
- A list of the circumstances where lockdown will be applied.
- Details of how individuals will contact the administrative office if they see or hear something suspicious.
- Arrangements for how the lockdown signal will be given.
- Guidance on where people go if they are outside or away from the classroom.
- Details of how a roll call will be undertaken.
- Information about how the plan will be shared, tested and reviewed.
- Training requirements for staff and pupils.
- Debriefing arrangements following a lockdown.

### **Lockdown Situations when Away From School**

Schools must also consider what would happen if a lockdown situation should arise when a group is away from school, whether this be on a short visit, day trip or longer trip that involves a party staying away, possibly even in a foreign country.

It will always be necessary to carry out a risk assessment prior to such visits and it is important to consider what would happen if an emergency situation arose that was out of the control of the staff who are supervising the pupils on the trip.

It will be necessary to give some guidance to pupils prior to the trip, and this should be reinforced during the trip itself. Parents and carers also need to be provided with information about the procedures that would be followed.

It is almost impossible to predict the circumstances where an emergency situation might arise in a way that specific planning can be undertaken. As a minimum it will be prudent to show pupils an emergency meeting point if the party gets separated and remind them to follow instructions from the Emergency Services. If the trip involves staying in a hotel or hostel the staff leading the trip should identify areas of the building where they are most likely to be able to protect the safety of the children in their care. Pupils could even be asked to disperse or hide if this will aid their safety.

### **Conclusion**

No guidance will ever cover every eventuality but, if the matter is given some thought, everyone will be as prepared as possible should a lockdown situation ever arise. The more preparation that has taken place the greater chance is that there will be less panic, enabling staff to protect the children in their care to the best of their ability.

#### Contact:

Razia Butt, Resilience Adviser

Tel 0121 464 7739 / 07535 647 711

Email: [razia.butt@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:razia.butt@birmingham.gov.uk)