

Glenridding Beck – Investigation Report

Drowning of Max Palmer in Glenridding Beck 26 May 2002

PART F: GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT AT THE SCHOOL

These pages look at the underlying arrangements for health and safety management at the school.

The lessons learned cover particularly the need:

- clear lines of accountability
- health and safety management arrangements to consider activities and systems as well as premises
- effective procedures for monitoring

The left hand column sets out some facts and the right hand column provides comment and further sources of information.

Note: Comments in *bold italics* draw particular attention to points that those involved in educational visits and adventurous activities may need to consider.

This Part has three sections:

- The school environment
- Priorities
- Monitoring

It ends with a summary of the key points.

Facts

The school environment

1. The Head teacher took up post in January 2000. Health and Safety (H&S) had previously been seen as the Head teacher's personal responsibility and there was little delegation of H&S functions. One of the new Head's early tasks was to clarify responsibilities and revise the staff handbook accordingly.

2. The Head teacher revised the school visits section of the staff handbook in 2000. She was mindful of the (then recent) Stainforth Beck tragedy, so downloaded relevant guidance from the DfES website and showed it to the governors. She considered that the policies and procedures that she had put in place were appropriate.

3. At the time of Max Palmer's death, most of the H&S issues in the school related to the poor condition of the buildings. The Governors had a "Buildings and Health and Safety Committee" which considered mainly premises matters. A senior teacher was given responsibility for the premises and reported to that Committee. He also helped informally with some H&S matters together with one of the administrative staff.

Priorities

4. In 2000 the School had a number of difficulties. Pupil numbers were falling and it was being reorganised onto one site. The incoming Head teacher had numerous issues to address, including accountability. She prioritised accordingly. H&S was not seen as an immediate problem because staff were in regular contact with LCC's schools Health and Safety Team and there was considerable H&S - related activity in the school e.g. risk assessment training.

5. The School's Ofsted reports in 2000 and 2002 had commented positively on the fact that children had the opportunity to go on activity weekends in the Lake District.

Comment

While we expect every head teacher to accept a personal responsibility for H&S, there is a danger that they will not be able to give sufficient time to the detail, particularly in a large school.

It can be good practice for head teachers to delegate many H&S functions, providing that they clearly define responsibilities and establish clear lines of accountability and monitoring arrangements.

In October 2000 two schoolgirls were drowned while river walking in Stainforth Beck. There is a note on the incident on the AALA website <http://www.aala.org/guidance.html> Look under "Articles"

It is good practice to review H&S procedures in the light of reported incidents and developments in local and national guidance

It is good practice for every school to have a person with a formal responsibility to act as the focal point for H&S.

Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) have a specific role within the school in respect of school visits. They may or may not have additional H&S functions

The H&S responsibilities of such people should be clearly defined (including both the extent and limits of those responsibilities) in their job descriptions. They should have sufficient training and resources to do the job effectively.

Although the most "visible" H&S matters are often premises-related, they should not obscure the need for effective H&S management, including establishing systems and accountabilities and monitoring compliance.

Head teachers have to prioritise, but it can be dangerous to assume that if something is not an immediate problem, it is functioning correctly. Active H&S management, including monitoring by head teachers, senior managers and governors is important to ensure compliance and prevent complacency.

Ofsted views favourably a good level of provision of extra-curricular activities, but inspectors would not normally look at the processes involved.

Favourable Ofsted reports about school trips are not confirmation of safe practice and are no substitute for thorough risk assessment and monitoring.

Note: An Ofsted paper on the personal development aspects of outdoor education is at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

Monitoring

6. Health and safety monitoring was largely premises-related. There were termly inspections of the buildings and the results were sent to the Governors' Buildings and Health and Safety Committee.

7. By 2002, the school had structured systems for performance management, staff appraisal and staff development and had received Investors in People (IIP) accreditation.

Although the Glenridding weekends, including the plunge pooling activity, were well known in the school, no one in senior management identified the need to find out what actually happened on the visits. ***This was a serious omission.***

As with risk assessment, monitoring needs to cover both activities and sites. One simple way of monitoring is to check compliance with the precautions identified in risk assessments or set out in safe operating procedures.

Monitoring should be seen as supportive, recording and acknowledging good practice and achievement, as well as identifying problems and remedying lack of achievement. H&S monitoring should be part of wider monitoring arrangements in the context of improving performance.

It is good practice for school governing bodies to receive evidence of monitoring by the school and LEA which shows both what has been done well and what can be done better. The aim should be to achieve continuous improvement.

H&S considerations should feature in performance monitoring, staff appraisal and staff development programmes.

Key points

- Head teachers can delegate H&S functions, but need to clearly define responsibilities and establish clear lines of accountability
- It is good practice to review H&S procedures in the light of reported incidents
- Every school should have a person acting as a focal point for H&S who has clearly defined responsibilities and is provided with effective training and resources
- Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) have a specific role within the school in respect of school visits
- Monitoring by head teachers, senior managers and governors is important to ensure compliance and prevent complacency.
- LEAs should have monitoring systems in place and provide feedback to schools (Para F6)
- Monitoring needs to cover activities and H&S management systems as well as sites.
- One simple way of monitoring is to check compliance with the precautions identified in risk assessments or set out in safe operating procedures.
- Monitoring should be seen as supportive, recording and acknowledging good practice and achievement, as well as identifying and remedying lack of achievement.
- It is good practice for school governing bodies to receive evidence from monitoring by the school and LEA which shows both what has been done well and what can be done better. The aim should be to achieve continuous improvement.
- H&S considerations should feature in performance monitoring, staff appraisal and staff development programmes
- Favourable Ofsted reports about school trips are not confirmation of safe practice and are no substitute for thorough risk assessment.