

Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Children

Guidance for the Management of Health and
Safety Risks

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1. Introduction

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA) employers have a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees and those affected by their undertaking. Section 2 sets out the employer's duties to provide safe systems of work, information, instruction, training, supervision, and a safe working environment.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR), employers have a legal duty to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of risks to employees and to others affected by their activities, review assessments when no longer valid or when there is a significant change, and consider specific groups.

This guidance aims to assist community schools, including community special needs schools, in understanding their responsibilities under health and safety legislation and to ensure that suitable measures are in place to protect both staff and pupils.

It recognises that children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are educated within mainstream settings. Therefore, effective risk management should support inclusion by ensuring access to learning while addressing significant risks sensibly and proportionately.

2. Aim

This guidance aims to help the school's leadership team:

- To ensure schools understand their health and safety responsibilities in managing risks associated with children who have special educational needs.
- To raise awareness among staff of the specific risks they might face when working with pupils who have special educational needs.
- To provide staff with adequate information, instruction, and training so they can work safely and effectively.
- To ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are undertaken for children with special educational needs.
- To provide adequate supervision and regularly review safe systems of work for educating children with a range of behavioural needs.

3. Behavioural Plan

A behavioural plan is a structured approach designed to support children with special educational needs (SEN) by addressing behaviours that may create barriers to learning or social development. Its primary goal is to encourage positive behaviour, reduce challenges, and create a safe and supportive environment.

The development of a behavioural plan begins with thorough assessment and observation to identify patterns, triggers, and contexts influencing behaviour. Collaboration is essential, involving teachers, SENCOs, Senior leaders, parents, and sometimes external specialists, ensuring the child's/YP's voice is included. Clear, measurable targets are then set, focusing on promoting positive behaviours rather than simply eliminating negative ones. Strategies are designed to prevent triggers and provide consistent responses when behaviours occur, often including reinforcement techniques and teaching coping skills.

An effective behavioural plan is specific and tailored to the child's individual needs. It should include clear, measurable targets, consistent strategies for staff, and a positive focus on skill-building. Data-driven monitoring ensures progress is tracked and adjustments are made as needed. Collaboration among all stakeholders and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances are key features that make a behavioural plan successful.

In summary, a well-developed behavioural plan is a proactive, collaborative, and adaptable tool that supports children with SEN in achieving behavioural and educational success.

4. Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is a fundamental process in health and safety management, defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as the systematic identification of hazards, evaluation of associated risks, and implementation of control measures to prevent harm. Its purpose is to ensure that work activities are carried out safely and that risks are reduced “as far as reasonably practicable.”

The process involves five key steps: identifying hazards that could cause harm, deciding who may be harmed and how they may be harmed, assessing the likelihood and severity of potential harm, deciding on appropriate measures to eliminate or control these risks, recording your findings and implementing them and reviewing and updating the risk assessment. This proactive approach not only protects school staff who work with children with special education needs and others affected by their work activities but also ensures compliance with statutory obligations.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. 1974 Act (HSWA) places a legal duty on employers to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of employees and others. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to carry out “suitable and sufficient” risk assessments, record significant findings where five or more employees are involved, and review assessments regularly or when circumstances change.

A compliant risk assessment must be detailed, practical, and tailored to the pupil/student’s behavioural risks. It should include clear control measures prioritising the elimination of the hazard, if possible, and/or reducing the risk to a reasonably acceptable level. Furthermore, Headteachers and responsible persons in schools are required to ensure assessments are implemented effectively, monitored, and communicated to staff.

Risk assessment is both a practical tool and a legal obligation. By identifying hazards, evaluating risks, and applying robust control measures, organisations fulfil their duty of care, protect people, and comply with health and safety legislation.

A template for completing suitable and sufficient risk assessments is available on the [ASSURE](#) Health and Safety Management Portal. Refer to the Risk Assessment Policy and Risk Assessment Procedure on [ASSURE](#).

5. Behavioural Plan vs Risk Assessment

Aspect	Behavioural Plan	Risk Assessment	How Behavioural Plan Supports Risk Assessment
Purpose	To manage and improve a child's behaviour, promoting positive actions and coping skills.	To identify hazards, evaluate risks, and implement controls to prevent harm.	Behavioural triggers identified in the plan help assess risks of harm (to self or others).
Focus	Individual behavioural challenges and strategies for support.	Physical, environmental, and activity-related hazards affecting health and safety.	Behavioural patterns inform supervision needs and safe activity planning.
Legal Status	Not a statutory requirement, but best practice in SEN support.	Required under HSWA 1974 and Management Regulations 1999.	Provides evidence for "suitable and sufficient" assessment for SEN pupils.
Development Process	Collaborative: teachers, SENCO, parents, specialists.	Systematic: hazard identification, risk evaluation, control measures.	Behavioural plan data ensures accurate identification of behavioural hazards.
Content	Behaviour triggers, positive reinforcement strategies, and coping techniques.	Hazards, risk level, control measures, monitoring and review.	Strategies in the plan can be integrated as control measures in the risk assessment.

Aspect	Behavioural Plan	Risk Assessment	How Behavioural Plan Supports Risk Assessment
Review Frequency	Regularly or when behaviour changes.	Regularly or when circumstances change.	Behavioural changes prompt risk assessment updates.
Outcome	Improved behaviour and safer learning environment.	Reduced the likelihood of accidents or harm.	Combined approach ensures holistic safety for SEN child.

A behavioural plan is an important tool that supports the development of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. However, these two documents should not be treated as interchangeable, as they serve different purposes and are written in different formats.

Behavioural plans are designed as planning documents and often contain broad information and language that can be open to interpretation. They may include extensive details that are difficult for teaching staff to recall when faced with an immediate risk posed by a pupil in their care. In contrast, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment extracts the behavioural risks identified in the behavioural plan and translates them into specific, actionable control measures that staff must follow to work safely.

Behavioural plans should be retained as management documents and updated as required. From these plans, individual risk assessments must be developed for pupils with identified special needs. These risk assessments should be shared with and reviewed by the teaching staff directly responsible for those pupils. This process ensures that staff receive concise, practical guidance on the child's risk behaviours and the precise control measures necessary to mitigate those risks.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) should evaluate whether providing both the behavioural plan and the risk assessment to support staff enhances the management of health and safety risks. While sharing the behavioural plan may be discretionary, the risk assessment must always be communicated and discussed with relevant staff to ensure compliance and safety.

6. Information, Instruction and Training

Schools must ensure that Staff receive clear, accessible information about the behavioural risks associated with individual pupils and the control measures in place to manage these risks. This includes details from risk assessments, emergency procedures, and agreed safety arrangements. Information should be tailored to the staff member's role. For example, teachers and teaching assistants should be given concise, practical guidance on how to respond to specific behaviours, rather than lengthy behavioural plans; they may not remember all the details when faced with a situation that poses a risk to their safety.

Training is essential to equip staff with the skills and confidence to manage challenging behaviour safely. Responsible persons in schools should assess training needs based on job responsibilities and identified risks. This may include positive behaviour support strategies, de-escalation techniques, and safe intervention methods. Training should also cover the use of any specialist equipment or procedures. Vulnerable groups, such as new staff, supply teachers, or those unfamiliar with SEN settings, require additional support through induction programs and ongoing supervision.

Effective supervision ensures that safety measures are consistently applied. Supervisors must be trained and experienced members of staff, understand risk assessments and their role in supporting staff. Regular check-ins, observations, and feedback sessions help maintain standards and provide reassurance to staff working with children with complex behavioural needs.

Headteacher and responsible staff members should confirm that staff not only attend training but also understand and can implement the strategies taught. This can be achieved through practical demonstrations, scenario-based exercises, and observation during classroom practice. Records of all training and competency checks should be maintained, and refresher sessions scheduled to reinforce good practice.

Staff Agency Worker/Supply Teacher	Examples of Training and Competency
Staff (supporting a Child with SEND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Handling – De-Escalation, Behaviour, Restraint Managing Behaviour needs in children with SEND Understanding and Supporting Behaviour Needs in Schools Specific site Induction
Example of Training Combinations based on Behavioural Risks	
Behavioural Risks	Recommended Training Modules
Aggression or Physical Outbursts	Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), De-escalation Techniques, Safe Physical Intervention
High Anxiety or Emotional Dysregulation	PBS, Communication Strategies, Crisis Management
Sensory Processing Challenges	PBS, Environmental Risk Assessment Training, Manual Handling

Staff	Examples of Training and Competency
Agency Worker/Supply Teacher	
Absconding or Running Away	PBS, Dynamic Risk Assessment, Emergency Procedures Training
Verbal Aggression or Threatening Behaviour	PBS, Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills, Incident Reporting Procedures

Note: Staff may need a combination of these training modules, depending on the specific behavioural risks posed by the child they are supporting.

7. Staffing Requirements

Schools must maintain adequate staffing levels to meet the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

- Some pupils may require one-to-one support, while others may need a higher staff-to-pupil ratio.
- Staffing requirements must be determined through a **Behavioural Needs Plan Assessment**.

Under no circumstances should staffing levels be compromised, as this may place the health and safety of staff, pupils, and others at risk.

If the required staffing level cannot be met on a given day, the **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)** should decide whether the pupil stays home and receives support from other services until enough staff are available for a safe return. This decision must consider the child's individual needs and follow statutory documents like the EHCP.

8. Use of Agency Staff

Where agency staff are engaged to support pupils with SEND, either temporarily or to cover staff absence, the following requirements apply:

- Agency staff must receive the same **information, instruction, and training** as permanent staff.
- If the agency asserts that staff have received relevant training, the school must verify their competency before deployment.

Verification may include:

- Evidence of training in behaviour management strategies (e.g., Team Teach)
- Up-to-date Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records
- Demonstrated experience working with pupils with complex or challenging needs
- Knowledge of safeguarding procedures and de-escalation techniques

Agency staff must complete training that aligns with the requirements specified in the Training and Competency Table within this guidance.

9. Accident Reporting

Accidents or incidents involving pupils with special educational needs, as well as teaching and support staff, must be reported on ASSURE without delay. Reporting should be completed as soon as reasonably practicable following the event to enable timely investigation and the implementation of appropriate corrective actions.

The responsibility for initiating the report rests with the staff member directly involved in the incident. Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) are required to ensure that all incidents are accurately recorded on ASSURE and that investigations are completed in accordance with Southwark Council's health and safety procedures.

10. Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Behavioural plan	A behavioural plan is an individualised strategy that uses assessment and collaboration to set measurable targets, promote positive behaviours, and implement consistent, preventive strategies.
Risk Assessment	A risk assessment is a systematic process used to identify potential hazards that could cause harm, evaluate the likelihood and severity of those risks, and determine appropriate measures to eliminate or control them to keep people safe.
Dynamic risk assessment	This occurs when an unexpected hazard or risk arises that was not included in your original risk assessment. It is usually addressed immediately on the spot when the situation changes suddenly and the hazard must be identified and controlled. Afterwards, it should be discussed with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and may need to be added to the risk assessment.

Term	Definition
Suitable and sufficient risk assessment	<p>The law says that your risk assessment needs to be “suitable and sufficient” – basically, it needs to prove that: You have done a thorough check, the risk assessment is in date, specific, and relevant to the job, environment, and individuals. You have thought about everyone who might be affected, such as workers, visitors, and anyone nearby. Assessed and dealt with all the big, obvious risks, implemented control measures to eliminate or, where not appropriate, reduced to the lowest level possible. If you follow the guidance and instruction within this policy, then your approach is likely to be considered suitable and</p>
Reasonably practicable	<p>“Reasonably practicable” means balancing the level of risk against the time, effort, and cost needed to control it. You are expected to reduce risks as far as is sensible and achievable without taking actions that are grossly disproportionate to the benefit.</p> <p>For example, spending £1 million to prevent minor bruises would not be reasonably practicable. But spending the same amount to prevent a major incident that could cause serious harm or death would be.</p> <p>Even when full control is not practical, you must still take steps to reduce the risk as</p>

Term	Definition
	much as possible, like changing how a task is done or providing protective equipment.
Reasonably acceptable level of risk	A reasonably acceptable level of risk means the risk has been reduced as far as practicable, making it low enough to be considered tolerable once suitable controls are in place.
foreseeable risk of harm	Foreseeable risk of harm means a danger that you can reasonably predict might happen and cause injury or damage if nothing is done to prevent it.
Risk	The likelihood and severity of the harm if the hazard did occur. The degree of risk depends on the control measures, the number of people who might be exposed, and the 5 consequences of the injury or illness. The more likely and higher the severity/consequences occurring, the higher the risk.
Hazard	A hazard is defined as something with the potential to cause harm. This can include hazardous substances or dangerous machines, unsafe methods of work,

Term	Definition
	inadequate supervision, insufficient training, defects on the premises, etc
Control Measures	Are safety measures put in place to eliminate, mitigate, and reduce the risk? Management is responsible for ensuring that adequate safety measures detailed within the risk assessment are implemented locally and staff follow the safe systems of work.

11. Sample Documents: Behavioural Plan and Risk Assessment

Behavioural Support Plan

Child Details

Name	Alex Johnson
Class/Year	Year 4
Date	12/12/2025
Reviewed By	Sarah Thompson

Overview

Primary Needs: Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD

Behavioural Risks: Aggression, physical outbursts, verbal aggression

Triggers

Sudden changes in routine
Loud noises or crowded spaces
Denial of preferred activity
Sensory overload

Early Warning Signs

Raised voice or pacing
Withdrawal or refusal to engage
Increased agitation (fidgeting, clenched fists)

Preventative Strategies

Provide visual schedules and clear routines
Use calm, simple language for instructions
Offer safe choices to reduce frustration
Reduce sensory overload (quiet space, noise-cancelling headphones)

De-escalation Strategies

Speak calmly and maintain neutral body language
Validate feelings: 'I can see you're upset.'
Offer a break in a calm area
Avoid confrontation or power struggles

Crisis Management

Maintain personal space and keep others safe
Use approved safe physical intervention only if necessary and as per training
Follow emergency protocol for absconding or severe aggression

Recovery and Follow-Up

Allow time for the child to calm down in a safe space
Use restorative conversation when appropriate
Record incident in behaviour log and review triggers

Staff Responsibilities

Read and understand this plan
Attend required training (PBS, de-escalation, safe intervention)
Report any changes or concerns to SENCO immediately

Behavioural Risks: Aggression, Physical Outbursts, Verbal Aggression

RA-00849

Overall Potential Risk Level:
High

16

Overall Residual Risk Level:
Low

4

Business unit	Southwark Council -> Schools
Location Category	School - Community
Assessment Date	12/12/2025
Risk Assessment Category	Personal
Assessment Title	Behavioural Risks: Aggression, Physical Outbursts, Verbal Aggression
Activity Description	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
People Covered	Alex Johnson Peter Brown(Class Teacher) Kay Gary (Teaching Assistant) Other Pupils Other Staff
Assessment Conclusion	This assessment will be reviewed following any update to Alex's Behavioural Support Plan, or sooner if Alex's behaviour results in an accident or significant incident
Is This An Acceptable Risk?	Yes
Assessor Name	Temple George

People Consulted	Class Teacher Assistant Class Teacher HT(Behavioural Plan Developer)
Approver	Temple George
Date	15/12/2025
Next Review	12/12/2027

Hazards And Control Measures

HAZARD CATEGORY, HAZARD DESCRIPTION	PEOPLE AFFECTED, HAZARD CONSEQUENCE (RESULTING HARM)	PRESENT CONTROLS	RISK RATING	EXTRA CONTROLS NEEDED	-
Violence & Aggression Physical assault towards staff/pupils - spitting, hitting, kicking, biting	Teaching staff, , Support staff, , Other pupils, , Alex Sore arms/legs Bruises, scratches dislocation Eye injury Emotional distress Biting wounds infection from biting and spitting	Maintain personal space Use predictable routines and visual schedule- stay calm, give simple instruction -stop kicking/biting Transition to calm area - room B. Maintain staff level Do a dynamic assessment of risk within the area.	12 High Consequence: 3 - Moderate Likelihood: 4 - Likely	Staff have received training in PBS, de-escalation and safe holds. Staff receive refresher training every term. A designated area is provided as calm area. Signal cards system is provided for early exit from class.	4 Low Consequence: 1 - Minimal Likelihood: 4 - Likely

<p>Personal Safety Throwing objects or using furniture as projectiles</p>	<p>Staff, pupils in vicinity,, Alex</p> <p>Head injuries</p> <p>Broken arms/legs</p> <p>Bruises</p> <p>Dislocation</p> <p>Unnecessary hard/loose objects are removed.</p> <p>Safe seating arrangement is in place.</p> <p>Pre- teach coping routines - use of low-arousal communication.</p> <p>Prompt movement to calm area at early signs</p>	<p>16</p> <p>High</p> <p>Consequence: 4 - Major</p> <p>Likelihood: 4 - Likely</p>	<p>Furniture are Fitted with soft edging to corners</p> <p>Introduce personal toolkit (fidget, stress ball);</p> <p>maintain classroom layout to create clear exit routes.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Consequence: 2 - Minor</p> <p>Likelihood: 2 - Unlikely</p>
<p>Personal Safety Absconding/running from supervised area</p>	<p>Alex, , Staff pursuing, , Wider School community</p> <p>Slip, Trips and fall</p> <p>Head injuries</p> <p>Broken arms/legs</p> <p>Bruises</p> <p>Dislocation</p> <p>Advance notice are given of transitions and changes.</p> <p>Adult positioned by door during known triggers</p> <p>Gates secured during lesson time.</p>	<p>16</p> <p>High</p> <p>Consequence: 4 - Major</p> <p>Likelihood: 4 - Likely</p>	<p>Personalised movement pass is in place.</p> <p>"Stop and Wait" routines are rehearsed;</p> <p>School site maps are available and accessible.</p> <p>Alarmed door procedures are observed and followed during search</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Consequence: 2 - Minor</p> <p>Likelihood: 2 - Unlikely</p>

Personal Safety	Alex	Reduce sensory load	16	4
Self-injury during escalation (head banging, scratching)	Head injury Bruises loss of consciousness	Provide safe space with soft furnishings Teach alternative regulation strategies (deep pressure, breathing) Close observation at early warning signs Remove hazardous items.	High Consequence: 4 - Major Likelihood: 4 - Likely	Low Consequence: 2 - Minor Likelihood: 2 - Unlikely
Personal Safety	Alex , Staff	Only Trained staff Team-Teach - minimal force, shortest time Maintain continuous communication Post-incident medical check and debrief	16	4
Use of physical intervention (last resort)	Slip, Trips and fall Head injuries Broken arms/legs Bruises Dislocation		High Consequence: 4 - Major Likelihood: 4 - Likely	Low Consequence: 2 - Minor Likelihood: 2 - Unlikely

Personal Safety	Alex, Nearby staff , pupils	Use Noise-reduction headphones	9	3
Sensory overload leading to meltdown	Bruises	Low-arousal classroom	Medium	Low
	Scratches	Planned breaks; clear signals for "time-out"; Use non-verbal cues and reduce language Use advance warning of changes.	Consequence: 3 - Moderate Likelihood: 3 - Possible	Consequence: 1 - Minimal Likelihood: 3 - Possible

12. Frequently Asked Questions

Q Do I need an individual risk assessment for every child with SEND?

A. Individual behavioural risk assessments should be undertaken **when there is a foreseeable risk of harm**, such as a pattern of aggressive or unpredictable behaviour that could cause injury to the child, staff, or others.

The Health and Safety law (HSPA 1974 and Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999) mandates risk assessments wherever employee health and safety may be affected, including risks arising from pupil behaviour.

Q. Is a behavioural plan the same as a risk assessment?

A. No. A behavioural plan (also known as a Behaviour Intervention Plan or BIP) outlines strategies, supports, and interventions to shape positive behaviours or de-escalate challenges.

A risk assessment, on the other hand, identifies potential hazards linked to behaviour, evaluates their likelihood and severity, and specifies control measures to mitigate risk.

While the behavioural plan may inform the risk assessment's control measures, they are distinct documents with complementary roles.

Q. Should teaching and support staff attend training before working with SEND children?

A. Yes. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) emphasises that employers must ensure staff are competent to support and manage any health and safety risks posed by students with SEND. The Department for Education guidance strongly encourage regular and SEND-specific training, especially in de-escalation, safe handling, and personalised support, before staff work alone with such pupils.

Q. Which is a legal requirement under health and safety law: a behavioural plan or a risk assessment?

A. Under Health and Safety law, a risk assessment is a legal requirement. Employers must assess and record risks stemming from pupil behaviour if they may impact staff safety, and then implement control measures accordingly.

A behavioural plan is not explicitly required by law. However, it's widely considered good practice in education, serving as an important component in supporting the care and education of the pupil.