• Has the issue of fatigue been addressed – classes/duties may be re-allocated, attendance at evening meetings may be suspended, cover of classes with disruptive pupils may not be required.

• Is there somewhere to lie down, if necessary?

• Is classroom seating appropriate? (teachers should not be required to use child-sized seating).

• Has she been offered help with lifting / carrying?

• Where a child or children could be disruptive, is she protected from them?

During pregnancy, other diseases (Chickenpox, Parvovirus, Cytomegalovirus and, in rural areas, Chlamydia Psittaci, caught from sheep) can be a risk to the mother and unborn child. In all cases the pregnant teacher should be aware of the risk and should seek medical advice if exposure is suspected. After giving birth, especially after returning from a short maternity leave, a teacher should still be provided with proper seating, rest place and, if necessary, a place to express and store milk. If a teacher is returning following a Caesarean birth, then care should be given to lifting, carrying and standing for excessive time. Toilet provision is particularly important; briefly the guidelines are that there should be one toilet and washroom (a lockable room with 1 toilet and washbasin) for a premises with 1~5 employees, 2 toilets and washrooms for 6~25 employees and 3 for establishments of 26~50.

Female and male employees should have their own toilet provision unless all facilities are of the washroom type. These facilities should be separate from those used by pupils the only exception being disabled facilities which may be used by teachers, staff, pupils and visitors as necessary. More information from UTU.

Swimming – Unless the services of a qualified lifeguard are used, non-specialist teachers of swimming should possess, at least, a current lifesaving qualification and a basic swimming teaching qualification. Teachers should not be expected to take on activities which expose themselves, or their pupils, to undue risk.

Teachers’ Vehicles – Even if a teacher should have adequate insurance, he/she cannot be directed to carry pupils in his/her own vehicle.

There are quite specific rules on insurance of vehicles for “business use” (driving to INSET training, driving between schools or sites, driving to work-related meetings, undertaking duties as a union officer etc) – check carefully with your insurer to make sure you are covered.

There is no automatic right to park on school premises and teachers must be aware that there is little likelihood of receiving compensation if their vehicle is damaged on school property – parking is at the teachers’ own risk.

Lifting and Handling – The lifting and/or handling of heavy loads or even of pupils (unless in an emergency situation) is not part of a teacher’s role.

Whereas teachers will be expected to carry light loads as part of everyday work, heavy loads should be the responsibility of premises staff or other contracted staff. A teacher should not lift or carry a load which could cause injury. Furthermore, teachers who are pregnant or who have a disability should have special consideration paid to them.

Asbestos – The presence of asbestos in schools is an ongoing concern, the law requires action to be taken to identify and deal with suspected asbestos. It is still present in some pipe and boiler laggings, wall spaces, ceiling and wall panels and in some science labs. If you suspect there is asbestos in your school the Safety rep should seek guidance on how it is to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

This leaflet is intended as a brief guide only to Health and Safety issues in school. There are staff at UTU Headquarters to give more detailed advice and guidance on any of the topics included or in the many that are not, for example:

• Risk assessments
• Safety during Construction Work
• Safety Inspections
• Stress
• Security and Violence
• Fire Safety
• Emergency Procedures
• Work Equipment
• Computers
• Practical lessons
• Electrical Safety
• Voice and Eye Care
• Infectious Diseases

Also look out for Health and Safety issues on the UTU website, in the School Reps’ Handbook and for training offered by the UTU.

Some other concerns in brief

Heating – The guideline minimum temperatures for school premises are – 18°C for classrooms, 16°C for rooms where physical activity takes place and 21°C for sick bays. It is in the power of Principals to close all or part of a school if these temperatures are not met but parents have to be notified. In the event of long-standing problems, the Safety Rep should ascertain what remedial action is being taken.
HEALTH AND SAFETY – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Health and Safety legislation affects every single worker and pupil in every school – all users of school and college premises are covered by the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978. All schools should have a Safety Committee to oversee Health and Safety in the school – each Union in school should appoint a Representative, although in small schools the unions may decide to appoint a joint Rep.

The full duties of the Rep can be found both on the UTU website and in the School Reps’ handbook. Briefly, these duties are:

- To investigate potential hazards and examine the cause of accidents.
- To investigate complaints by colleagues.
- To carry out inspections of the premises.
- To investigate accidents by colleagues.

Safety reps are entitled to some time off with pay to carry out their duties – a guideline would be in small schools, half a day per term for inspections and a full day in large schools. For routine duties, one hour per week in small schools and two hours in large schools. Time off is not dependent on funding and should be written into a teacher’s timetable in the same way as time allowed for other responsibilities.

The Safety Rep is not in any way legally responsible for hazards that are pointed out but not been hazard

The leaflet will give information on some basic Health and Safety in schools – further information is available on the UTU website, the School Reps’ Handbook and by calling the UTU Office.

SCHOOL JOURNEYS

School visits are of great educational and social value for young people, but teachers must, however, ensure that the highest standards of Health and Safety are applied at all stages. Teachers should also be aware of the potential for stress involved in planning and going on school trips and decide whether it is essential to become involved.

The law expects that a teacher will apply the same care that he/she would for his/her own family and that supervision of pupils throughout the journey is maintained at all times. Teachers must take all reasonable steps to avoid exposing children to dangers which are foreseeable and beyond what certain pupils can be expected to cope.

No teacher should be expected to organise a trip without either training or guidance from colleagues who have had previous experience. The organiser should, wherever possible, make a preliminary visit to the proposed site, become familiar with activities to be carried out and assess possible hazards.

Staffing should be based on the age, sex and ability of the pupils – guidelines are:

1. 1 adult per 6 pupils in years 1-3 (pre-school a higher ratio). 1 adult per 10-15 in years 4-6.
2. 1 adult per 15-20 in year 7 onwards.

These are the bare minimum – the ratio should always be higher if possible. Any representations from parents or other matters of concern.

To carry out inspections of the premises.

To represent colleagues in consultations on Health and Safety issues.

First Aid – There is no absolute requirement to have a First Aider in a school, there must, however, be an “Appointed Person” who is not necessarily trained in first aid but takes overall control of the First Aid equipment, knows the emergency procedures to summon an ambulance and to report accidents.

To make representations to employers on matters of concern.

To advise your friends to think before they post, as your

Never discuss school-related issues on social networking sites – there is no absolute requirement to have a First Aider in a school, there must, however, be an “Appointed Person” who is not necessarily trained in first aid but takes overall control of the First Aid equipment, knows the emergency procedures to summon an ambulance and to report accidents.

Schools should have a clear policy on medicines and an appropriate action to be taken. Fallen roof tiles, uneven paving, carpets not secure could all be “near miss” accidents.

If the accident to a UTU member is serious, the member should contact Headquarters for advice and assistance. A member should also contact Headquarters if remedial action is not taken following an accident or near miss.

Playground accidents to pupils due to trips, slips or falls are not reportable other than to be recorded in the school’s accident book unless the accident requires professional medical care or it arose in connection with construction work on the school site, because of the condition of the premises or because of the level of supervision.

Further information from UTU.

ACCIDENTS AND REPORTING ACCIDENTS

It is essential that all accidents are reported and investigated so that hazards may be eliminated in future.

All accidents, however trivial, should be recorded – injuries which may seem trivial at the time may have more serious long-term consequences. It is a legal requirement to record accidents in the workplace where ten people or more are employed (even in the smallest schools when lunchtime supervisors, classroom assistants and admin staff are counted, this will be ten staff). For accidents at work, or in connection with accidents away from work, a record of accidents should be kept and this record should be maintained at all times. The record should be available to other staff in the school, or at the head of the school if the school has more than one head teacher.

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