

## Fire emergency evacuation drills

In the recent months to date the face of the world has changed following the emergence of Covid-19. The Covid-19 impacted every human activity resulting in the closure of our schools. Schools were then partially opened for children of key workers.

At the beginning of the new academic year 2020-2021, the schools were opened to all pupils and students. The opening of the schools was subject to a very strict guidance issued by the government. The guidance unfortunately was silent on emergency fire evacuation drills in the schools.

The absence of the mention of fire evacuation drills then raised the question;

Are the schools expected to carry out fire evacuation drills under Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRFSO) 2005, if so, how can the drill be carried out still maintaining the social distancing and class safe bubbles protocol?

The enforcing authority of the RRFSO 2005 which is West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) was consulted. According to WYFRS, the RRFSO 2005 is still in force and enforceable. Therefore, Article 15(1) is applicable and must be rehearsed and documented. See below the Article 15 (1).

*15.—(1) The responsible person must—*

*(a) establish and, where necessary, give effect to appropriate procedures, including safety drills, to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to relevant persons;*

*(b) nominate a sufficient number of competent persons to implement those procedures in so far as they relate to the evacuation of relevant persons from the premises; and*

*(c) ensure that no relevant person has access to any area to which it is necessary to restrict access on grounds of safety, unless the person concerned has received adequate safety instruction.*

Following the consultation with WYFRS and considering the government Covid-19 secure guidance the below measures are formulated.

1. When the fire evacuation procedure is reviewed indicate that these are *“unprecedented times and the measure implemented are done with the best intention”*. Insert this in your fire safety register.
2. It is suggested that the drill is conducted maintaining the class bubbles
3. A drill using the bubbles would be easier to manage than evacuating the whole school.
4. This could be done on a class to class basis and aimed at new starters as they would not know what the alarm sounds like and what is expected of them
5. Space permitting, use a larger external area as assembly point or consider multiple assembly points

6. Children will already have face coverings and are expected to use them in common areas. Teachers to instruct children to keep to hand the mask and be ready to put them on (apply the government guideline on age limit for use of face masks)
7. Speak to neighbouring buildings businesses and ask if you can use their outside space (similar to bomb threat and major fire incidents)
8. Consider upgrading the fire alarm to an addressable system therefore narrowing down the search area, may be look at a delayed evacuation (risk assessment and building construction permitting)
9. In an actual fire emergency, the social distancing and safe bubbles should not be a hindrance to evacuating the building.

In conclusion, the evacuation drills despite Covid-19 the WYFRS confirmed that it is a legal requirement and must be fulfilled. Documentary evidence in the fire safety register will be required.

Should you require any further explanation or clarification, do not hesitate to contact; [bts.helpdesk@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:bts.helpdesk@bradford.gov.uk).