

Policy for Working at Heights

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to William Austin Junior School staff on the risks associated with working at heights. The document gives advice on the selection and use of access equipment and includes examples of generic risk assessments.

Falls, together with slips and trips have always been the major incident category of concern both nationally and country-wide and account for more deaths and serious injuries than any other accident class.

Some of the most common causes of accidents include:

- Using inappropriate equipment e.g. tables/chairs
- Faulty access equipment
- Overreaching or over balancing when on a step ladder or ladder
- Climbing a ladder with loads
- Slippery surfaces transferred onto access equipment (e.g. mud)
- Placing access equipment on unsuitable surfaces
- Falls from roofs with unprotected edges
- Not securely placing or fixing access equipment

Note the term “access equipment” includes a variety of equipment including step stool, step ladders, ladders and more specialised equipment to enable tasks to be carried out at height.

Legal requirements

William Austin Junior School must comply fully with the Working at Height (WaHR) Regulations 2005, which are aimed at preventing accidents resulting from working at height. These regulations apply to all work at height, both indoors and out, where there is a risk that a person may fall any distance liable to cause personal injury.

Work at height includes:

- Obtaining access to and from places where tasks will be carried out at height (e.g. ladders to roofs)
- Any place at or below ground level, e.g. open excavations where access is gained by means of access equipment
- Where access equipment is used below ground to work at a distance above ground level where a fall might cause personal injury

The regulations place responsibility on any person who controls the work of others, e.g. Managers who may control others, such as maintenance contractors to work at height.

Responsibilities

Managers and others who have control of work at height must ensure that:

- All work at height is properly planned and organised
- All risks from working at height are assessed by a competent person and appropriate equipment is selected and used
- The risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled
- Those involved with work at height are trained, competent and are fit enough to undertake the task
- Equipment for work at height is appropriately inspected, stored and maintained
- A register of access equipment is maintained
- The risks from falling objects are properly controlled
- The risks of falling through fragile structures are avoided or controlled

Employees are responsible for

- Taking care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by what they do, or fail to do, at work
- Complying with any safety measures put in place by managers/supervisors to ensure any work at height is undertaken safely
- Informing their employer of any medical condition (temporary or otherwise) which would prevent them from working at height
- Only using access equipment which is appropriate to the task and for which they are trained
- Inspecting equipment before use and reporting any defects identified

Risk Assessment

The WaH Regulations require that a risk assessment is completed for any work at height undertaken and that the findings are recorded as part of the planning process for the work. The assessment should consider both the work to be done and the most appropriate access equipment to be used (not just what is available on site) to achieve a safe system of work.

There is a simple hierarchy of controls for work at height:

- Avoid the risk by not working at height e.g. using long reach equipment.

If it not practicable to do the work in any other way, then:

- Use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls and
- Where the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated, introduce further controls to minimise the distance and consequences should a fall occur

The detail of the assessment should be proportionate to the level of the risk involved.

As a general guide the risk assessment should consider:

- **The task and activity** involved – how long will it take; what other tools will be needed; will there be heavy loads involved.
- **People** involved in the task – are they adequately trained; do they have any medical conditions; what is their general fitness etc.; are there arrangements in place in case of emergencies
- **Equipment** to be used – including erection and dismantling; are ladders correct length (tall enough so no over-reaching is necessary but not so long or flexible that sway or vibration could occur); is equipment suitable and sufficient for the task in hand and in good condition
- **Location** – is the structure against which the access equipment is to be fixed strong and in good repair; consider proximity to roads, overhead cables etc
- **Environment** – are surfaces slippery; are weather conditions suitable (no high winds etc.); is temperature appropriate, are light levels adequate
- **Other people** – those on site who may be affected by the activity; pedestrians at risk from falling objects
- **Emergency arrangements** which may need to be put in place e.g. for rescuing or assisting people who are at height.

A generic risk assessment could be used for repetitive tasks in some cases but must always be checked for continuing appropriateness on each occasion of use. Examples of such assessments are provided in APPENDICES A & B and should be adapted to suit the specific activity to be assessed.

Higher risk or specialist activities must only be carried out by:

- Specialist contractors with the appropriate competency and equipment to undertake the task safely, or
- Employees, where authorisation has been given by the relevant Head of Service, appropriate equipment is available and where training has been given.

Once a risk assessment has been conducted by a person competent/qualified in the work to be undertaken it must be shared with all relevant person(s).

Examples of tasks considered to be 'higher risk' include (the list is not exhaustive and there will be many others):

- Accessing unguarded flat roofs
- Working on unguarded flat/fragile roofs
- Cleaning out gutters

- Surveyors undertaking inspection of roof voids, flat/fragile roofs
- Bridge inspections
- Cleaning windows which cannot be reached from ground level
- Changing a bulb/florescent tube at high level.

Access equipment – selection

Access equipment includes step stool, ladders, step ladders and scaffolds. Scaffolds should only be used by a competent person who has had full training and is PASMA approved.

In selecting appropriate equipment for working at height, priority should always be given to collective protective measures to prevent falls (e.g. equipment with guardrails and working platforms) before other personal measures (e.g. fall arrest equipment).

Access equipment should be selected that is appropriate to the nature of the work being undertaken, taking account of such factors as:

- Working conditions
- Duration and frequency of use
- Complexity of work
- Distance and consequences of a fall.

LADDERS AND STEP LADDERS

IT IS THE SCHOOLS POLICY THAT EMPLOYEES MUST NOT USE LADDERS LONGER THAN 5 METRES.

Ladders/step ladders are only suitable for light duties of low risk and short-term duration (less than 30 minutes). They should only be used by staff who have had appropriate training/instruction.

Ladders are classed by their 'safe working load' – i.e. the maximum static vertical load (MSVL) they are able to bear. This is made up of the person plus anything being carried.

Any doubt as to the loadings on any ladders must be verified with the ladder's manufacturers.

A generic risk assessment for stepladders and ladders are provided in APPENDIX A, which managers may tailor according to the activities and circumstances.

STEP STOOL

Step stool used in school should be of steel construction with anti-slip rubber treads and base surround to provide a solid base from which to work. They should have a working load of 150kg.

TOWER SCAFFOLDS

A tower scaffold system should conform to **HD1004 Class 3 Trade Standard**. Another standard which can be looked for is **Kite Mark 506338**.

Scaffolds should come with:

- Guardrails of no less than 950mm high
- A mid rail 750mm from toe board to guardrail
- Toe boards 150mm high

Access ladders to platforms should be robust and secure in use.

The stability of a mobile tower can be easily affected – the purchase of outriggers or stabilisers if not supplied, is recommended to mitigate the risk.

Check the maximum working load and safe working height of the tower to ensure it is suitable for the type of job to be carried out.

Anyone erecting, altering or dismantling any standard mobile tower must hold a current PASMA standard course card.

A generic risk assessment tower scaffolds is provided in APPENDIX B, which managers may tailor to the activities and circumstances.

Access equipment – recording, inspection and storage

RECORDING

All access equipment should be placed under the control of a responsible person who should be familiar with this guidance and who should maintain an equipment register for the premises.

Steps or ladders should only be made available to 'casual' users after the person responsible for them has familiarised them with the appropriate safety precautions.

INSPECTION

Generally, access equipment should be inspected termly to ensure they remain undamaged and suitable for use. The results of these inspections should be recorded.

Tower scaffolds must be inspected by a competent person before use and then, if it remains erected, every seven days it remains in the same place. This inspection must be recorded.

Where work equipment is hired to the user, it is important that both parties agree, in writing, exactly what inspection has been carried out and that this information is passed to those working at height.

STORAGE

Ladders should be stored with:

- Suitable secure indoor racks to protect from weather and any contamination
- No materials placed on top of stored ladders or stepladders
- Timber ladders should be kept away from radiators, steam pipes or other areas of excessive heat or dampness.

INSPECTION

Equipment should be regularly inspected and the results recorded in a log book in the Site Manager's Office:

- New equipment should be checked to make sure it is appropriate for the intended use, that it operates correctly and that it is in good condition
- All equipment should be checked before each use - in addition to pre-use checks, equipment should have a detailed inspection by a competent person in accordance with a schedule drawn up by them
- Interim inspections should be made by the competent person where a hazard that could cause significant deterioration in the equipment is present, e.g. use in acidic or alkaline environments or grit blasting etc
- Damaged equipment must be taken out of service immediately. Even a small cut in webbing can seriously affect performance.

In addition, checks should be made to ensure:

- Anchors and anchor points are of adequate strength
- Where possible, anchors and anchor points are above the user so that the anchor line or lanyard is taut or has little slack as possible
- There is a rescue plan in place, if required, and suitable people and equipment available to put it into effect.

MAINTENANCE

Equipment should be properly maintained by:

- Keeping it clean and storing it properly
- Thoroughly drying before storage, if it has become wet
- Only altering or repairing when approved by the manufacturer.

INFORMATION, INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING

Those using the equipment must be properly trained. Users should be:

- Competent to check their equipment for defects and do this before every use
- Suitably trained and assessed for competency in the use of their personal fall protection systems and equipment for the particular application; and

- Should read and understand the product information before using the equipment
- Should check that the components in the system are compatible.

Appendix A: Generic risk assessment for stepladder and ladder use (includes inspection checklist)

This generic risk assessment should be used only as a basis to develop a specific risk assessment for the activity to be carried out.

Appendix B: Generic risk assessment for mobile tower & tower scaffold use (includes inspection checklist)

This generic risk assessment should be used only as a basic to develop a specific risk assessment for the activity to be carried out.

Appendix C: Step stool

This generic risk assessment should be used only as a basic to develop a specific risk assessment for the activity to be carried out.

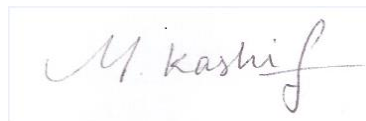
This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Governing Body every two years.

Policy updated: October 2025

Staff responsible: School Business Manager/Premises Manager

This policy was ratified by the Governing Body on: 15th October 2025

Signed on behalf of the Governing Body:



(signature)

M. Kashif - Chair of Governors (printed)

Appendix C

Safe use of Step stool

Step stools are a common workplace tool suitable for putting up displays, notices or reaching higher shelves (low risk and short duration use). Following the guidance in this document would be considered sufficient instructions for their use.

A step stool is not a ladder and does not have stability issues such as a free standing ladder. You therefore do not need to attend a ladder safety course in order to use one.

However, before commencing work, make sure:

- Storage areas have been organised so that the lightest items are on the uppermost shelves. Make sure that the shelves are securely fixed to the wall with wall brackets that are capable of acting as a steadying handhold if needed
- Shelves, notice boards etc. to be accessed are approximately at shoulder height when standing on the step stool. If they are higher, consider a different means of access e.g. use of podium steps
- The items to be placed on shelves or notice boards are not too heavy or unwieldy
- You inform your supervisor if you feel you are unable to undertake a task, even if this will be on a temporary basis because you feel unwell
- There are no other obvious defects – the top covering is in good condition and secure
- The floor area is sound and there are no areas of damage to the surface of carpeting, which may cause you to fall
- You can position the step stool so that you will not be over reaching and become unbalanced
- You are wearing suitable, flat-soled, non-slip footwear.
- Be prepared to move the step into a new position rather than risk overreaching for access to an item, and subsequently losing your balance.
- Don't carry items in both hands when mounting.