"STAYING SAFE"

A Conceptual Framework for School Safety

Version 1

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John Twigg

Hon. Senior Research Fellow
Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre
www.benfieldhrc.org
&
Chair of Governors
Edith Neville Primary School
www.edithneville.camden.sch.uk

Contact: j.twigg@ucl.ac.uk

1. Purpose of the framework

This conceptual framework is intended to help school governors and managers, and those who work with them on risk, safety and emergency management, to promote school safety more effectively.

It can be used to assess a school's strengths and weaknesses in risk and emergency management, identify gaps and opportunities for improvement, and – importantly – make connections between different areas of school activity so that they reinforce each other better.

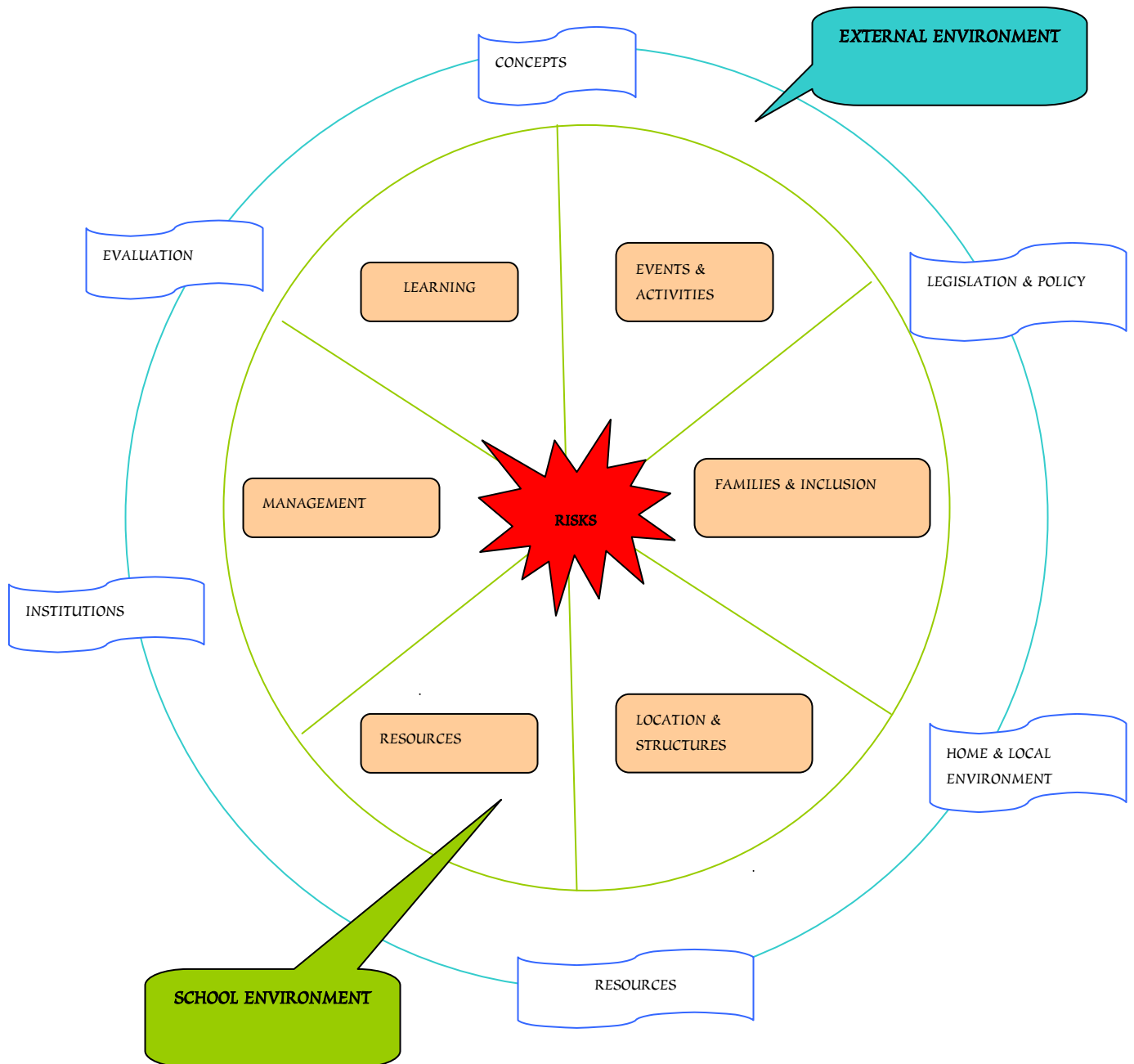The thinking behind the framework is based on the following ideas and experiences:

(a) From the perspective of disaster management:
- The modern 'disaster risk management' approach. This is more broad-based than conventional emergency planning. It integrates a range of structural, non-structural, short- and long-term measures to reduce risks and prevent and mitigate crises.
- Vulnerability and capacity analysis, which considers the spectrum of physical, socio-cultural, organisational and institutional factors that affect particular groups' ability to withstand shocks and stresses.

(b) From the perspective of school management:
- The UK Government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda, which now guides the work of schools. This is a holistic view of children's development which has children's health and safety among its key outcomes.
- The challenge for school leaders in keeping the 'big picture' in view and adopting a coherent approach to risk and emergency management when faced with a multiplicity of individual regulations and guidelines.

2. Components of the framework

Figure 1 shows the components of the framework. These are explained below.

Figure 1: the conceptual framework for school safety

CONCEPTS

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

EVALUATION

LEGISLATION & POLICY

LEARNING

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

MANAGEMENT

RISKS

FAMILIES & INCLUSION

INSTITUTIONS

LOCATION & STRUCTURES

RESOURCES

HOME & LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCES

A. Risks

These are at the centre of the framework. The framework's other component parts relate to the capacity to manage risks.

The framework is designed to assist a comprehensive assessment of school safety with regard to all risks, or at least all major ones. Schools ought to carry out comprehensive assessments; otherwise they may overlook potentially dangerous issues. However, the framework can also be applied to individual hazards and associated risk (e.g. fire).

B. School environment (the inner circle)

This part of the framework comprises the capacities that the school possesses and the actions that it takes to manage risks. These are grouped into six areas:

1. Learning
Schools are influential channels for awareness raising and education about health, safety and emergencies. Pupils' understanding of risks and how to manage them can be reinforced through the curriculum. However, formal risk and emergency management guidance for schools pays little or no attention to this.

Learning here includes all relevant teaching and learning activities carried out in the school. These can be categorised further as 'direct' and 'indirect' learning.

Direct learning is teaching and learning specifically about hazards, risks and emergencies relating to the school and its pupils. For example, this could include activities within the PSHCE[1] curriculum such as teaching about 'stranger danger' and road safety, or circle time sessions on issues which make children afraid. School fire drills could also fit under this heading.

Indirect learning is teaching and learning on related subjects across the curriculum which might back up the direct learning. In primary schools, for example, this might include teaching about the Great Fire of London in Key Stage 1 History, and about floods in Bangladesh in Key Stage 2 Geography. At secondary school, there may be many opportunities through the Science and Geography curricula, as well as Design and Technology.

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[1] Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education.

2. Management

All aspects of school governance should be considered within this component, beginning with overall arrangements and responsibilities for decision-making, management and implementation of emergency and risk management measures. This includes the work and duties of school governing bodies.

Other areas to consider are school policies for health & safety and emergencies, operating procedures (e.g. risk assessments, fire drills) and systems for monitoring and evaluating progress.

3. Resources

School resources can be broken down into four main areas:

1) Human resources: staff knowledge of risks and how to manage them, staff training (e.g. in evacuation procedures and first aid), and creation of a 'culture of safety' among staff and pupils.
2) Material resources: equipment and materials (e.g. fire extinguishers, first aid kits).
3) Information resources: possession of relevant technical, procedural and other information, and ease of access to it.
4) Financial resources: budgeting for the above.

4. Location and structures

This component considers the physical aspects of the school and its immediate environment. This includes site security (e.g. against break-ins), the resilience of buildings and their contents to hazards, evacuation routes and access to the school by emergency services.

Physical hazards arising from the state of the school buildings and the materials used in them should also be taken into account; this extends to the rest of the school site and facilities.

5. Families and inclusion

Schools need to work closely with families to enable children to achieve their full potential. The family environment can reinforce health and safety messages learnt at school. Conversely, children are potential vehicles for introducing ideas about good practice in health and safety into the family. This is another area that conventional risk and emergency planning guidelines are likely to overlook.

The framework therefore covers communication and engagement with families on safety issues (in the school and at home). It also includes child protection, which is central to the 'staying safe' agenda.

6. Events and activities

This area of the 'school environment' component is different in character from the other five but is presented here as a distinct area because the issues it addresses are important ones that may otherwise be lost from sight.

It includes out-of-school trips, and major and out-of-hours events on site. Both are normally addressed by standard health and safety procedures and they are sometimes considered as specific categories of risk in their own right.

Also included under this heading are events away from the school which might have an impact on it: for example a major emergency in the locality requiring the use of the school as a first aid station, or an influenza epidemic preventing a significant proportion of staff and pupils from attending school. There is a potential overlap here with the external factors in the framework that are discussed below. Again, what matters is that the issue is kept in sight; the precise category under which it is considered is less important.

C. External environment (the outer circle)

This part of the framework covers external factors supporting or affecting the school's capacity to 'stay safe'. It looks at both national and local factors. This holistic view is central to the framework but schools will find it harder to assess than the school environment and may wish to concentrate on the most important factors.

The external environment is divided into six areas:

1. Concepts

These are theoretical and conceptual developments in learning and school governance insofar as these are relevant to emergency and risk management. It also includes theoretical and conceptual developments in emergency and risk management that are relevant to schools.

2. Legislation and policy

This covers national laws and national and local regulations and policies, considering their coverage and general usefulness for the promotion of school safety. Their effectiveness as drivers of progress could also be assessed, as could their contribution to inhibiting change (e.g. the consequences of the lack of a legal requirement to install sprinklers in schools).

3. Institutions

This includes both government and non-governmental organisations. The institutions and procedures of central and local government are the principal sources of material, financial and technical support for schools. Most support will come from educational services (the Department for Education and Skills at national level, and local authorities' education and social welfare services) but other agencies may have an important role to play (e.g. the Health and Safety Executive, local emergency services). Other institutions and facilities to be considered include designated centres for evacuating children and staff from the school in an emergency.

There are also many non-governmental organisations involved in aspects of health and safety work that can provide information, training and other support to schools (e.g. the Suzy Lamplugh Trust on personal safety, Childnet on internet safety). These ought also to be considered within the framework.

4. Evaluation

External systems for assessing school safety are considered under this heading. These might be formal local authority and fire service health and safety checks or Ofsted inspections. These should be seen as sources of support because they provide evaluative information to school governors and managers.

5. Resources

As in the school environment component, this area has four main parts:
1) Human resources: availability of expert technical help in planning, implementing and evaluating measures.
2) Material resources: provision of equipment and facilities (though it is more likely that finance will be provided to obtain these).
3) Information resources: guidelines, manuals and other technical and, procedural information, and ease of access to it.
4) Financial resources: funds made available for the above.

6. Local environment

This part of the framework looks at other hazards in the local environment that might affect the school, its staff, pupils and their families.[2] These could be natural hazards such as floods, technological hazards such as pollution or industrial accidents, and social hazards such as criminality or civil unrest.

This area does not require detailed analysis. What is important here is to be aware of the most significant potential hazards and what their impact might be. Shifts in local conditions (e.g. a large-scale construction project in the

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[2] NB there is some overlap here with the 'events and activities' part of the 'school environment' component (see above).

neighbourhood) might make it necessary to review aspects of school planning and procedures.

3. Application of the framework

The framework is still at an early stage in its development and will be revised in the light of comments and feedback from field tests.

The main use of the framework will probably be by schools and support agencies to carry out comprehensive assessments of the risks facing a school and the capacity for managing them.

Such assessments could be rapid mapping exercises or more deliberative and analytical. They might be carried out by individuals or groups. Self-assessments involving a range of school stakeholders are likely to be particularly beneficial in terms of raising awareness and generating commitment.

The framework can also be used as a monitoring tool, using repeat assessments to identify achievements and changes.

Another possible application is in reviewing official or other formal guidance on specific aspects of risk and emergencies against the framework, to identify both issues that the school or external supporting agencies need to address and aspects that may not be covered by the guidance.

The framework may also be helpful in guiding research into school safety and emergency management.

Schools and supporting organisations are invited to use the framework and adapt it to their needs.

The author would welcome feedback on the structure, contents and application of the framework. Please send comments to j.twigg@ucl.ac.uk