

Why estates must prioritise asbestos and fire safety

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Critical but Overlooked: Why Fire Safety and Asbestos Should Top Your Estates Agenda in 2025/26

In a year where compliance standards are tightening and funding windows are closing fast, fire safety and asbestos remain two of the most urgent—and consistently overlooked—priorities in school estates planning.

In Brief

- **62% of schools** report fire safety or asbestos as unresolved risks
- **Legal duties** require schools to document and act on these hazards
- **Funding is available** via CIF, SCA, DFC—especially for bundled risk works
- **Summer 2025** offers a vital window for works before next year's inspections and audits

Why Fire Safety and Asbestos Now?

In our recent survey of over **4,500 schools and trusts**, two issues emerged as the most commonly reported compliance concerns:

Concern	% of Schools Flagging It
Fire safety systems overdue or under-resourced	62%
Outdated or incomplete Asbestos Management Plans	58%
Lack of staff confidence in emergency procedures	47%
Uncertainty around funding eligibility	41%

These risks are rarely high on public agendas—but they sit at the **core of school safety, compliance, and accountability**.

Are You Inspection-Ready? (Quick Self-Check)

Risk Area	Are You Compliant?
Fire risk assessment is less than 2 years old	☐ / ☐
Asbestos Register is updated, accessible, and used	☐ / ☐
All staff have received refresher training on fire/ACMs	☐ / ☐
You log drills, incidents, and inspections digitally	☐ / ☐
You have a 2025 capital plan for fire/asbestos risks	☐ / ☐

Fire Safety in 2025: A Rising Risk Profile

Outdated or inconsistent systems persist across many school sites:

- Non-compliant or broken fire doors
- Alarms not connected across new blocks or mobile units
- Limited staff role clarity during evacuations
- Out-of-date Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)

Legal Reminder:

The **Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022** mandate:

- Current fire risk assessments
- Clear mitigation logs and system checks
- Transparent documentation for inspection or insurance

Leadership alert:

“Inspectors, insurers, and HSE spot-check teams are flagging unlogged fire checks and outdated evacuation plans as *leadership-level failures*, not just facilities issues.”

Asbestos in 2025: A Quiet Threat That Still Exists

Asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) still exist in thousands of school sites—often out of sight, and out of mind. Common locations include:

- Pipe lagging in boiler rooms
- Ceiling voids, wall panels, and floor insulation
- Electrical risers and older window frames

Where schools fall short:

- Asbestos Registers are out of date, missing, or unused
- Cleaning/site staff unaware of ACM proximity
- Contractors work near risk zones without pre-task briefings

Legal Reminder:

The **Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012** require:

- A current, visible Asbestos Management Plan
- Training for *anyone who might disturb asbestos*
- Logbooks and signage for all ACMs on site

What Schools Are Doing Now

- A **Devon secondary** migrated its asbestos register into a QR-scannable mobile app for all contractors.
- A **Midlands MAT** paired fire and asbestos re-surveys into one CIF bid, saving cost and increasing approval odds.
- A **London primary** began logging fire drill response times and using them to update pupil support plans.

Funding Routes to Act

Fund	Supports	Applies To
Condition Improvement Fund (CIF)	Doors, alarms, asbestos removal	Eligible academies
School Condition Allocation (SCA)	Cross-site risk projects	MATs and LAs

Fund	Supports	Applies To
Devolved Formula Capital (DFC)	Surveys, signage, minor works	All schools
Emergency Capital (LA/DfE)	Post-inspection urgent repairs	Case-by-case

Funding tip:

Bundle fire + asbestos into a single risk-mitigation bid. Prioritise works tied to inspections or identified via audit.

Strategic Guidance for MATs and LAs

If you're part of a trust or LA, ensure:

- Each site's fire and asbestos compliance data is **centrally visible**
- **Training schedules** and **assessment dates** are tracked in one system
- Your capital planning includes a **cross-site risk mitigation line**, not just condition works

Trusts using live dashboards are reporting:

- **Faster responses to flagged hazards**
- **Stronger CIF/SCA bids**
- **Improved confidence among governors and insurers**

Leadership Briefing Line for Governors

"Our school's current fire safety and asbestos status requires review. National guidance and funding routes are available, and summer 2025 offers a key window to close outstanding risks."

Final Thought

Fire and asbestos risks don't grab headlines—but they still pose **real harm** and **real reputational liability**.

The best schools in 2025 aren't reacting—they're planning:

- With up-to-date evidence
- With confident, trained staff
- With smart capital investment

This isn't about paperwork. It's about protection—for everyone who walks through your gates.