

Emergency Lighting Changes 2025: What Every School Leader Needs to Know

17 November 2025



..... and Why It's a Positive Opportunity!

This autumn, three important British and European standards for emergency lighting have been updated for the first time in over a decade:

- BS 5266-1:2025 (UK Code of Practice)
- BS EN 1838:2024 (Lighting performance)
- BS EN 50172:2024 (Installation and maintenance)

These are **not** optional guidance - they now form the benchmark that Ofsted, Local Authorities, HSE, fire officers and your insurers will use when they next visit.

The good news? The changes are sensible, child-focused and, once implemented, will make your school demonstrably safer - and easier to manage day-to-day.

What has actually changed for schools?

Old expectation (pre-2025)	New requirement (2025 onwards)	Why it matters for children & staff
1-hour emergency duration was often accepted	3-hour duration now mandatory for all schools	Gives far more time for controlled evacuation or “invacuation” after hours
Only the centre line of corridors needed illuminating	Full width of escape routes (including both edges) must now reach ≥ 1 lux	Prevents tripping where bags, coats and lockers line corridors
Large classrooms and halls sometimes had no emergency lights	Anti-panic lighting (≥ 0.5 lux) now required in every room $> 60 \text{ m}^2$	Stops panic and crushing in the dark - especially important with younger or SEND pupils
Toilets and changing rooms often left in darkness	Every toilet, changing room and store cupboard must now have ≥ 5 lux emergency lighting	Dignity and safety for pupils who may be alone when power fails

The timeline - there is no grace period

The standards are live now. Responsible bodies are expected to:

1. Review current systems immediately (November-December 2025)
2. Complete a professional compliance audit before the end of the spring term
3. Create a prioritised upgrade plan (most schools will finish the essential work in the 2026 summer holidays)

How to turn compliance into something positive

Many business managers initially worry about cost and disruption. In reality, the majority of schools we are speaking to are discovering three big wins:

- **Cheaper running costs** - modern LED emergency fittings with self-test use 70-90 % less electricity and remove the need for expensive annual “drain-down” tests.
- **Less staff time** - automatic testing systems send a monthly email report instead of someone walking round with a clipboard and a fish-key.

- **Stronger safeguarding & wellbeing evidence** - being able to show inspectors that every toilet and changing room stays lit during a power cut is powerful, reassuring evidence of a caring school.

Your 5-step action plan (start this week)

1. **This week** - Walk your site after dark (or switch off the lights) and film/photograph corridors, staircases and toilets. You'll instantly see the gaps.
2. **Before Christmas** - Contact us at the School Leaders' Network for **free, vetted referrals** to NICEIC/ECA-registered contractors who specialise in schools and can carry out a no-obligation compliance review in January (zero disruption, school-day friendly).
3. **January-February** - Receive your clear report with "must-do now" and "nice-to-have" recommendations.
4. **Spring term** - Add the essential items to your 2026/27 premises budget (many trusts are finding the payback period is under 4 years because of energy savings).
5. **Summer 2026** - Complete the physical work while the buildings are empty.

We're here to make this easy for you

Simply connect with your account manager we'll send you 2-3 trusted, school-experienced contractors who are already working with Network members - all fully vetted, competitively priced and ready to book your January audit.

Final thought

Keeping children safe when the lights go out is one of the most fundamental duties we have. The 2025 standards simply give us clearer, kinder rules to follow - and modern technology makes it easier and cheaper than ever before.

Start the conversation in your next senior leadership or premises meeting. A small amount of planning now will give you complete peace of mind for years to come - and a school that is genuinely safer for every child and adult who walks through the door.

If you would like a ready-made governor briefing, staff slide deck or short

assembly script, just let us know - we're happy to help.