

# New Fire Safety Responsibilities for Schools

26 June 2025



## What BS 5839-1:2025 and the Academy Trust Handbook Mean for You

### Understanding the Changes Ahead

This year marks a pivotal shift in how schools must manage fire safety. Two major developments have come into effect:

1. **BS 5839-1:2025**, the newly updated British Standard for fire alarm systems in non-domestic buildings.
2. **The Academy Trust Handbook 2025**, effective from 1 September, which introduces new governance-level responsibilities for fire safety within academy trusts.

Together, these changes offer schools and trusts a valuable opportunity to strengthen estate management, enhance safety, and improve long-term compliance.

### What's New in BS 5839-1:2025

This updated standard, published by the British Standards Institution in April 2025, replaces the previous 2017 version. It introduces several important refinements that schools should now act on:

- **Refined system categories (A-L)**, ensuring fire alarms are tailored to specific building uses and risks.
- **Updated requirements for detector placement**, to improve detection coverage in all areas, including IT suites, storage rooms, and plant spaces.
- **Mandatory cybersecurity and remote access capabilities**, to enable safer and more efficient system monitoring.
- **Support for integrated lockdown functionality**, with a clear requirement for distinct alarm tones for fire versus evacuation/lockdown.

These updates aim to improve both the technical performance and the strategic reliability of fire detection systems in educational settings.

## **The New Governance Duty: Academy Trust Handbook 2025**

Starting 1 September 2025, the Department for Education has placed estate-related risks firmly within the remit of academy trust governance. This is a significant and welcome development: safety is now recognised as a leadership responsibility.

Trust boards are now accountable for:

- Having up-to-date, documented **fire risk assessments**.
- Ensuring operational compliance with **fire exits, alarms, and emergency systems**.
- Maintaining **audit trails** of remedial actions, upgrades, and maintenance activities.

The guidance is clear: fire safety failings may now prompt regulatory intervention, even in otherwise high-performing trusts. This includes the possibility of Notices to Improve or financial scrutiny.

### **What Schools Can Do Now**

These changes are not intended to overwhelm. In fact, they provide a valuable opportunity to review, realign, and strengthen existing systems. Here's how schools and trusts can respond effectively this summer:

#### **1. Review Your Fire Alarm System**

Assess your system type and ensure it matches the new BS 5839-1:2025 categories. Confirm detector coverage is suitable for all parts of your site.

## 2. Update Documentation

Fire system design records, maintenance logs, and test results should be current, complete, and ideally digital. This supports both compliance and clarity.

## 3. Strengthen Alarm Functionality

If your alarm system serves multiple purposes (e.g., fire and lockdown), ensure the tones are clearly distinct and properly understood by staff and students.

## 4. Secure Remote Access and Cyber Compliance

Work with suppliers to ensure your alarm system is protected against unauthorised access and supports secure remote diagnostics.

## 5. Align with Governance Reporting

Ensure your fire safety risk assessments and audit trails are available for board scrutiny. Schedule a briefing for governors or trustees on the new expectations.

## A Positive Opportunity for Improvement

These changes underscore a broader shift in how safety and estate risks are managed in schools. While compliance is essential, this is also a strategic opportunity to:

- Improve the reliability and responsiveness of your alarm systems.
- Reduce risk through clearer governance and planning.
- Enhance confidence among staff, parents, and regulators.

By acting now—during summer break—schools can position themselves strongly for the year ahead.

## Suggested Summer Action Plan

Task	Responsibility	Timeline
Commission alarm system audit	Site or Premises Manager	July 2025

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Update fire risk assessments	Responsible Person	July 2025
Digitalise documentation	SBM / Admin	August 2025
Train staff on new tone protocols	DSL / SLT	August INSET
Schedule board update on compliance	Headteacher / Governance Lead	September meeting

### **Final Word**

Both BS 5839-1:2025 and the Academy Trust Handbook 2025 signal a more structured and supportive approach to fire safety in schools. With the right steps, every school can ensure compliance, improve safety outcomes, and meet new governance expectations with confidence.

Photo by [Jakub Zerdzicki](#)