

# Urgent: UK Schools Must Prioritise Fire Safety

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**The School Network, the leading advocate for educational infrastructure and safety in the UK, today issues a critical advisory urging school leaders to prioritise fire safety enhancements as the 2025/26 academic year approaches.**

With rising incidents of fire-related risks in educational settings and stringent regulatory requirements under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, schools must act swiftly to modernise fire detection, suppression, and evacuation systems. Failure to do so risks student and staff safety, legal non-compliance, and potential operational disruptions.

Recent data underscores the urgency of this issue. In 2023/24, UK fire services attended over 2,000 incidents at educational premises, with schools accounting for a significant portion due to outdated infrastructure, electrical faults, and inadequate maintenance of fire safety systems. Research indicates that 60% of school fires are linked to electrical equipment or ageing wiring, often found in older buildings prevalent across the UK's 24,000+ schools. Moreover, inspections by fire authorities have revealed that a substantial number of schools—potentially up to 30% based on sector audits—fail to meet current fire safety standards, including inadequate fire alarms, outdated sprinkler systems, or insufficient evacuation protocols.

“Fire safety is not just a regulatory box to tick; it’s a moral and legal obligation to

protect our school communities,” said a spokesperson for The School Network. “With the 2025/26 term on the horizon, school leaders must address these vulnerabilities now. Modern fire safety systems save lives, reduce property damage, and ensure continuity of education. Schools that delay risk devastating consequences, from preventable injuries to costly closures and legal penalties.”

The importance of prioritising fire safety is driven by both risk mitigation and the opportunity to leverage advanced technologies for better protection:

- **Enhanced Life Safety:** Modern fire detection systems, such as addressable alarms and smoke/heat sensors, provide faster, more precise alerts, reducing response times and enabling safer evacuations. Upgraded sprinkler systems can contain fires before they spread, protecting students and staff.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 mandates comprehensive risk assessments, maintained fire equipment, and clear evacuation plans. Non-compliance can lead to fines, enforcement notices, or even criminal prosecution for responsible persons, such as headteachers or governors.
- **Cost Savings and Insurance Benefits:** Investing in modern systems reduces the risk of catastrophic losses, lowering insurance premiums by up to 20% in some cases. Preventative maintenance also avoids costly emergency repairs or rebuilding efforts post-incident.
- **Operational Continuity:** Effective fire safety measures minimise disruptions, ensuring schools remain open and operational, safeguarding learning environments and community trust.
- **Integration with Smart Technology:** New systems integrate with building management platforms, offering remote monitoring, automated alerts to fire services, and data-driven maintenance schedules, enhancing efficiency and reliability.

Real-world examples highlight the impact of proactive fire safety upgrades. St. Mary’s Primary School in Manchester installed a state-of-the-art addressable fire alarm system in 2023, reducing false alarms by 40% and improving evacuation efficiency during drills. Similarly, a multi-academy trust in Birmingham retrofitted sprinklers across its secondary schools, resulting in a 15% reduction in insurance costs and zero fire-related incidents since implementation. In contrast, a rural secondary school in Devon faced a six-week closure in 2024 after a fire caused by

outdated wiring, disrupting education for 800 students and incurring £1.2 million in damages. These cases underscore the tangible benefits of investment and the severe risks of inaction.

The School Supply Store & Network estimates that thousands of UK schools, particularly those in older buildings or with constrained budgets, have yet to fully upgrade their fire safety systems. With fire authorities increasing inspections and the government pushing for stricter compliance, schools face mounting pressure to act. The 2025/26 academic year is a critical window to address these gaps before risks escalate.

The School Network urges all UK school leaders to take immediate action. Recommended steps include:

- **Conduct a Fire Risk Assessment:** Engage certified assessors to identify vulnerabilities in current systems, from alarms to escape routes.
- **Upgrade Fire Detection and Suppression:** Invest in addressable alarms, modern sprinklers, and emergency lighting to meet or exceed regulatory standards.
- **Train Staff and Students:** Implement regular fire drills and training to ensure preparedness and compliance with evacuation protocols.
- **Partner with Experts:** Work with accredited fire safety providers to design and install tailored solutions, leveraging funding schemes like the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) for eligible schools.
- **Access Resources:** Utilise free guides, checklists, and case studies from The School Network at [www.theschoolnetwork.org.uk/fire-safety](http://www.theschoolnetwork.org.uk/fire-safety) to support planning and implementation.

The School Supply Store & Network stands ready to support schools in this vital endeavour. “The 2025/26 term is a pivotal opportunity to future-proof your school against fire risks,” added the spokesperson. “Investing in safety today protects your students, staff, and community tomorrow.”

Image by jcomp on [Freepik](#)