

Before & After School Supervision - The Challenges

A Primary School is officially open for 5 hours and 40 minutes daily, (4 hours 40 minutes for infant classes)

The Challenge

Many children arrive in school a considerable length of time before school opens. Schools where children avail of private or public bus services, experience a situation where children are dropped and collected at staggered times, resulting in their being at the school premises for varying lengths of time before and after the official 5 hours and 40 minutes-contact time.

There is no clear procedure or guidance as to what level of supervision should be in place, if any. The Board of Management (BoM) is responsible for the safety of children in their charge, including periods of time where children are on the school premises outside of official 5 hours and 40 minutes-contact time.

Many children are actually on the school premises up to an hour before official contact time commences. While the BoM has responsibility, it does not have the resource capacity to ensure adequate supervision of these pupils.

The staff of the school are not required by their contract to provide supervision outside of the official 5 hours and 40 minutes-contact time.

3. Analysis

The school is officially open for 5 hours and 40 minutes. This breaks down as:

- 4 hours 10 minutes for secular instruction
- 30 minutes for religious instruction
- 30 minutes for lunch break
- 20 minutes for assembly
- 10 minutes for roll call.

One 10 minute or two 5 minute breaks may be taken daily from within the overall 5 hours and 40 minutes. Depending on the custom and practice of the school, the 20 minutes allocated for assembly time which can be used for whole-school or in-class assembly, is in many cases integrated into the normal contact day for addressing issues such as homework, parent - teacher communication, pastoral care etc. It is not a period which is considered external to the contact day.

Based on case Law precedence and the advice of Allianz Insurance, it appears that it can be reasonably expected that children will be on school premises for up to **10 minutes before and after school**, allowing for normal access and departure in an orderly fashion.

Once the school allows access to the premises, the school authorities have a duty to supervise. The same applies to pupils staying on after school. It is not reasonable to leave children standing on the side of busy roads in inclement weather where the traffic poses a danger.

4. Possible Solutions

The geography of every school is different, but regardless of design, the BoM's responsibility relates to the entire premises and not just the school building or designated playgrounds.

The BoM is clearly in a difficult situation i.e. it has been given a legal responsibility for which it has neither the personnel nor the financial capacity to carry out its responsibility. Consequently, the various solutions outlined below, require compromises and practices that will not be to everyone's satisfaction.

There is no single straightforward procedure that can be followed with certainty, leaving each school to negotiate its own best solution.

Every BoM should consider their supervision responsibilities towards the children in their care and develop a policy. This policy should address all aspects of supervision including:

- Lunch & Break Time
- Unpredicted Teacher Absences
- Brief Teacher Absences
- Extra Personal Vacation Days (EPV)
- Out of School Activities
- Tours, Matches etc;

Before & After official 5-hour 40 minutes-contact day.

Defining when the BoM is not responsible for the supervision of children, is equally as important as providing clear information about those times when it is responsible.

The BoM should display in a public place and send to each parent a copy of the official school timetable based on the 5 hours and 40 minutes -contact day.

The BoM should consider specifically, with advice from the Principal, factors relating to and causing children to be on the school premises before and after school e.g. transport, road safety, parental work arrangements, appropriateness of school opening time.

Based on legal and insurance advice, the BoM should communicate to parents in writing at the beginning of each term, that the BoM is not responsible for children's safety other than the reasonable period of 10 minutes before and after the 5 hours 40 minutes-official contact day.

This communication should require parents to arrange drop off and collection within the prescribed **10-minute period before and after school**.

In relation to the two 10 minute periods, the BoM has a number of options:

- The BoM to examine the sustainability of the existing custom and practice and to consider 'living with the risk' of making no change
- Employ and train suitable adults to provide supervision for 10 minutes before and after school. Some schools employ SNAs to fulfil this function.

In the context of revising In-School Management posts of responsibility, the BoM should designate one or more posts to include Before & After School Supervision as a management duty.

'Croke Park Hours' may be utilised to provide cover for the before and after school periods.

Engage the Parents' Association (PA) in discussion re. Before and After School Children's Safety.

Outline the BoM's difficulty in relation to this matter i.e. the BoM has a duty of care and responsibility but does not have the personnel or the finance to provide supervision cover (schools' staff are contractually not obliged to supervise during these periods and there is no grant aid available for such supervision).

Engage the PA in discussion re. the link between the school opening time and the pattern of children being on school premises for lengthy periods in advance. Having consulted with parents through the Parents' Association & individually and having consulted with staff, the BoM should consider the feasibility of altering the school opening time, to minimise the amount of time the children are likely to be unsupervised on the school premises.

The BoM to engage the PA in discussion re providing a rota of parents to supervise the safety of children before & after school.

The BoM and the PA should negotiate with transport providers and seek more practical collection and drop-off times for children. Where transport providers are either unwilling or unable to show flexibility, encourage parents to engage in car-pooling.

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