

Health and Safety Consultancy

Prepared for

STEP Academy Trust
Burfield Academy
Oaklands Way,
Hailsham,
East Sussex,
BN27 3NW



Visit date

21st March 2022

By

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Introduction

On the 21st March 2022, a Health and Safety Consultant from WorkNest Ltd visited STEP Academy Trust - Burfield Academy Oaklands Way, Hailsham, East Sussex, BN27 3NW to provide Health and Safety Consultancy on the existing travel plan for the premises and issues with the Kiss and Drop/ Collection.

Health and Safety concerns have been raised as the existing plan puts Staff, Parents, Pupils and all other persons at risk during drop off and pick up peak times.

The assessment is based on observation and the documentation presented that was available at the time of the review. Any statements regarding the premises or the relevant practices that take place on the premises have been derived from interviewing the client's employees and from the author's observations.

The WorkNest Health and Safety consultant was advised that the scope of the report was limited to the road leading up to the premises gates, around the premises area of current Kiss and Drop/ Collection, with no access to private car parks or tenant areas.

The report does not specifically mention the positive findings encountered during the assessment, rather, it concentrates on findings which could be improved to meet legislative and best practice requirements.

Executive Summary

On the 21st March 2022 a review of the Kiss and Drop off/ Collection as well as the immediate travel route to the school was completed.

The assessment has identified that the current layout and its associated controls, which are very limited give rise to a risk of serious injury to both pedestrians and vehicle drivers due to the way the access route is being used. This use follows the travel plan of 2014 used by all persons visiting the school.

The Travel Plan design in 2014 was suitable as a paper based exercise when created however, in practice it is impossible to carry out safely without putting members of staff, parent or children at risk.

Recommendations have been more targeted at specific parking plans that could be implemented to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable within the restraints imposed by the throughput of vehicles and parking space currently provided within the school.

Significant issues relating to transport have been identified during this assessment. The fundamental cause of all the identified risks relating to transport is the high number of vehicle movements required during normal operating conditions and the lack of pedestrian zones provided.

All the recommendations within this report are specific requirements that could be implemented to reduce the risks caused by the interaction of people and vehicles as well as possible safeguarding issues.

It is recommended that these risks are recognised and that the corrective actions required as well as allocating relevant responsibilities are put into place. A timetable for their completion should be set, and provision of adequate resources to complete the works within the identified time frame.

Background

The consultant has been informed that there is an issue at Burfield Academy concerning the use of the car park. The school was a new provision which was designed by East Sussex County Council and was opened under Lilac Sky Schools Academy Trust (LSSAT) in 2015. However, in 2017 Burfield Academy joined STEP Academy Trust after being rebrokered by the Department for Education after the failure of LSSAT.

Proposed planning permission was opposed by local residents and to address some of the concerns about traffic, a 'kiss and drop' system was incorporated, which allowed parents to drive onto site to drop off/ collect their child.

It is believed that this plan was not witnessed in action during peak drop off/ collection times. Also, as a school which grew at a rate of one year group per year, the impact would have been limited initially. However, as the school has grown, the kiss and drop provision has resulted in numerous safety issues, which are noted within this report.

The Directors of Operations had informed the consultant that during the start of the Covid Pandemic, the kiss and drop area was closed to assist with social distancing on the premises. Since then there has been a significant increase of pupils (approx. 30%). The Trust are therefore concerned that it would be difficult to safely re-open the kiss and drop in the existing format.

It has been advised that the parents are currently parking on the surrounding residential roads, which is upsetting neighbours.

The school is working with East Sussex County Council to review the proposed 2014 travel plan, which must be agreed by Children's Services, Highways and STEP Academy Trust.



Safety Concerns

1) The travel plan notes 4.5.5

“At a total share of 53% by car that would generate about 111 pupils travelling by car based on 210 pupils on site. The nursery school has been taken out of this equation as it will operate outside of the main school arrival times in two sessions.”

As the proposed plan relies heavily on only 53% of pupils travelling to school by car, where the true percentage is close to 75-80%, and staff have mentioned that not all parents are local and cannot walk to the premises from their home. Also, it is noted that 4.6.3/4.6.4 depends on residents utilising the off-road parking, leaving the roads clear for vehicles queuing to use the ‘kiss and drop’. This has not been the case in practice and resident’s cars are regularly parked on the highway (which is both legal and their right).

It is important to note that the consultant has been informed that due to the width of the roads, one parked car essentially makes the road ‘single track’ causing neighbouring roads to become congested which restricts emergency vehicles from accessing the school as well as any residents in need.

2) It is noted that there is no gap between the school property and the adjacent residential properties, which means that any vehicles parked immediately outside the closest residence blocks the entrance to the school gates. Again, this is permitted and there are no parking restrictions in place.

As described in ‘1’, this has resulted in only one lane for traffic arriving and leaving the school premises, with arriving vehicles having to manoeuvre around parked cars into the path of those vehicles exiting. This takes place immediately outside the school gate, with pedestrians using the adjacent pathway to access the school site. With cars having to avoid one another, this creates an increased risk of cars swerving onto the path and therefore a great safety risk of car-on car and car-on pedestrian collision

3) This then leads to safety concerns about the kiss and drop processes regarding the 2014 Travel Plan as outlined in Section 7 - 4.6.7 and Appendix H- Kiss & Drop Operation & Layout. It is believed that the plan does not work safely in practice due to the following reasons:

A. 4.6.7 - section 7 – A, it seems that this is reliant on staff members to police the public highway, requesting that cars do not proceed beyond a certain point and reverse into the cul de sac and wait for their allotted time. The Academy Staff are not trained road safety experts and have no authority to restrict vehicle movement outside the school property. The school also has no governing power

to close the road and the process could not be moved at or within the school gates, as there is insufficient room to safely turn around

From a risk perspective, suggesting that members of staff will stand in the highway to police this process would put them at risk of a collision, as well as opening them up to disputes from drivers.

In terms of the proposal itself, directing cars down the cul de sac will cause further congestion on that road as cars stack waiting for their allotted timeslot.

B. 4.6.7 - section 7 – F – notes:

“The children are then directed along the footpath to and through the playground entrance gates by Staff Member”

Whilst this might work with secondary aged children, primary aged children including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) would be expected to proceed along the pavement in close proximity to the arrival of cars pulling in and out of drop off spaces and opening and closing car doors. As this activity is proposed to take place unaccompanied for children in years 3 and over, this would place them at significant risk of injury by a vehicle.

C. 4.6.7 - section 7 – G – carries the same concerns as ‘F’, but the added challenge is that ‘person C’ must know every parent and every car that they drive, during peak times in order to prevent a child from being released to the wrong adult. This presents a significant safeguarding risk which is to be avoided at all costs.

D. . 4.6.7 - section 7 – J

“Where parents are delivering siblings within both Groups A & B, special arrangements will be made with a later allocated slot for their older children so that there is opportunity then to wait within the site to drop their younger children in the 0845 slot.”

As there are three different proposed drop-off/collection times. this section suggests that siblings will have special arrangements. Burfield Academy have 53 families who would require special arrangements, which would increase congestion in every timeslot where the existing plan does not support this.

E. It is noted that the provision currently available for Key Stage 2 allows 1 minute to drop off each child where parents are to remain within the vehicle. Again, in theory, for secondary aged children this may be possible, however, it seems that the plan does not take into account the need to assist children out of car seats. Also the plan seems to be based on vehicles being on the premises for a maximum time limit of 3 minutes, this adds the unneeded pressure to rush this process, which in turn increases the likelihood of frantic behaviour adding to the safety risk of all persons concerned.

- F. The travel plan proposed for Early Years Foundation stage and Key stage 1 allows for parents to walk their children to the gate (no timescales are listed within the plan), however as previously noted, this is based on the usage of 53% cars where only 3 cars can be accommodated on site at a time. As it is estimated that the number of 53% has significantly increased, this expectation has been exceeded and queues of cars have in the past extended to local road, blocking access for emergency vehicles.

- G. It is noted that the design of the kiss and drop requires cars to bypass once another at the exit of the kiss and drop parking area. This is a blind spot, which is adjacent to a busy zebra crossing. This again increases the risk of car-on-car and car-on-pedestrian collision at that point, introducing an unnecessary risk.

Recommendation

The systems included within the travel plan do not in practice offer a safe solution for the drop off and collection of primary aged children. Even with modification of the school site, access via the highway is regularly encumbered by parked vehicles, creating a bottleneck at the school gate, which puts cars, pupils and residents at risk.

With this in mind there are no safe options for a safe on-site drop-off and collection process and STEP Academy Trust should work with East Sussex County Council to formally restrict access to the school premises, encouraging parents to park in surrounding residential roads.

It should be noted that The travel plan (4.6.4) already allows for cars to park on residential streets, noting that: “between 22 and 44 additional cars stopping on the highway. As the local roads leading to the proposed site are residential with all properties having off road parking, there is scope for this to be accommodated within the highway on-street without causing undue congestion.”

This recommendation is therefore an extension of an approved approach, rather than a new one and that cars parking on the surrounding roads should be the preferred option, rather than a contingency.

Whilst this may cause some moderate disruption for residents for around 15 minutes at the start and end of each school day, this approach is common to many schools and will prevent the health and safety and safeguarding risks which have been identified, as well as removing the need for complex drop off arrangements.