

LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON

# From Risk to Resilience

An introduction to business continuity for schools

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Practical preparation for disruption, continuity and recovery



# The immediate emergency is only the beginning

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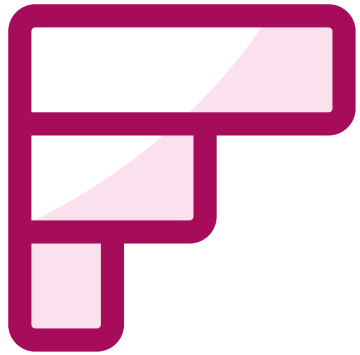
**Safety procedures answer “How do we get people safe?”**

**Business continuity answers “How do we keep the school functioning afterwards?”**

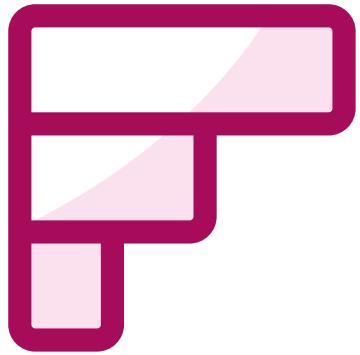
**A disruption can quickly affect**

- safeguarding
- pupil and staff welfare
- teaching and learning
- parent confidence
- essential operations

**Preparedness reduces uncertainty and helps leaders make faster, safer decisions.**



# Do you have a current Business Continuity Plan (BCP)



**Has your BCP been tested and are you confident of activating it?**

# Could your school run offline?

Schools that identified a cyber breach or attack in the previous 12 months

49%

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

73%

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Imagine your school systems are unavailable tomorrow.

**What would you need to keep running?**

**By the end of the session, you should be able to:**

**Explain** how emergency response, business continuity and recovery fit together

**Identify** your school's most time-critical activities and dependencies

**Plan** practical fallbacks for the loss of people, premises, technology or suppliers

**Act** by developing a usable plan, continuity kit and exercise schedule

# Continuity is a capability; not just a document

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## What is Business continuity?

The capability to continue priority services at an acceptable level and within an acceptable time during disruption

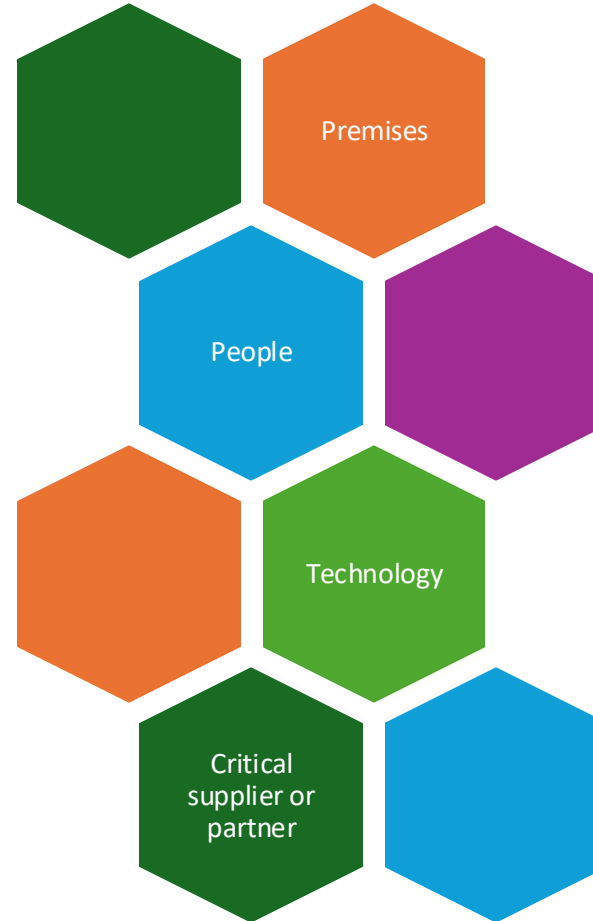
*For a school: protect pupils and staff, sustain critical operations, continue education where possible, and recover in a controlled way.*

### It is not...

- only a fire evacuation plan
- a document kept on one computer
- a list of every possible emergency
- solely the responsibility of premises staff
- finished once it has been written

# Plan for consequences, not a catalogue of disasters

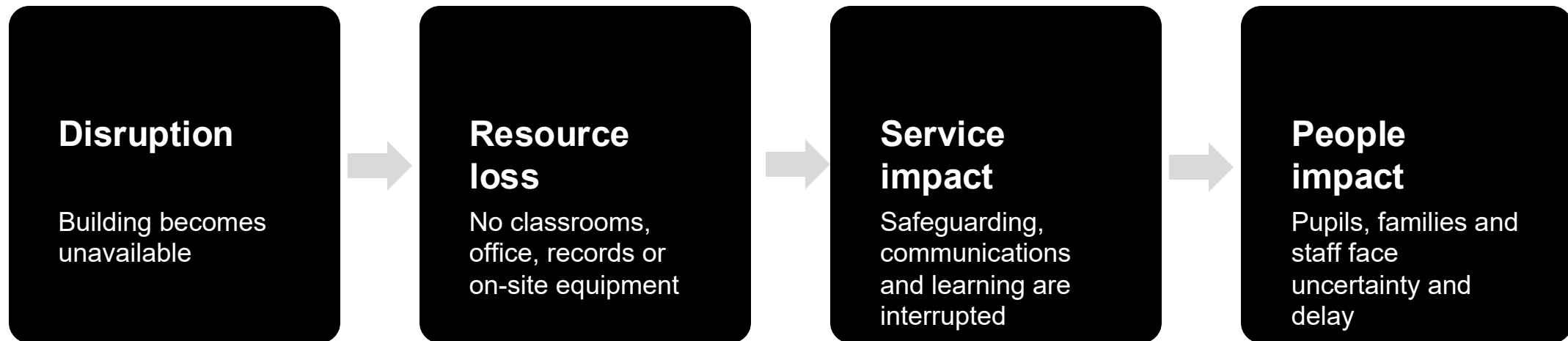
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*Plan for the loss; not only the cause*

# One disruption can cascade through the whole school

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***Business continuity interrupts the cascade by introducing prepared alternatives***

# Response, continuity and recovery

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Immediate



## Respond

Protect life • account for people • contact emergency services

Hours–days



## Continue

Activate fallbacks • communicate • sustain priority activities

Days–weeks



## Recover

Restore capacity • support wellbeing • learn and improve

**Emergency response and business continuity overlap—they should be designed and exercised together.**

# Protect outcomes before restoring everything

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A school cannot recover every activity at once. Priorities should reflect harm, urgency and dependency.

- |   |                                |                                                                                       |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Safety &amp; accounting</b> | Know where pupils, staff and visitors are; support immediate welfare.                 |
| 2 | <b>Safeguarding &amp; SEND</b> | Maintain referrals, trusted contacts, medication and individual support arrangements. |
| 3 | <b>Clear communication</b>     | Give staff and families verified instructions and a time for the next update.         |
| 4 | <b>Education continuity</b>    | Prioritise a safe, accessible learning offer and critical cohorts.                    |
| 5 | <b>Essential operations</b>    | Sustain catering, payroll, transport, premises, data and supplier coordination.       |

# A simple impact assessment sets priorities

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| Critical activity                              | Impact becomes serious | Minimum acceptable level           | Key dependencies                          |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Safeguarding response                          | Immediate              | Named cover available              | DSL/deputy • secure records • partners    |
| Pupil/staff accounting & family contact        | Within hours           | Verified status and update channel | Registers • contact data • messaging      |
| Medication, SEND and welfare support           | Same day               | Critical support maintained        | Staff • care plans • supplies • transport |
| Teaching and learning                          | Same/next school day   | Prioritised learning offer         | Staff • premises • IT • resources         |
| Catering, payroll and essential administration | 1–3 days               | Priority obligations sustained     | Suppliers • systems • finance • data      |

# Recovery expectations must be specific enough to test

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## Weak

“Restore IT quickly.”

“Reopen as soon as possible.”

“Tell parents what is happening.”

## Useful

“Authorised staff can access emergency contacts and safeguarding information within the agreed recovery time using a secure fallback.”

“Provide a safe alternative learning offer for prioritised pupils by the next school day if the site remains unavailable.”

“Issue a verified holding message within 30 minutes and confirm when the next update will be provided.”

**If an expectation cannot be understood, resourced and exercised, it is not yet a workable recovery objective.**

# Map every critical dependency

Select one critical activity and map what it cannot operate without.

Example activity

**Maintain  
safeguarding  
response during  
site loss**

Owner: DSL / named deputy

|                   |                                                   |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| People            | DSL cover • trained staff • decision authority    |
| Information       | secure records • contact details • case status    |
| Technology        | approved devices • access • authentication        |
| Partners          | children’s social care • police • health contacts |
| Premises & access | confidential workspace • safe meeting point       |

Look for single points of failure: one person, one password, one device, one supplier or one copy.

# Choose workable fallbacks before disruption



|             |                                                        |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| People      | deputies • cross-training • remote coordination        |
| Premises    | relocation • partial opening • partner space           |
| Technology  | secure remote access • backups • manual workarounds    |
| Information | controlled offline copies • alternate contact routes   |
| Suppliers   | alternatives • escalation contacts • agreed priorities |
| Learning    | prioritised cohorts • remote or shared provision       |

# A usable plan answers eight questions

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## 01 **Activate**

When is the plan invoked—and by whom?

## 02 **Lead**

Who makes decisions, and who deputises?

## 03 **Prioritise**

What must continue first, by when and at what level?

## 04 **Act**

What are the immediate continuity actions?

## 05 **Communicate**

Who needs what message, through which channel?

## 06 **Operate**

What premises, technology, staffing and supplier fallbacks apply?

## 07 **Record**

How will decisions, actions, costs and welfare issues be logged?

## 08 **Recover**

How will the school stand down, restore services and learn?

**Keep the core plan concise. Put detailed contacts, checklists and service-specific information in controlled annexes.**

# A continuity kit keeps essentials available offline

What must remain available if the office, network or usual building cannot be accessed?



## Core contents

- Current plan and decision checklists
- Key contacts, deputies and escalation routes
- Accounting and safeguarding information
- Site access and assembly details
- Torches, chargers, backup phone and paper logs

**Quick check: could the named deputy reach the kit now—and is personal data sealed, controlled and current?**

# Define roles and deputies

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Name a primary and deputy for each role. Combine roles where proportionate but keep responsibilities explicit.

## Strategic lead

Sets priorities • authorises closure or alternatives • liaises with governors/trust

## Operations / continuity

Activates plan • coordinates resources • tracks actions and dependencies

## Safeguarding & welfare

Protects pupils and staff • maintains referrals, medication and SEND support

## Communications

Provides verified updates • manages staff, family, council and media liaison

## Loggist / administration

Records decisions, timings, issues, expenditure and follow-up actions

# Communicate early, accurately and consistently

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## Quick reflection

If your primary platform failed, who would authorise the message and which channel would you use next?

## Plan for channel failure

|                |                                             |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Primary</b> | school messaging platform • email • website |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|

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|                 |                                                          |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Fallback</b> | telephone cascade • council/trust channel • social media |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|

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|                |                                                             |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Offline</b> | printed notices • agreed collection points • local partners |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|

# Your school building is suddenly unavailable

10:30 on a normal school day

Everyone is safe, but the site cannot be re-entered for at least 72 hours. Staff cannot access offices or paper records. The main network and telephony are unavailable. Families are asking whether the school will open tomorrow.

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**01** What are your first five continuity decisions?

**02** Which activities must continue today; and by tomorrow?

**03** What information, people or resources are currently inaccessible?

**04** Who needs an update in 15 minutes and within one hour?

# A plan that is not exercised is still an assumption

1

## Walk through & call

Read the plan together; test contacts, deputies and alternative channels.

2

## Tabletop

Discuss decisions against a realistic disruption scenario.

3

## Rehearse & improve

Safely test selected arrangements; record actions and update the plan and kit.



**Commit now: choose one exercise your school will complete this term.**

# A practical first 30 days

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|            |                 |                                                                  |
|------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Days 1–5   | <b>Own</b>      | Nominate a BC owner, incident team and deputies.                 |
| Days 6–10  | <b>Analyse</b>  | List critical activities, impacts, times and dependencies.       |
| Days 11–15 | <b>Design</b>   | Agree safe fallbacks for people, premises, IT and suppliers.     |
| Days 16–20 | <b>Document</b> | Complete the core plan, contacts, checklists and continuity kit. |
| Days 21–30 | <b>Validate</b> | Run a short tabletop, assign actions and update the plan.        |

Start proportionately. A short plan that is understood and tested is more useful than a perfect plan that never leaves the shelf.

# Common Weaknesses to Avoid

Plans that are  
too long or  
overly technical

Outdated  
contact  
information

Untested  
recovery  
procedures

No clear  
ownership

Focusing only on  
IT and ignoring  
operations

Missing  
communication  
workflows

Assuming key  
staff will always  
be available

# What an effective BCP should look like

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Could the school use the plan immediately if the building, IT systems or key staff were unavailable tomorrow?

## Leadership & Critical Activities

- Named BCP owner and trained deputy
- Clear triggers for activating the plan
- School Incident Management Team roles identified
- Decision and incident log templates included
- Priority services identified, including safeguarding, supervision, SEND support, meals and examinations
- Minimum staffing and essential resources recorded
- Arrangements for remote learning or alternative premises
- Recovery priorities and acceptable downtime agreed

## Disruption Arrangements & Maintenance

- Plans cover loss of premises, staff, utilities, IT/data and critical suppliers
- Up-to-date staff, parent/carers, contractor and Hillingdon Council contacts
- Pre-agreed communication methods and holding messages
- Emergency grab bag and secure off-site or cloud-based copy available
- Plan approved by senior leadership and governors
- Staff understand their roles and can access the plan
- Exercised at least annually and after significant changes
- Lessons from exercises and incidents recorded and implemented

# Prepared schools make better decisions under pressure

Three commitments to take away

- 1 Name the owner and deputies
- 2 Complete a basic plan and continuity kit
- 3 Schedule a short exercise and update cycle

**Questions &  
discussion**

Thank you