

Chemicals in Early Years settings and Primary schools

The connections between secondary schools and their cluster primary schools are important and of benefit to all. However, recent enquiries to SSERC have highlighted that there are some aspects of Health and Safety, where some extra consideration is called for.

It is not uncommon for secondary schools to help with the provision of equipment or chemicals for use in Early Years and Primary science and technology. In principle, this is not a problem but there are important points to consider. There is also the possibility that a primary teacher is likely to be less familiar with their safe use. Restrictions in Early Years and Primary settings due to health and safety are not the same as in a secondary school. Regarding chemicals for instance, there are greater restrictions on the type and concentration of chemicals that younger learners can use or be exposed to.

The best guide for Health and Safety in Science and Technology in Early Years and Primary is the Association for Science Education's "Be Safe!" (Fourth Edition).

In general, arrangements work well and safely but we recently heard of a situation where a primary teacher was looking to source some chemicals from a secondary school of a higher concentration than would be safe even in a secondary classroom. This is not a common event but it was only flagged up because the teacher went through the secondary school. Had they managed to source the substance from a supplier there could have been a significant risk.

You should also be aware that, if you are considering delivering materials or equipment to an Early Years or Primary setting, there are legal restrictions on the transportation of hazardous chemicals by road (although the fact that they ought to be of low hazard should mitigate any problems).



Where secondary age learners are leading activities in Early Years or Primary settings, for example as part of the Young STEM Leader Programme, risk assessments must take the above advice into account.

As usual, if there is any doubt, contact SSERC for advice. Specific advice from the Early Years and Primary Team at SSERC can be obtained by emailing primary@sserc.scot.

