

PROPOSAL FOR SAFE SCHOOL DORMITORIES IN KENYA

1. CORE PRINCIPLE

No dormitory should be occupied unless every child can escape quickly, safely, and without needing a key during an emergency. The guiding test should be: If a fire broke out at midnight, could all learners leave the dormitory within minutes through clear, unlocked, outward-opening exits?

2. DESIGN AND APPROVAL

All new dormitories should be designed by qualified architects and engineers registered with the relevant professional bodies.

No school dormitory should be built, extended, partitioned, or converted from

- another use without approval from:
- The county physical planning/building control office;
- Public health authorities;
- Fire safety authorities;
- Public works or equivalent technical officers;
- The Ministry of Education.

Converted classrooms, halls, workshops, stores, or dining halls should not be used as dormitories unless formally inspected and certified fit for boarding use.

3. EXITS AND ESCAPE ROUTES

Every dormitory should have at least two independent exits placed apart from each other.

All dormitory exit doors should:

Open outwards;

- Be wide enough for rapid evacuation;
- Never be padlocked from outside when students are inside;
- Have panic bolts or panic bars that open from inside without a key;
- Lead directly to a safe open assembly area.

Corridors should remain clear at all times. Beds, boxes, lockers, shoes, water containers, and luggage should never block escape routes.

4. PANIC BOLTS AND DOOR HARDWARE

Every emergency exit should be fitted with a working panic bolt or panic bar. These should be tested daily by the dormitory supervisor and recorded weekly by the school administration. Keys should never be the primary emergency-exit system. In a fire, smoke, panic, darkness, and confusion make key-based evacuation unsafe.

5. WINDOWS AND GRILLS

Dormitory windows should support ventilation, visibility, and emergency escape.

Where security grills are used, they should:

- Have emergency release mechanisms from inside;
- Not permanently trap learners;
- Be inspected regularly;
- Be included in fire drills.

Fixed burglar-proof grills without emergency release should be prohibited in dormitories.

6. OCCUPANCY LIMITS

Each dormitory should have a clearly displayed maximum occupancy certificate. No dormitory should exceed its approved bed capacity.

Bunk beds should be arranged to allow:

- Clear walking space;
- Direct access to exits;
- Easy movement in darkness;
- Access for rescue personnel.

Overcrowding should be treated as a serious safety violation, not as an administrative inconvenience.

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7. FIRE DETECTION AND ALARM SYSTEMS

Each dormitory should have:

- Smoke detectors;
- A clearly audible fire alarm;
- Emergency lighting;
- Illuminated exit signs;
- Fire extinguishers placed near exits;

Sand buckets or other approved fire-response equipment where appropriate.

Alarms should be loud enough to wake sleeping learners.

Fire equipment should be serviced on schedule and labelled with inspection dates.

8. ELECTRICAL SAFETY

All dormitory wiring should be installed and maintained by qualified electricians.

Schools should prohibit:

- Illegal extensions;
- Overloaded sockets;
- Exposed wiring;
- Student-owned cooking appliances;
- Candles;
- Kerosene lamps;
- Unsafe phone-charging arrangements.

Electrical inspections should be done at least annually and after any renovation.

9. FIRE DRILLS AND EVACUATION PRACTICE

Fire drills should be conducted at least once every school term.

- Drills should include:
- Night-time evacuation simulations;
- Use of all exits;
- Assembly-point roll calls;
- Learners with disabilities;
- Dormitory captains and supervisors;
- Response by security staff and matrons.

The purpose of drills is not ceremony, but muscle memory.

10. SUPERVISION AND NIGHT SAFETY

Each boarding section should have dedicated day and night supervision provided by trained and qualified supervisors.

The duty supervisor should know:

- Dormitory occupancy numbers;
- Location of all exits;
- Emergency contacts;
- Fire equipment locations;
- Students requiring special assistance.

Security guards should be trained that their role is not to lock students in, but to protect them while preserving emergency escape.

11. SPECIAL PROTECTION FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Dormitories for younger children should preferably be on the ground floor. Learners with disabilities or limited mobility should be placed near accessible exits and assigned trained evacuation support. Evacuation plans should include all learners, not only the physically strongest or fastest.

12. PROHIBITED PRACTICES

The following should be expressly banned:

- Locking dormitories from outside while occupied;
- Blocking exits with furniture;
- Using fixed grills without emergency release;
- Converting buildings into dormitories without approval;
- Overcrowding beyond approved capacity;
- Using candles or open flames;
- Storing flammable materials in dormitories;
- Ignoring defective alarms, doors, locks, or extinguishers.

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13. INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION

Every school dormitory should do a formal safety inspection before opening each academic year, and graded from compliant to unsafe. Inspections should be carried out jointly by education, fire, public health, and building-control officers.

A dormitory should receive a visible annual safety certificate only after passing inspection. Unsafe dormitories should be closed until defects are corrected.

14. SCHOOL BOARD RESPONSIBILITY

Boards of management should treat dormitory safety as a governance duty.

Each board should:

- Maintain a dormitory safety register;
- Approve safety budgets;
- Review fire-drill reports;
- Ensure professional maintenance;
- Audit and regularly report to parents/stakeholders
- Refuse unsafe overcrowding;
- Take responsibility for compliance.

Safety should be a standing agenda item at every board meeting

15. STUDENT AWARENESS

Learners should be taught:

- Where exits are;
- How to use panic bolts;
- What to do when an alarm sounds;
- Where to assemble;
- Why false alarms are dangerous;
- How to report electrical faults, smoke, bullying, or threats of arson.

Students are not merely occupants. They are part of the safety system.

16. EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Every boarding school should have a written emergency plan covering:

- Fire;
- Smoke;
- Electrical faults;
- Arson threats;
- Stampede risk;

- Medical emergencies;
- Missing learners after evacuation;
- Communication with parents;
- Coordination with police, fire brigade, ambulance, and Kenya Red Cross.

Emergency numbers should be posted visibly in dormitories, offices, gates, and staff houses.

17. MINIMUM SAFE DORMITORY CHECKLIST

A dormitory should not be occupied unless the following are confirmed:

- Two or more exits are available.
- Doors open outwards.
- Panic bolts or panic bars work.
- No exit is padlocked from outside.
- Windows allow ventilation and emergency escape.
- Grills have internal emergency release.
- Occupancy limit is displayed and respected.
- Fire alarm works.
- Smoke detectors work.
- Emergency lighting works.
- Fire extinguishers are serviced.
- Electrical wiring is certified safe.
- Escape routes are clear.
- Fire drill has been conducted that term.
- Assigned night supervisor is vetted.
- Assembly point is marked.
- Inspection certificate is current.

18. FINAL STANDARD

A safe dormitory is not one that merely shelters students.

A safe dormitory is one that allows every learner to survive the worst night of the school term.

No academic result, security concern, or budget excuse should override the right of a child to escape from danger.



Scan to access to access the 2020 AAK Safe Learning Handbook and the 2008 Safety Standards Manual for Schools by the Ministry of Education

ENDS

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