

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: 26th September 2023
Report for: Information
Report of: Karen Samples: Director of Education

Report Title: Schools in Trafford affected by RAAC building safety concerns

Purpose

This report will provide an overview of the impact of RAAC on schools and colleges in Trafford.

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted and to receive further updates as appropriate.

1.1 Background

RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete and is very different from traditional concrete and because of the way in which it was made, much weaker. RAAC was used in schools, colleges and other building construction from the 1950s until the mid-1990s. It may therefore be found in any school and college building (educational and ancillary) that was either built or modified in this time period. RAAC has a lifespan of around 30 years after which time it deteriorates. The DfE has been helping schools and Responsible Bodies to manage the potential risks of RAAC since 2018 by providing guidance and funding to address any issues.

Dependent on the status of a school, the Responsible Body (RB) will differ. The Local Authority is the RB for all Community, Foundation and Voluntary Controlled schools. The relevant Diocese is the RB for Voluntary Aided Schools and the relevant Trust is the RB for Academies.

In February 2021, the DfE published technical guidance to assist RBs to identify, assess and manage RAAC. In 2022, they sent a questionnaire to all RBs asking them to provide information on RAAC in their estates and recently commissioned structural engineers to visit education settings with the purpose of confirming whether their buildings contained RAAC panels and to assess the panels' condition.

In 2023 there were a small number of cases where RAAC failed with no warning. The engineers have previously risk rated the severity of RAAC found in education settings, from Critical (requiring immediate action with rooms/blocks/entire buildings requiring closure) to High, Medium, or Low. DfE has continued to assess the latest technical evidence on managing RAAC in light of the cases where RAAC has failed and is taking a cautious approach to prioritise safety whilst minimising the disruption to learning.

1.2 Action taken by Trafford Council since the House of Commons Standing Committee issued its alert to schools in 2019

In December 2018, the Local Government Association made the LA aware of the potential risk of RAAC, stating the building material was that used between the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. This information was shared with all schools via the schools e-bulletin (including Academies) and with Diocesan representatives in January 2019. Any relevant Local Authority building information and/or local knowledge for Academy or Voluntary Aided schools was also shared with the relevant Responsible Body.

The Schools Capital team also undertook a desktop exercise using the schools asset management database to establish which buildings fell within this age range. Information was reviewed by the Amey Area Surveyors and schools that were identified as a 'system-build' construction were eliminated.

Surveyors then visited a number of schools to review potential areas that could have contained RAAC, some of which required a follow-up visit from a Structural Engineer and intrusive testing was undertaken where the Structural Engineer was unable to rule out the potential for RAAC. In these cases, no RAAC was identified.

A reminder article was once again, placed in the Jan 2020 Schools e-bulletin for all schools.

In Feb 2021, the DfE issued guidance which expanded on the original building age range stated by LGA. The above process was repeated in order to capture any additional schools within the revised age range of mid-1930s and mid-1990s. Following any necessary follow-up visits from a Structural Engineer and intrusive testing, no RAAC was identified.

In 2022, the DfE opened an online portal to capture the responses from Responsible Bodies and Trafford completed this exercise for all the schools where it was the RB.

In 2023, the DfE asked for support from all local authorities, to chase any RBs that had not completed the online portal information. This was done promptly by Trafford officers. The Capital and Estates Teams in Trafford have acted in a timely and robust way over time according to DfE guidance

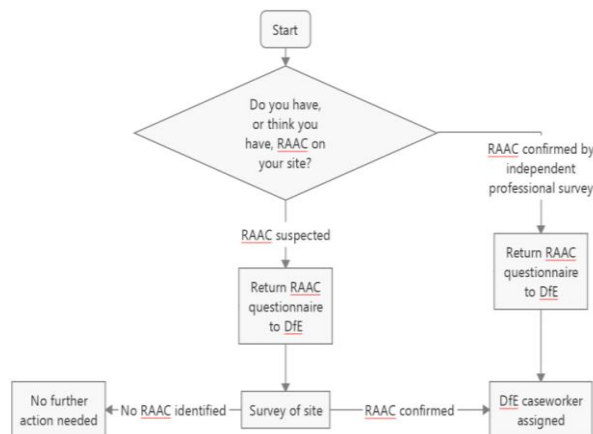
1.3 Managing RAAC in Schools

The DfE issued guidance in September 2023, for Responsible Bodies on the management of RAAC.

This stated that areas where RAAC has been confirmed, should be vacated and restricted access implemented to ensure that they are out of use. If the RAAC is in a small enough area, it is likely that there will be minimal disruption to the operation of the school or college.

The DfE expects that most local authorities and education settings will be able to manage the mitigation works themselves.

Where it is agreed in the initial triage that additional support is required or the scale of works is large, the DfE will allocate an additional project delivery manager to support.



1.4 Emergency Accommodation

Emergency or temporary accommodation may be needed for the first few weeks until the building has been made safe through structural supports.

This may be:

- ✓ space in a nearby, local school, college, or nursery that you can use for a period of time
- ✓ semi rigid temporary structures that can quickly be brought to your school, college, or maintained nursery school
- ✓ space in a community centre or empty local office building

DfE will provide funding for all mitigation works that are capital funded. This includes propping and temporary units on the estate. Where schools and colleges need additional help with revenue costs, like transport to locations or temporarily renting a local hall or office, agreement will be sought through liaison with DfE and the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

1.6 – Impact on Trafford Schools

The Local Authority is the Responsible Body for 39 Schools. Of these, **none** of our schools required some form of temporary or emergency accommodation as a result of RAAC.

Two academies were identified to have RAAC present, namely Altrincham College and Sale Grammar School. Both schools had already taken proactive steps to ensure that the risk of the RAAC identified has been fully mitigated and this was confirmed by the DfE.

In addition, the Local Authority requested additional intrusive testing take place at any settings where concerns were raised to ensure a rigorous approach was adopted and assurances provided to the DfE.