

ARVOE / SCHOOL LEADERSHIP GUIDES

Hiring for risk and compliance

A practical guide for school leaders

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This guide helps principals, business managers and selection panels decide what a risk and compliance role needs and assess candidates for it. Use it for a first dedicated appointment, a replacement or a combined role. Adapt it to your school's size, structure and stage of development.

Good risk management helps a school make better decisions and catch problems early, which leaves more room for new ideas. The right person in this role makes that possible. A poor fit, or a role without enough time, authority or support, leaves risks with busy leaders and problems get found later. That is why this appointment is worth getting right.

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Where to start

YOUR SITUATION	WHAT TO CONSIDER
First dedicated appointment	Map the work already happening across the school. Identify what the new person needs to build, bring together or support.
Replacing someone	Capture what the outgoing person knows, then reassess the role. Decide what to retain and what the school now needs to do differently.
Changing a combined role	Make each responsibility visible. Check that the time, capability and authority match the proposed workload.

Key decisions before advertising

- Agree three outcomes for the first year.
- Define the work included in the role and what stays with other leaders.
- Choose the level of capability needed on day one.
- Confirm the reporting line, escalation route and leadership sponsor.
- Match the workload to the time, budget and specialist support available.

Before advertising, use sections 1 to 3 (pages 3 to 6) to define the work and capabilities. For interviews, start at section 4 (page 7). The first 90 days are in section 6 (page 10), and the optional questions follow on page 11.

This is a recruitment guide, not a complete role description or a statement of legal requirements. Use it alongside your school's recruitment and child safety procedures.

1. Define the role

Titles vary. A part-time officer can be carrying responsibilities that require an experienced lead. Judge the role by the decisions and work involved.

LEVEL	USUALLY SUITABLE WHEN
E Executive	The school needs senior risk leadership across a complex organisation.
L Lead or manager	Someone needs to run the program, often as a team of one.
P Practitioner or officer	An experienced leader already provides direction and technical support.

Write down what success will look like

Choose three outcomes that address your school's actual needs. For example: leaders agree the priority risks and actions; upcoming reviews have clear owners and evidence; staff can use a practical process for excursions and events. Avoid making a new register or policy the only measure of success.

Make the boundaries and support explicit

List any combined responsibilities, such as work health and safety, privacy, child safety coordination, complaints, emergency planning or insurance. Clarify where the role coordinates or advises, where it makes decisions, and where another leader remains accountable. One appointment cannot provide every specialist capability.

Confirm who the person reports to, which leadership meetings they attend and how they raise an unresolved concern. If they are still developing their risk skills, name the person or external adviser who will support them. Test the workload against the available hours and the school calendar.

Keep ownership clear

Leaders and area owners own and manage their risks and controls. The risk and compliance role provides expertise, coordination, monitoring and challenge. The principal leads implementation within the school's governance arrangements; the governing body provides oversight. Independent assurance, where used, comes from a suitably independent provider. An audit and risk committee oversees that assurance.

Protect continuity during a vacancy

Before the outgoing person leaves, capture key deadlines, unresolved matters, regulator correspondence, records and system access arrangements. Assign interim owners and an escalation contact. Keep urgent work moving while recruitment proceeds.

2. Activities and outcomes by level

Use this indicative comparison to select the functions your school needs. Each cell describes typical work and the outcome it should support. Levels may be combined; agree the scope, authority and support rather than treating every cell as a requirement. Mark the cells that fit your school, then align the capabilities in section 3 (page 6).

FUNCTION	E EXECUTIVE	L LEAD OR MANAGER	P PRACTITIONER OR OFFICER
Framework and strategy	Shapes the framework, appetite and strategy with leaders. OUTCOME an agreed direction linked to school goals.	Designs the approach and improvement plan. OUTCOME a workable program with priorities and owners.	Maintains documents and tracks milestones. OUTCOME current guidance and visible progress.
Assessment and controls	Challenges significant decisions and risk acceptance. OUTCOME informed choices within agreed authority and appetite.	Facilitates assessments and reviews control effectiveness. OUTCOME material exposures have credible responses.	Supports assessments, records controls and gathers evidence. OUTCOME reliable records and gaps raised promptly.
Compliance and reviews	Advises leaders on material gaps and regulatory matters. OUTCOME timely decisions and accountable responses.	Coordinates obligations, policy reviews and review preparation. OUTCOME requirements have owners and evidence.	Updates obligation records, gathers evidence and follows up deadlines. OUTCOME dependable information and timely escalation.
Incidents and learning	Advises leadership on serious events and systemic changes. OUTCOME sound decisions and organisational learning.	Coordinates the agreed process and action follow-up. OUTCOME a consistent response and improvements implemented.	Records incidents, tracks actions and identifies patterns. OUTCOME accurate records and concerns escalated.
Reporting and assurance	Interprets exposure and advises on assurance priorities. OUTCOME oversight focuses on significant decisions.	Prepares reports, coordinates checks and follows up findings. OUTCOME leaders see gaps and required actions.	Validates data, prepares reporting inputs and tracks findings. OUTCOME timely reports supported by evidence.
Culture and adoption	Builds leadership commitment and expectations. OUTCOME risk informs planning and decisions.	Coaches owners and improves processes with staff. OUTCOME practical routines that staff use.	Explains processes and supports staff participation. OUTCOME staff know what to do and where to seek help.

FUNCTION	E EXECUTIVE	L LEAD OR MANAGER	P PRACTITIONER OR OFFICER
Risk systems	Ensures the school's risk systems align with its framework and are embedded in how the school operates. OUTCOME risk information leaders can rely on.	Coordinates the registers, records and tools that hold risk and compliance information, and keeps the data accurate. OUTCOME one current, reliable record.	Uses the risk systems, checks the data entered and flags errors or gaps. OUTCOME accurate data and records.
Emerging risks	Brings a strategic lens to shifts across the sector and beyond, and considers what they mean for the school's direction. OUTCOME strategy that reflects what is coming.	Monitors what is changing in the sector, in other sectors and outside the school, and judges what matters for this school. OUTCOME relevant changes assessed and acted on early.	Collects regulator updates, news and peer information and flags items for assessment. OUTCOME relevant changes reach the lead promptly.

Area leaders (eg. Child Safety Lead) retain ownership of their risks and controls. Specialist safeguarding, legal, IT and assurance work should follow agreed responsibilities; this table does not transfer those duties to the risk role.

3. Key capabilities to assess

Functions describe the work; capabilities describe what a person needs to do it well. Set the required depth for your chosen level and identify what must be demonstrated on day one. Use these capabilities to guide the interview, exercise and references.

CAPABILITY	E EXECUTIVE	L LEAD OR MANAGER	P PRACTITIONER OR OFFICER
Risk and compliance knowledge	Applies framework and appetite concepts to governance, strategy and significant decisions.	Designs and operates assessments, controls, obligation tracking and monitoring; knows when specialist advice is needed.	Applies established methods, maintains evidence and recognises when to seek guidance.
Judgement and prioritisation	Weighs strategic trade-offs, uncertainty and school-wide consequences; gives clear advice under pressure.	Prioritises material exposures and deadlines within available resources; escalates with practical options.	Identifies exceptions, manages competing tasks and raises matters beyond their authority.
Implementation and change	Sponsors improvement, secures support and tests whether changes achieve intended outcomes.	Turns direction into a realistic plan; involves staff, removes barriers and checks adoption.	Organises tasks, follows through on actions and helps staff use new processes.
Influence and relationships	Challenges senior leaders constructively and builds commitment across leadership and the governing body.	Works with area owners, coaches staff and resolves resistance without relying solely on authority.	Builds dependable relationships, explains requirements respectfully and follows up effectively.
Communication	Presents significant choices and recommendations clearly to the principal and governing body.	Turns technical detail into concise reports, advice and usable staff guidance.	Writes accurate records and explains processes clearly to different staff groups.
School context and learning	Connects risk to educational purpose, student safety, culture and governance.	Adapts delivery to teaching, school rhythms and relevant requirements; learns unfamiliar areas quickly.	Understands daily operations and safeguarding boundaries; asks questions and seeks support.
Digital and data capability	Judges information quality, technology fit and emerging risks, including AI.	Uses systems and data to improve monitoring; evaluates tools with relevant specialists.	Maintains accurate data, uses tools safely and verifies outputs, including AI-generated material.

School experience and transferable risk capability both matter. Ask for evidence of what the candidate has done, their personal contribution and what changed. Be explicit about development needs and who will support them.

Each core question in section 4 (page 7) is tagged with the capability it tests. Risk and compliance knowledge and digital and data capability are not covered by a core question, so draw on the additional questions to test them at the required level.

4. Run an interview that tests judgement

Use the same core questions for candidates applying for the same role. Match follow-up depth to the level you need. An officer may contribute to a program; a lead should be able to run it; an executive should show how it shapes leadership decisions.

For a 60-minute interview, allow 5 minutes for introductions, 30 for core questions, 15 for a scenario and 10 for the candidate's questions. Use additional questions to fill evidence gaps.

Six core questions

Q1 Improving what already exists

Implementation and change

Tell us about a risk or compliance process you inherited. What did you keep, what did you change, and what improved?

LISTEN FOR Respect for existing work, a clear personal contribution, evidence of improvement and changes that lasted.

Q2 Working with limited time

Judgement and prioritisation

You join our school in a part-time role or as a team of one. How would you decide what to do first?

LISTEN FOR Questions about the school, urgent obligations and exposures, realistic priorities, and work shared with responsible leaders.

Q3 Making requirements practical

Implementation and change

Tell us about a requirement that staff found difficult to follow. How did you make it workable?

LISTEN FOR Listening to staff, understanding the requirement, reducing unnecessary effort and checking that the revised approach worked.

Q4 Responding to a serious concern

Judgement and prioritisation

A key safety control has not operated for a term. What would you do first, and what would you need to find out?

LISTEN FOR Immediate protection, proportionate escalation, evidence, interim action and attention to any reporting requirements. Then a review of why it failed.

Q5 Influencing a senior leader

Influence and relationships · Communication

Tell us about a time a senior leader disagreed with your advice. How did you handle it, and what happened?

LISTEN FOR Clear advice grounded in evidence, respectful challenge, an understanding of decision authority and appropriate escalation.

Q6 Starting well

School context and learning

What would you aim to understand and agree with us in your first term? What support would you need?

LISTEN FOR Relationships, a baseline, agreed outcomes and realistic expectations. A willingness to ask for support and explain trade-offs.

Use one short practical exercise

Use this as the 15-minute scenario. Give every candidate the same fictional scenario and a few minutes to read it. Explain that you are assessing their reasoning, priorities and communication. Invite questions and avoid using confidential school information.

SCENARIO

You have joined a school in a three-day-a-week risk and compliance role. A regulator review is eight weeks away. Several excursion assessments have incomplete approval records, a policy review backlog is growing, and staff use an AI tool that has not been assessed. The principal wants an update by Friday.

Ask the candidate for a five-minute briefing, then follow up with questions. Cover: What would you clarify? What would you address first? Who would you involve? What would you recommend to the principal, and what would have to wait?

Listen for someone who establishes the facts before ranking the work, checks for immediate safety or data exposure, involves the right owners and explains a realistic plan. There is no single correct ordering without more information. A long list of tasks is weaker evidence than a reasoned set of priorities.

5. Compare evidence and make the appointment

Record evidence against the capabilities you need

Use the capabilities in section 3 (page 6) and the level you selected. Record strong, partial or not yet demonstrated, with an example for each. Agree essential capabilities before interviewing. Panel members should record views independently before discussion; an overall score should not conceal a critical gap.

Use references to test what remains uncertain

Ask referees for specific examples of the candidate's delivery, judgement and influence. Test important claims from the interview and ask what support helped the person succeed. Agree additional referees with the candidate before approaching them.

Complete the school's required suitability and child safety checks through its normal process. References complement those checks. Before offering, confirm the role's scope, working arrangements, development needs and first-year outcomes with the preferred candidate.

6. Set the person up for the first 90 days

Agree a starting plan together and adapt it to term dates, the person's hours and any urgent matters. A new appointee needs access to leaders, information and decisions as well as a list of tasks.

PERIOD	APPOINTEE FOCUS	SCHOOL SUPPORT AND AGREED OUTPUT
Days 1 to 30	Meet key people, understand the school's goals and review existing work. Identify urgent exposures, deadlines and gaps in ownership.	Provide access, handover and a leadership sponsor. Agree a short baseline and urgent actions with named owners.
Days 31 to 60	Validate priorities with leaders, address selected gaps and test one practical improvement with staff.	Make decisions on priorities and resources. Agree a manageable work plan and clarify risk ownership.
Days 61 to 90	Establish reporting and review routines. Check whether early changes work and propose the next phase.	Review progress with the appointee. Agree a realistic improvement plan, measures and ongoing support.

What useful progress could look like

- Leaders can explain the priority risks, who owns them and what needs a decision.
- Important obligations and upcoming reviews have owners and visible deadlines.
- Urgent gaps have been escalated and have a clear response.
- Staff have seen at least one improvement that makes their work easier or safer.
- The appointee and sponsor agree what can be delivered with the available resources.

Judge progress by whether the school is better able to act. Document counts alone say little about whether a control works or a decision has improved.

About the author

Ryan Speak is a co-founder of Arvoe. His experience is in enterprise risk transformation, and developing highly qualified and capable risk teams at Macquarie Bank and Woolworths. This guide brings that experience to the practical decisions schools face when appointing a risk and compliance professional.

Ryan Speak and Lachlan Bransby, co-founders of Arvoe

If a second view would help, we welcome a conversation about the scope of your role or the capabilities you want to assess.

Arvoe is the risk and governance platform built for Australian independent schools. arvoe.ai

Additional interview questions

Optional reference for the panel. Select questions to fill evidence gaps; do not work through the whole bank. The indicators below guide follow-up and are not a required script.

Risk and compliance fundamentals

Risk and compliance knowledge | Judgement and prioritisation

How would you explain the difference between risk and compliance to a staff member?

LISTEN FOR Compliance concerns obligations; risk considers uncertainty affecting school objectives, including student safety. They should connect the two in a practical example.

Describe a control you helped design or test. How did you know it worked?

LISTEN FOR A clear purpose, owner and trigger or frequency, plus evidence of operation and effectiveness. A process can contain several controls.

What should a risk report help our leaders decide?

LISTEN FOR Priorities, changes, exposure and actions needing decisions. Can explain more than ratings or register maintenance.

How do you keep track of what's changing outside the school to identify emerging risks?

LISTEN FOR Named sources they actually use, such as regulators, sector bodies and peer networks, and a regular routine for checking them. An example of a change they spotted early, how they judged whether it mattered to the school, and what they did about it.

Obligations and reviews

Risk and compliance knowledge | Judgement and prioritisation

How would you establish which obligations apply to our school?

LISTEN FOR Relevant authoritative sources, school context, responsible owners and a way to track changes. Knows when specialist advice is needed.

Two weeks before a review, you find an unmet requirement. What do you do?

LISTEN FOR Clarifies the requirement and exposure, escalates and proposes action. Distinguishes interim risk reduction from satisfying the requirement; checks reporting duties.

Tell us about a review you helped prepare for. What did you learn?

LISTEN FOR Their own contribution, honesty about gaps, evidence of completion and improvements that continued after the review.

Incidents and safeguarding

Judgement and prioritisation | School context and learning

A serious incident occurs on camp. What matters in the first hour and the following week?

LISTEN FOR Immediate safety and support, emergency response where needed, escalation and applicable notifications. Preserves records, then supports learning and follow-through.

A child safety concern is raised late on Friday. How do you respond?

LISTEN FOR Acts on immediate safety, follows the school's safeguarding arrangements and checks applicable reporting duties. Recognises the limits of their role and maintains confidentiality appropriately.

Additional questions by capability

Digital tools and AI

Digital and data capability

Staff are using an AI tool that has not been assessed. What would you ask and do?

LISTEN FOR Establishes use, data involved and any exposure. Uses the school's approval process, involves relevant specialists and considers safe options for staff.

Tell us how you have used AI or another digital tool in your work. What did you check?

LISTEN FOR A specific use, verification of outputs, appropriate handling of information and recognition of limitations.

You inherit three risk registers. How would you decide what to retain?

LISTEN FOR Finds owners and users, checks purpose and data quality, then agrees a reliable source and transition. Avoids choosing a system before understanding the need.

Leadership and direction

Judgement and prioritisation | Influence and relationships | Communication

Describe a decision where each option carried risk. How did you help?

LISTEN FOR Understands objectives, consequences and constraints; explains options and trade-offs, including opportunities and the effect on students and staff.

How would you develop a risk improvement plan for this school?

LISTEN FOR Starts with educational purpose and existing capability; involves leaders, selects achievable priorities and agrees resources and measures.

Tell us about a time you presented to a board or council. What decision or action followed?

LISTEN FOR Clear advice suited to the audience, relevant evidence and a concrete account of what happened next.

Working with people

Influence and relationships · School context and learning

A teacher says your process takes too much time. How do you respond?

LISTEN FOR Listens to the task and constraints, checks what is essential and improves the process while preserving the required outcome.

How would you help area leaders keep their risks and actions current?

LISTEN FOR Clear ownership, useful support and a review rhythm connected to existing meetings and decisions.

What would you need to learn about our school, and how would you learn it?

LISTEN FOR Curiosity about culture, educational practice and governance; a practical learning plan and willingness to seek help.

Panel reminder: school experience and transferable risk capability both matter. Decide what is essential now and what can be developed with genuine support.