

New standard needed for Scotland's school toilets says Children and Young People's Commissioner

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People today [**Friday 6 September 2013**] launched a campaign calling on the Scottish Government to urgently introduce new guidance on school toilets and ensure children and young people's right to dignified and safe facilities is respected.

Flushed with Success: Setting the Standard for Scotland's School Toilets seeks to address the fact that standards of school toilets for pupils need to improve and the quality of the facilities must be monitored and guaranteed in the same way as in workplaces for adults.

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tam Baillie, said: "Providing better school toilets as standard across Scotland is a matter of respect and dignity for children and young people.

"A number of schools have great toilets for pupils and have gone above and beyond what's required in legal terms. However, I have come across many instances where the standard of school toilets is poor and children regularly complain about the facilities.

"Current legislation is nearly 50 years old and doesn't demand that inspectors look at school toilets. There is no process to ensure compliance with even basic standards and no-one systematically challenges the standards of school toilets when they do not come up to scratch.

"While legislation protects standards of toilets both in workplaces for adults and in schools, the standards for school toilets are not being upheld. This is a clear breach of children's rights."

"Open access to high quality toilet facilities is crucial to pupils' health and wellbeing and it can also have a positive influence on pupils' willingness and ability to learn, their behaviour and morale. It's an issue that particularly affects children and young people with health conditions or disabilities, who already face the highest barriers to inclusion in our society.

"This most basic of requirements needs to be urgently improved if the government's vision for 'Scotland to be the best place to grow up in' is to be realised."

Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland who is backing the Commissioner's campaign, said: "I would like to see the guidance for school toilets updated, to ensure that basic hygiene standards including access to hot water and soap and proper hand washing facilities, are adhered to in every single school in Scotland."

Eileen Prior, Executive Director of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, said: "SPTC welcomes and wholeheartedly supports this campaign. Parents across Scotland are concerned about poor school toilets and the frankly Dickensian attitudes that sometimes mean children are not allowed access to them."

"SPTC encourages Parent Councils to support this campaign and take up their concerns with the school, their local authorities and their MSP."

A recent survey of over 2000 Scottish pupils (Ipsos MORI – see note 2) found that 56 percent *never* used school toilets or only used them if they '*really had to*'.

The research also found that:

- Although around half of pupils who use school toilets report *always* or *usually* feeling safe in them, 16% say they *rarely* or *never* feel safe in them, and a similar proportion (15%) that they only *sometimes* feel safe.
- Asked to provide an overall rating of their school toilets, around a third of pupils rated them as *very good* or *good* (31%), and a similar proportion rated them as *OK* (32%), while only a slightly smaller proportion rated them as *poor* or *very poor* (27%).
- Among pupils who have to seek permission to go to the toilet during class, only around a third of pupils say they are *always* or *usually* allowed to go, 16% report *rarely* being allowed to go, and 2% say their teachers *never* let them go to the toilet during class.

Further research by the Commissioner for Children and Young People shows that many pupils avoid using the toilets at school because they say they lack basic provisions, are not private enough, or because they are not allowed to go to the toilet when they need to.

Adolescent girls, children who are being bullied, and children and young people with disabilities or health conditions are affected disproportionately.

Avoidance – or limited access to toilets – can lead to medical conditions such as chronic constipation, incontinence and urinary infections which are common among children and young people. Both boys and girls may limit their intake of water during the day to reduce the need to use the toilet, leading to dehydration. Lack of privacy and safety in school toilets can have a negative impact on the emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Lack of cleanliness, hot water and soap, combined with poor toilet hygiene and hand washing represents a very specific risk of passing on infection and disease including threadworm, the most common parasitic worm infestation in the UK.

While current legislation does demand ‘lockable doors and partitions that secure privacy’, these standards are not fully met in schools across Scotland. Three quarter height partitions are still common in school toilets but these leave gaps underneath and above stall doors.

In addition to the legislative improvements and related national guidance and inspection regimes, the Commissioner is also calling on Scottish local authorities and schools to self assess the current state of their school toilets by taking part in a *Flushed with Success* Active Enquiry [see note 3], where schools involve pupils in the audit process.

-ENDS-

Notes for Editors

1. The Commissioner’s remit is to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people, with particular emphasis on the rights set out in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. He also monitors the law, policy and practice for effectiveness in relation to the rights of children and young people and promotes best practice by service providers working with children
2. The campaign was informed by research conducted with children and young people by Ipsos MORI, completed in March 2013. [A PDF of the report is here](#). Results are based on a sample of 2,154 S1-S6 pupils from schools across Scotland, who completed pen and paper questionnaires in mixed ability classes. Fieldwork dates: Sept-Nov 2012. Data are weighted to ensure findings are representative of the Scottish secondary school population.

3. The campaign was also informed by [a commissioned literature review](#) and learning drawn from discussion on the subject with over 900 participating primary school pupils at a national GLOW event.
4. Following work with [Space Unlimited](#) to pilot the *Flushed with Success* Active Enquiry, the Commissioner will encourage schools to support a pupil-led self evaluation of their school toilet provision and management within a UNCRC Rights context against the criteria of hygiene; sanitation; privacy; safety; pupil access and free use; health promotion; curricular links; pupil and staff management processes.
5. Current legislation includes The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1067 No 1199: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/1967/1199/contents/made>. The standards for school toilets are not upheld in the same way as toilets in adult workplaces, standards for which are set out in the Workplace (health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.
6. For more information about Flushed with Success visit www.sccyp.org.uk and the Commissioner's new Facebook page www.facebook.com/RightsSCCYP