



**Scotland's Commissioner
for Children & Young People**

Flushed with success: the great school toilet debate
A summary of the views of children and young people

September 2013

Flushed with Success – the great school toilet debate

The special Glow meeting 'Flushed with Success: the Great Toilet Debate' was held on Thursday, 20 February 2013 in Carrick Knowe Primary School in Edinburgh.

This Glow meeting focused on the qualities and standards of school toilets and involved primary school aged children and their teachers. Thirty one schools took part and approximately 938 children were involved on the day through Glow.

Twenty five pupils hosted the meeting along with Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People in the school itself.

"...one girl in the class hasn't used a school toilet since Primary One..."

The session featured a presentation from Heathery Knowe Primary School, which had been asked to do a review of the qualities and standards of their own school toilets. The findings of the review were presented and provoked a wide-ranging discussion.

The session was recorded and the comments from pupils and some teachers have been transcribed below. The comments have been ordered under the key themes for discussion that emerged.

Comments

Permissions/Access:

There was clear indication from children that they believed it was important for health and safety reasons that teachers know when they are at the toilet (in case of fire etc).

There were a range of different processes that are being used to help teachers manage this. These include:

- A rule that only one child at a time is allowed out of the classroom
- Toilet passes being used
- Some children talked about holding pictures up to let teachers know they wanted to go to the toilet
- Some infant classes have a sign or a toy to show they are at the toilets so group work is not disturbed
- Some children talked about putting hands up with crossed fingers when they needed to go to the toilet so going didn't disturb the lesson
- Use of toilet cards.

Safety:

There were a number of comments made about feeling unsafe in toilets.

- Don't always feel safe because you don't know who else may be in there...
- Using the toilets to punch another pupil
- Toilets quite far away from the corridors meaning that someone might be being bullied – nobody's walking past that can hear. No teachers there to stop it.
- Older children will push children in the toilets
- There are lots of rumours that our school toilets are haunted
- Toilets can be noisy – with lots of kicks and bangs
- Throwing water at one wall in the cubicle
- People looking into cubicles makes us feel really unsafe
- Don't feel safe because others look over the cubicles at them sometimes
- Toilet doors can easily be opened from the outside
- Some people would crawl under the cubicles
- We did not feel that the issue was about bullying, rather that people will not respect privacy
- Some Primary Fives feel vulnerable to bullies in the toilet
- Locks are stiff so the children are scared in case they get locked in.

Privacy:

Privacy in school toilets was identified as a key issue, and one where there were problems.

- Broken locks were identified as an issue by many schools
- People peering over the tops of cubicles, peering under, opening doors from outside while pupils on the loo, climbing into the cubicle all raised by a range of schools
- Behaviours like this made pupils feel unsafe more than bullying
- Unlocking doors when people are on toilets
- Talking heads under toilet cubicles – horrible!
- People looking over the top or under the bottom and even trying to climb over
- Toilets should be able to be locked
- Some of the toilets have broken locks
- Our locks don't work because the pupils break them
- Our locks are broken and people peer over the cubicles
- We would like the toilets to be full-sized because people try to look over the top and under the bottom and sometimes even try to climb over
- We would also like to have proper locks on the doors but we understand that the little ones may end up locking themselves in
- P7s need bigger doors
- Our toilets have broken locks as well and people peer over
- All of our toilets have working locks.

Soap and Hot Water:

There was a variance of experience around access to hot water:

- Water is freezing in the summer
- The water is boiling
- Water from the taps in the girls' toilets too hot to use
- Our water is either freezing or burns you
- Sometimes the water runs very slow in the toilets when lots of them are running at the same time.

More predominant were issues about soap:

- Pupil council's budget bought our liquid soap dispensers
- Our toilets keep running out of soap because pupils waste it
- Our soap makes really good bubbles and causes children to misbehave
- Our soap is watery and disgusting
- Our soap takes a long time to be replaced
- Our janitor replaces soap really quickly
- We would like the sort of soap that smells better
- Soap dispensers don't work in some schools
- Our soap doesn't smell nice
- The soap is dirty and some people use it to draw on mirrors
- The soap in the toilets does not smell nice
- Would like fresh soap dispensers with liquid soap
- When the sinks are so dirty we can't clean our hands
- Sometimes we run out because people waste soap
- Some people waste the soap and then sometimes it's really dirty
- In our school we often run out of soap and it takes a long time for it to be replaced. We would also like the sort that smells better.
- Sometimes the plunger on the soap dispenser does not work properly
- There is no liquid soap anymore because it was getting wasted and put on mirrors. Now there are bars of soap but the children don't like them because the bars of soap get dirty and sometimes stick to the sink.
- Pupils use more soap than they need and are therefore wasting soap so it runs out quickly
- One of the soap dispensers is broken and the other one is not always full
- We sometimes have a small bar of soap but it's often dirty and some people draw on the mirrors with it
- Our pupil council bought us liquid soap dispensers
- There is not enough soap in the boys' toilets but the girls' ones are fine
- The boys have three soap dispensers but only one works and the girls have four but only one works
- The girls' toilet is far better than the boys. They waste soap.
- In the boys' toilets the soap dispenser is not in order

Toilet paper:

- Too much toilet paper is used through the day so by the end of the day it has run out
- Pupils waste toilet paper
- We never get new paper
- People block toilets
- Toilet roll being wasted
- Toilet paper been put in sinks
- Some people use too much toilet paper so by the end of the day it is starting to run out
- Some pupils waste toilet paper
- Our toilet never gets new paper
- Sometimes we have toilet paper but sometimes we don't because people muck about with it and it blocks the toilets
- Our pupils feel the toilet roll is wasted
- The children are saying that the toilet paper is often wasted
- The toilet paper gets picked in sinks and thrown onto the ceilings
- Our toilet's get blocked by paper towels
- Better toilet paper please.

Hand towels or drying hands:

- Only one works – the other hand dryer's not working
- Paper towels to dry hands in toilets – it's disgusting that most of the toilets have no paper towels. We need more.
- Towels don't come out properly – they come out in little pieces
- Dryers would save paper and money
- We would love hand dryers instead of paper towels
- Our hand dryer is not working
- We don't think we waste toilet tissue or paper towels.

Broken Doors, Toilets and Toilet Seats:

- Most of our toilets are broken and blocked
- Some of the toilet seats are broken
- Some of our toilet seats have broken off
- We think toilets would be better if the doors were not broken and if the locks worked
- If there were proper toilet seats and if the toilets actually smelt nice because often they don't
- Every child has the right to privacy. We need toilets fixed.
- Repair the locks on the doors and repaint the walls
- We need cleaner toilets with locks that work
- If something gets broken we tell the teacher and they tell the janitors. They are very quick at fixing it.
- Our toilet seats are disgusting.

Numbers of toilets:

- At lunch and break there are too many people trying to use a toilet at the same time
- We need more cubicles
- Through the day we have enough but at lunchtime and break we have too many people.

General environment:

- I like our toilets
- Girls' toilets are far better than the boys
- We would like to decorate toilets and have nice colours
- They really need repainted
- Put up signs that say flush the toilet
- Boys' toilets recently redecorated; the girls would like this in theirs too
- Put signs up to make people to flush the toilets
- Air freshener's please would be nice
- Lots of people forget to flush
- Smells coming in the classrooms
- Windows need to be easy to open
- Pink sparkly toilet seats for the girls
- Would like flowers painted in their toilets
- More signs to remind everyone how to behave
- Don't use them for a play or a chat
- Repair the walls
- Repaint the walls
- Toilets are brilliant. We have amazing murals painted on the walls.
- I'd like an alien painted on the wall
- Younger pupils don't like using older pupil's toilets
- We think the toilets need more maintenance
- It is important because if they are dirty people may be sick or feel sick if they go.

Cleanliness:

- Nice clean toilets encourage you to use them more
- We felt there might be urine on the floor and of course we may not want to use the toilets
- Floors need to be cleaned more regularly
- The toilets need to be clean. This will encourage children to use them and we feel that toilets could be cleaner.
- The floors need to be cleaned more regularly
- Some of the boys would like the floors to be cleaned regularly throughout the day
- If it was to be a bit cleaner I would feel happy about using them
- If the sinks are dirty we can't clean our hands.

Smells:

- Not flushing causes really bad smells
- We would like freshener sprays
- Sometimes the smells come into the classroom
- If people don't flush the toilets they get really stinky.

Ideas for improvement from the children involved:

- Toilet monitors might help
- School toilet monitors or toilet checkers
- Pupil councils should take responsibility for checking the toilets
- Get the children to wash their hands more
- Older pupils should teach the younger pupils how to use the toilet properly
- We would like to have sensor-controlled taps and toilets
- Pupils need to take more responsibility for looking after the toilets
- Better water fountains please
- Posters reminding children to wash their hands
- Full Dyson hand dryers please
- We would like the doors on our toilets to be full size because people try to look over the top or under the bottom and sometimes they even try to climb over
- We think teachers we know should come in more often.