

Factsheet for schools: getting changed for PE

March 2018

There is no current legislation around safe PE changing practices in primary schools; it is up to individual schools to write their own guidelines. These are some of the things that schools should take into consideration when deciding how to practicably provide safe and appropriate changing facilities.

Clear guidelines are recommended because:

- getting changed can make some children feel vulnerable
- getting changed can cause anxiety for some children
- staff can feel unsure about PE changing supervision and how to ensure that both children and adults are safe.

Changing areas

Schools need to consider the following things when organising changing facilities for children:

- Where possible, **use designated single-gender changing rooms or areas**. If boys and girls are getting changed in the same room, think about using furniture or screens to provide separate areas.
- Mixed gender changing areas are less appropriate as children get older and staff need to be sensitive to those who physically mature at a much earlier or later age than their peers. In most circumstances, boys and girls should be changing in separate areas by the time they are aged 7/8.
- Schools need to treat all pupils fairly and with respect for their privacy and dignity.
- Schools should make adequate and sensitive arrangements for changing which take into account the needs of pupils with disabilities and children from different religions, beliefs and cultural backgrounds or gender identity.

- Adults must always change or shower privately; never in the same space as children.

Staff supervision

Schools will need to make a judgement about supervision based on the age and developmental needs of the pupils. It should not be necessary for adults to remain in the room in order to maintain good behaviour; being in close proximity and pupils being aware of this should be enough.

Pupils should know that adults will enter the room if necessary - in response to a disturbance, for example.

Staff should also consider the following:

- It is often possible to leave the door of designated changing rooms slightly open.
- If there is a need for an adult to enter the room, it is recommended they should alert pupils to this by announcing it to give pupils the opportunity to cover up if they want to.
- Where possible, female staff should supervise girls and male staff should supervise boys.
- All adults, but particularly those of the opposite gender, should avoid just standing in the changing room watching pupils, or repeatedly going in and out without good reason.
- Establish a code of behaviour with pupils so they are clear about expectations about their conduct whilst they are unsupervised.
- Pupils who express concern about the behaviour of a member of staff or other pupils should be listened to, and appropriate enquiries should be conducted by the head teacher or designated safeguarding lead.

Pupils who need assistance with getting changed

When organising changing areas for children with additional needs, schools should:

- Refer to the school's Intimate Care Policy for assisting children who are disabled or require additional support.

- Ensure all staff are aware of any intimate care issues for individual pupils. It is best practice to involve pupils and parents in making decisions which involve intimate care.
- Have a written policy and review these arrangements regularly.
- Encourage pupils of all ages to be as independent as possible; consider prompting and giving verbal help/encouragement before offering physical assistance.
- Be especially careful when helping children with underclothes, tights and swimming costumes.
- If necessary, offer assistance openly and not out of sight of others.

Using off-site changing rooms

Schools will need to think about what safeguards need to be put in place to protect children when visiting other sites and consider the following:

- It is not appropriate for school swimmers (for example) to share changing facilities with members of the public (unless this has been carefully risk assessed). If school sessions precede or are followed by public sessions, enough time should be booked either side of the swimming session to allow pupils to get showered and changed before the public are allowed in.
- As far as possible, members of staff should only supervise or assist pupils of the same gender.
- If changing areas are shared with pupils from another school, particularly those who are older/younger, adults from both/all schools should take this into consideration and properly risk assess together.

Useful links

[The Underwear Rule – resources for schools and teachers](#)
[Stages of puberty: what happens to boys and girls](#) (NHS)

Online training for schools

- [Child protection in schools](#)
- [Safer recruitment in education](#)
- [Managing sexualised behaviour in primary schools](#)
- [Keeping children safe online](#)

Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

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