

An email from a supporter to her child's school regarding mixed-sex toilets

Dear [School name]

Regarding your announcements earlier today about the installation of mixed sex toilets at [school] I would like clarification of the following points.

1) Please provide me with a copy of the consultation (with results) that you undertook with children and parents prior to making the decision to install mixed sex toilets. As a parent of a [year] student I am concerned that neither myself or my daughter received a copy of this.

2) Please provide a copy of the impact assessment you undertook prior to making this decision. I refer specifically to the impact of using mixed sex facilities on the safety and privacy of female students. For example, what consideration has been given to the specific biological needs of girls?

3) What safeguarding measures are you putting in place to safeguard young girls in an enclosed space with males? I'm sure you will be aware that when sexual assault, harassment and voyeurism are carried out against women and girls in toilets that 90% of the time this occurs in mixed sex facilities. How has this been taken into consideration?

4) How have you assessed the physical and psychological impact on female students of being forced to share toilets with males? Please provide details of all the steps you will be taking to mitigate the negative impact of mixed sex toilets on female students which have been seen in other areas of the UK where these have already been introduced. I refer to reports of girls missing school during their period and deliberately dehydrating themselves in order to not have to urinate in the presence of boys.

5) Plan UK International have recently found that between 48 and 56% of girls (depending on age) experience period shaming at school. What are you doing to counteract this and how can you ensure that mixed sex facilities will help reduce this? How do you plan to ensure that young girls who are just getting used to menstruation can deal with this in privacy and with dignity? Have you ensured that the mixed sex toilets have private, enclosed wash spaces where girls can deal with accidents relating to menstruation discreetly?

6) What have you done to ensure that the installation of mixed sex toilet facilities complies with the Equality Act 2010 which states that children over the age of 8 years are entitled to have access to single sex toilet facilities? This includes separate toilets, wash basins and sanitary disposal units.

7) ERIC, the children's bowel and bladder charity has pointed out that lack of privacy is one of the obstacles to children using school toilets. Therefore, children can try to limit toilet usage which has a negative effect on their ability to learn, their behavior, morale and attendance levels. ERIC points to the School Premises and Regulations (2012) as best practice which outlines single-sex toilet provision is essential for over 8-year-olds. Similar provision in Scottish schools is mandated for by the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967.

8) Please advise whether any existing single sex toilet provision has been converted to mixed sex or are these facilities entirely new? What is the exact number of male only, female

only and mixed sex cubicles available and in the case of the mixed sex toilets how many have enclosed washing facilities?

10) If existing single sex toilets have been converted have the numbers of male only and female only toilets been reduced? If so, this is again in breach of the Equality Act 2010 as it discriminates against one protected characteristic (sex) in favour of another. As boys are less likely to be made to feel uncomfortable using mixed sex facilities than girls how can you be sure you have not effectively doubled the toilet provision for male students whilst not doing the same for female students?

11) How do you plan to keep the mixed sex facilities clean? Are girls expected to wipe urine off seats before using the toilets themselves?

12) Please provide details of any third-party organisations e.g., charities that have been involved in making this decision and why you felt it was appropriate to include them. I would like to see details of the amount of input these organisations have had and what advice they given the school particularly in relation to equality legislation.

13) Can you confirm if there are any plans to remove single sex toilet provision from the school completely and if so when parents will be consulted about this.

14) Please confirm whether single sex toilet provision will be available for all students at all times of the school day and if it is equally accessible from all areas of the school.

15) Finally, please confirm whether your mixed sex policy will also be extended to changing facilities and sleeping accommodation on residential trips and the safeguarding and impact assessments you have completed in relation to this.

I'm sure you can appreciate my concerns regarding the safety, privacy and dignity of my daughter whilst she is in your care, and I look forward to receiving your responses to my questions.