

The Chair, Parent Council, and all parents of

[ADD SCHOOL HERE]

Why are we writing to you?

It has come to our attention that many Councils across Scotland have started to install 'Gender-neutral' toilet provisions in some schools. We write to ask that you discuss this situation with your parents and teachers, and if you also have concerns, to ensure your Head Teacher is aware and make your opinions known.

Why we object

Mixed-sex toilets are not legal in Scottish schools unless there are also adequate single sex toilets provided as well. The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 state that half the sanitary accommodation shall be for boys with the other half for girls, with additional accessible facilities as appropriate. This includes wash-hand basins, and sanitary disposal units. There is no provision in legislation for unisex, mixed-sex or 'gender-neutral' facilities. Similar laws are in force in England, stated in The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012, section 4, with further information in the Building Standards document 6465, Part 1. Both Acts make it very clear that it is illegal not to provide single-sex toilet facilities for pupils.

There is a claim that these facilities are more secure than cubicles within a designated boy or girl area because they are fully enclosed rooms. We have additional concerns that these 'floor to ceiling' toilets are not safe as a child locked into one of these rooms cannot alert someone in the case of distress or illness, and they cannot be seen from the outside should anyone become concerned. It is also less likely that contamination will be noticed without regular observation. In general, these cubicles are not provided with wash-hand basins, and we will explain why this is a problem.

It has been reported that girls are reluctant to use mixed-sex toilets. It should be considered that if provision is now split 3 ways - girl, boy and mixed-sex - then effectively the girls have one-third of the sanitary provision, while boys will use two-thirds. Where all provision is made mixed sex, there is already evidence that girls will avoid the toilets altogether by reducing their liquid intake which increases the chance of a urinary tract infection (and females are already more vulnerable to UTIs because of their shorter urethra) and dehydration. We have seen a recent example of this happening in a small primary school. Work was being carried out in the boys' toilet area causing a temporary closure, girls refused to go to their toilet unless accompanied to the door by a member of staff to ensure no boys could enter at the time. We would consider that this would be an even more sensitive situation in a Secondary school. To be unable to retreat to a single-sex space, to deal with distress or the practicality of menstruation is a breach of girls' right to dignity and privacy. It is also a breach of boys rights and we have had reports from make pupils feeling uncomfortable sharing toilets with girls. All children should have privacy and dignity when using facilities.

Girls are at unprecedented levels of risk in schools with escalating reports of hidden camera crimes, physical voyeurism, assaults, and abuse reported across the country thanks to the #EveryonesInvited campaign, where several Scottish schools were named by children who had experienced sexual harassment, including assault. 30 of the schools were Primary. Please also consider the psychological impact on the girls of knowing there are boys nearby while in a stage of partial

undress, or present while collecting sanitary protection, or washing hands or clothing clean of menstrual blood. The environmental impact of some sanitary products has encouraged many young women to use Mooncups which require to be emptied and washed at a basin. An open washing space with male's present would take that choice away from these young women. While many boys may be sensitive to the issue, this does not reduce embarrassment and self-consciousness (and, of course, the risk of teasing and bullying is still present). This will inevitably mean that some girls will miss school altogether while menstruating. UNESCO research supports this position, stating in its 2018 Global Education Monitoring Report that the lack of separate facilities has a significantly detrimental effect on girls' school attendance around the world, and there is no reason to believe our girls won't be negatively impacted in the same way. What safeguarding and emotional support will be offered to the young people in this situation? These points are particular issues with Secondary pupils but not unheard of at Primary School either.

We would also like to point out that some girls in Scotland have a religious or ethnic background which formally forbids the sharing of public toilet provision with males, particularly when menstruating. Religious belief is one of nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, and it is important to note that no single protected characteristic can infringe on the rights of another. It therefore follows that under the terms of the Equality Act 2010, mixed-sex facilities are unlawful as these girls' religious observance is breached. Sex is another protected characteristic, and the Equality Act 2010 specifically cites toilet arrangements as a single-sex exemption in Schedule 22. There is nothing diverse or inclusive about measures which make it difficult for girls to attend to such an elementary process such as elimination and menstruation in peace and safety.

Finally, we wish to briefly address the longer-term implications of introducing a policy which disregards the importance of recognising the different needs of boys and girls. To force all children to use the same facilities at this age, teaches them that they do not have the right to expect single-sex spaces and to set boundaries. In particular, female children receive mixed messages about the concept of consent and their right to object when their physical space is being encroached upon.

What you can do if you are concerned

If your school has already installed mixed-sex toilets, we would recommend that you request a copy of the consultation undertaken with parents and children prior to this decision being finalised. Of course, if a consultation was not done, perhaps you can request that they do so now. You can also request a copy of the Impact Assessment and satisfy yourself that all implications of this measure have been fully considered regarding female students in particular.

If your school still has fully separate single-sex toilet provision, you can still contact your Head Teacher to enquire if there are any plans in place to introduce mixed-sex toilets. You can also write to your Council's Head of Education at the address above to register your concerns.

We have also heard from other Parent Councils that upon receiving our letter they have added this topic as an ongoing agenda item as well as sending a questionnaire to parents to ask for their views. This would also be good to do with pupils.

Parent power certainly does work. At the time of writing, Highland Council have just reversed plans to install unisex toilets at Ness Castle school, following a similar decision at Culloden and Bettyhill schools as a result of concerned contacts from parents - more information at www.highlandparentsgroup.co.uk. Consultations were forced at Borders Council regarding schools in Peebles and Galashiels as a result of objections to the proposals. Last year a primary school in Swindon was forced to revert to separate toilet provision following complaints from parents. Please

do not be discouraged if your enquiries are given a lukewarm reception at your school. Many teachers are very concerned by these developments but are effectively silenced by the GTCS - their registration body. This doesn't mean that you cannot raise these issues and put forward concerns.

Who we are?

If you have read this far (and thank you for doing so), you are probably still wondering who we are. ***Safeguarding Our Schools Scotland*** is a group of parents/carers, teachers and child protection professionals who are concerned about safeguarding, the erosion of sex-based spaces, services, sports, and opportunities which are necessary for the safety of women and children, and the dignity of all people. We are also concerned about an uncritical acceptance of teaching gender ideology in schools without evidence base. We are all ages, with a wealth of lived experience, educational achievements and work and public engagements. A significant number of us have a working responsibility towards the vulnerable and have a professional understanding of safeguarding. We have a range of religious beliefs and none, and our political leanings encompass both left and right-leaning inclinations on many issues. Many of us work for the local authority or in public services and this is one reason for our anonymity. You can find more information about our organisation on Twitter @SOS_Scotland or on our website sosscotland.com. If you wish to contact us privately to find out more, you can do so on sosscotland@gmail.com

A quick Google, or an hour or so on Twitter will reveal that women in the UK are abused, threatened, and hounded from their jobs for defending the right of women and girls (and men and boys where appropriate) to expect single-sex services for safety, dignity, and privacy. All the information above is publicly available, with more analysis at www.forwomen.scot, www.womansplaceuk.org, www.safeschoolsallianceuk.org, www.transgendertrend.com, and www.genspect.org, if you wish to read more about this campaign and related concerns.