



PHYSICAL EDUCATION

CHANGING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PRIMARY AGED PUPILS

Changing areas in PE need to ensure dignity, decency and privacy where needed be it for reasons of physical development or other individual needs. The changing space should be checked regularly, before and during use, to ensure that:

- pegs, where installed, are not broken or exposing sharp edges
- adequate space is available for the number of students changing, including space to store their clothes neatly
- additional accessible space is provided, where required, for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (e.g. wheelchairs users, those requiring help with changing)
- benching and other furniture is fixed to prevent it toppling over during use
- there are no sharp edges to tiling or heaters that could cause injury
- floor surfaces are not slippery when wet
- personal items and clothing do not litter the floor to cause potential tripping hazards
- where showers are provided, water mixer valves are regulated by one control key, positioned out of reach of students to reduce any risk of scalding.

Where safety standards are compromised, alternative arrangements need to be made and faults reported to the school leadership team.

Supervision of Changing areas and accommodation of mixed gender groups

Physical Education is a statutory element within the National Curriculum and its demands have substantially increased. It is quite clear that pupils must change into appropriate clothing to participate in any physical activity safely. Earlier maturation, particularly in the case of girls can cause difficulties for schools, parents and pupils.

Most schools are not ideally equipped with discrete areas for changing. Very few schools have purpose built changing rooms and in the vast majority of cases schools make their own arrangements. Until recently the practice of pupils changing in their own classroom was accepted by all as a normal feature of school life and, although there must have been sensitivities, they were rarely voiced.

Many schools have developed ways of providing some privacy for older pupils within their restricted facilities. These include changing in toilets, cloakroom areas, on corridors, landing and stages. All of these responses have supervision implications and in some case, health and safety implications. In some cases the classroom can offer some privacy by using the shape of the room to provide a discrete area for boys and girls or by using existing furniture and screens to divide the sexes. Other schools encourage the use of individual robes to change within.

There is no easy solution. Even the provision of separate accommodation presents supervision difficulties as pupils separate into two groups.

Accepting that the circumstances of each school will vary and that many schools may be content with their existing arrangements the following options are offered for schools to consider:-

Schools without separate, adequate changing accommodation:

- Whole class changing together within the classroom without special arrangements. This option assumes parental awareness and approval.
- Girls and boys change within a classroom, utilising the layout or the room existing furniture or screens. Screens are portable and can be used additionally for display purposes.
- Girls and boys change in different rooms e.g. girls remain in classroom and boys use alternative available space – resources area, library, classroom, toilets or cloakroom.
- Special arrangements are made for pupils requesting privacy. Curtained or screened areas can be created within the classroom for individual pupils or groups.
- Towelling robes could be used to avoid any classroom adaptations.

Schools with separate changing accommodation for older boys and girls:

- For these schools the difficulties are almost entirely related to the need for supervision and being able to adequately cover two single sex groups.
- If it is not possible/practical to have a male and female member of staff supervising, then a member of staff should always be in close proximity and there should be clearly understood arrangements for intervention should it be necessary.
- There should be a clear code of behaviour for pupils using changing accommodation.

When changing, there is no statutory requirement for students to be supervised at all times.

The degree and method of supervision will vary according to the particular circumstances, but age, behaviour, potential bullying, and safety aspects of the space itself will contribute to deciding whether constant direct supervision is necessary or intermittent direct supervision is safe.

The location of the staff responsible for the group is of particular importance. It must be considered whether they can provide the level of supervision required while they are fulfilling their usual pre-lesson organisational tasks. Some schools use changing time as a positive part of the learning experience.

Remote supervision refers to a situation in which a member of staff responsible for a group of students is not directly present. This type of supervision may be implemented in appropriate circumstances where only one member of staff is available for changing-room supervision (e.g. in situations such as teaching mixed-gender groups). Remote supervision might involve tasking a reliable student with reporting any concerns in the changing area to the member of staff who is outside the changing area. The suitability of remote supervision would be dependent on the location of the changing areas, student behaviour, age and ability. This method is only satisfactory when the member of staff remains on hand in the immediate vicinity outside the changing area to respond to any alert.

Direct supervision of students enables the member of staff to intervene at any time. Decisions to supervise less directly should not be taken lightly.

At **swimming pools**, separate school changing areas should be made available. Where this is not possible, and 'village style' changing areas are used, attendance at the pool at different times to the public may be requested. Failing this, schools should request that students are

provided with a section of the changing area specifically for their use, away from that being used by the public.

Whatever the circumstances, changing rooms should be adequately supervised. Ideally, a male and female member of staff should accompany each mixed-gender class in order to fully supervise the changing areas. Staffing pressures may mean a known adult volunteer of the opposite gender is used. If this adult is unsupervised, disclosure and barring clearance would be required for this role with children in this situation. Where this level of staffing is not available, it may be possible to enlist the cooperation of pool staff to supervise the other changing room. This arrangement with the pool management needs to be assured and consistent. If only one suitable adult is available, they would need to establish procedures to deal with any emergency in the other changing room. If these arrangements are not to the school's satisfaction, it may be necessary to combine classes and take single-gender groups, where appropriate staffing allows this. Adults supervising students need to be familiar with, and adhere to, the relevant safeguarding policies.

Schools must do whatever is reasonably practicable to ensure safe and secure arrangements and decisions must be made following a risk assessment.

- Make the best use of existing facilities
- Adapt creatively but sensibly
- Maintain appropriate supervision
- Communicate with parents
- Agree a whole school policy

Further information on changing provision can be found in Association for PE (afPE) **Safe Practice in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity** 2020 p127.

In summary, wherever young people are changing for physical activity, checks should be made in terms of safety, security and supervision appropriate to the age and/or development stage of the students.