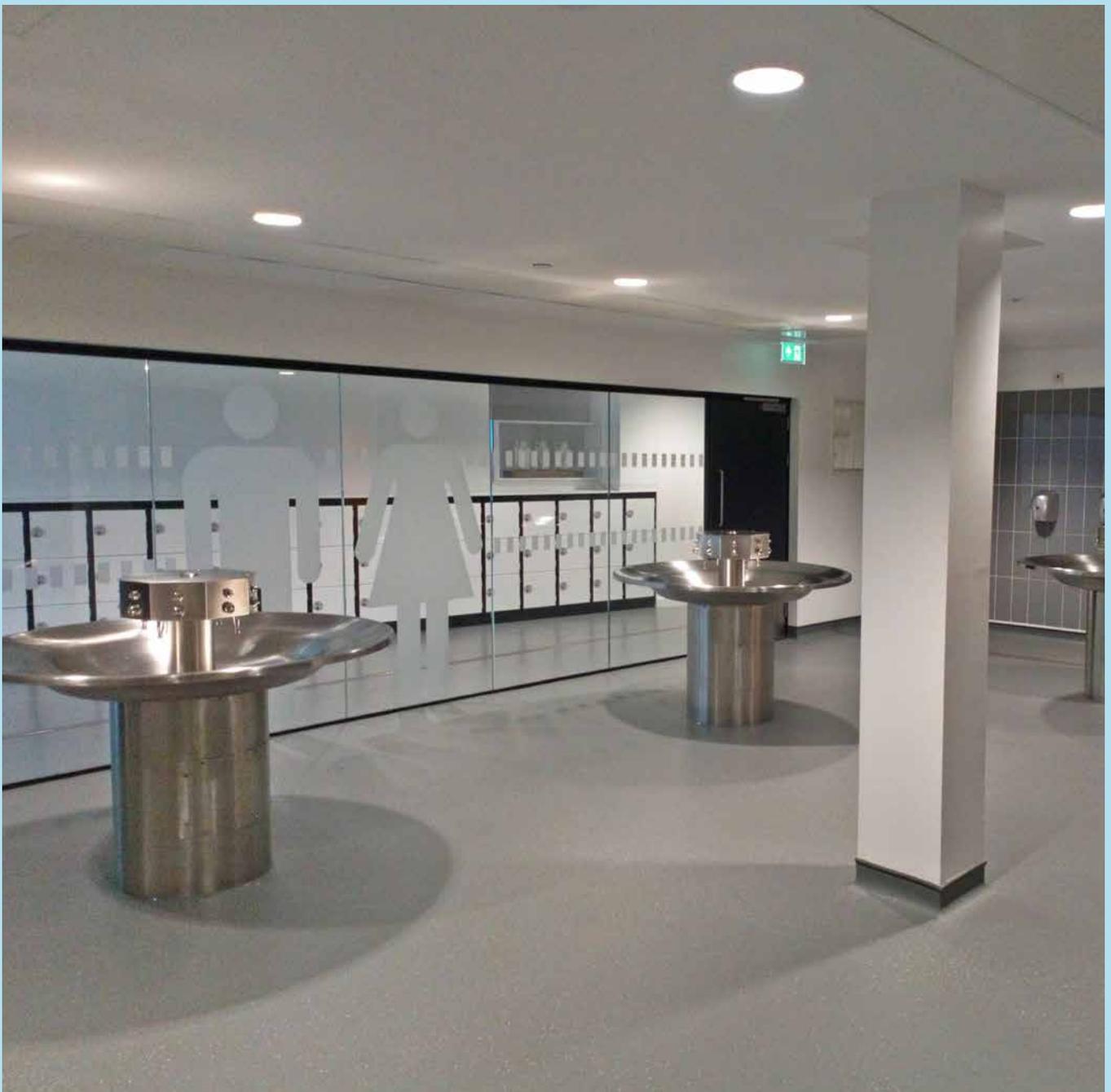


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Case Study

# Toilet design in the learning environment



## Introduction and context

[‘Never forget the importance of school toilets’.](#)

Dr Emma Kell, January 2019

The above piece by author and teacher Dr Kell is an introduction to some informal research gathering she has carried out and is very apposite since in 2019 the issue of school toilet provision and management has never been more prominent, with articles in the press on a regular basis. The Scottish Government, mindful of the limitations of existing school design legislation, aware of the societal changes since this legislation was first introduced in 1967, and conscious of the fact that more campuses now have pupils from more than one stage of education in the same building, sent out a consultation document in 2017.

The Scottish Government was keen to look at opportunities for changing (amongst other aspects of school buildings) the regulations with respect to the provision of accessible toilets and ‘unisex toilets that could address gender issues’. Responses to the consultation document were received from a range of groups and individuals, all with specific areas of interest and / or professional expertise.

With respect to the number of toilets provided in schools, due to the peaks in demand falling at very specific times (break times), the existing legislation was found to be appropriate for modern school environments.

In terms of the provision of gender-neutral facilities, responses were somewhat conflicting, but all agreed that the existing regulations were outdated. Some respondents stated that unisex facilities raised issues of potential vulnerability, while others stated that gender-neutral toilets reduced the risk of bullying and eased concerns over safety for all pupils. The analysis of the responses also indicated that there was no clear picture of where the requirements should be set out – separate legislation or building regulations. The drafting and consideration by the Scottish Parliament of new regulations is ongoing.

Discussion is not solely restricted to central government however, with local authorities playing a vital role in dialogue with schools. Glasgow City Council have stated that all new build schools will have gender-neutral toilets while the City of Edinburgh Council will offer the option of unisex WC’s and full height toilets in their Authority Requirements for all school new builds and refurbishments going forward.

With regard to appropriate toilet provision for all pupils, the number of new-builds and refurbishment projects within schools in Scotland over the past decade, present a wide array of design solutions, often approaching the issues surrounding toilet provision from different angles, but ultimately attempting to respond to the same challenges.

This document is intended to help stakeholders understand the issues and opportunities regarding toilet provision in schools and also to present a range of potential solutions.

## Research

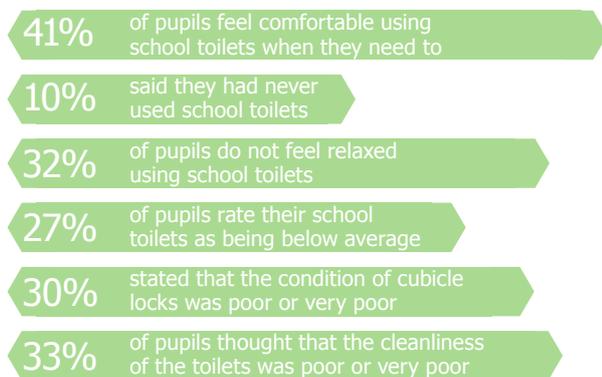
Dr Val Curtis, (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine’s Hygiene Centre) presented survey findings at the Science Museum in 2010 as part of [Global Handwashing Day](#) [1]. One of her key findings was that 1/3 of secondary school girls reported ‘holding it in’ while 1/5 of all secondary school children reported avoiding using the toilet altogether, simply because they were ‘disgusting’.

Pupils ‘holding it in’ or not going to the toilet often enough has serious health implications including [urinary tract infections and kidney stones](#) [2]; illness resulting in absence will necessarily then impact upon school attendance and subsequently affect attainment. Not drinking enough water (in order to avoid needing to use the toilet) can put a child at risk of headaches, lack of concentration, digestive problems, [cognitive impairment and lethargy](#) [3], all symptoms that affect the learning experience.

# *1/3 of secondary school girls reported “holding it in” while 1/5 of all secondary school children reported avoiding using the toilet altogether, simply because they were “disgusting”.*

Dr Val Curtis, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine’s Hygiene Centre.

The 2012 Ipsos MORI survey of over 2,000 young people’s attitude to toilet provision and use in [Scottish secondary schools](#) [4] painted an equally unhealthy picture:



With regard to toilet provision in new school buildings, the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) reviewed 28 new schools in 2009 and reported on ‘[Lessons Learnt](#)’ [5]. Two models for toilet location were discussed, centralised and distributed. A concern with centralised facilities was the potential for a local utilities problem resulting in the entire school being closed. A literature survey carried out as part of the ‘Flushed with Success’ campaign (see Reading List) references a 2011 report on East Dunbartonshire Council’s new schools. The report compared attitudes to toilet provision in new schools with those in older buildings and found that provision was ‘[perceived much more positively in the new buildings](#)’ [6]. A more recent (SFT) report on the [Schools for the Future programme](#) [7] found a “reported reduction in bullying and vandalism in open circulation toilet arrangements”.

These reports show that progress is being made; this is vitally important for the overall learner experience. Facilities such as toilets are integral to pupils’ attitudes to [education and learning](#) [8]. [Changing the physical facilities without addressing policies](#) (permissions) [4], [9] only partially tackles the problem, however.

The research reinforces the importance of pupils feeling comfortable using school toilets (as referenced in the Introduction) regardless of the chosen model of toilet provision. In terms of the physical facilities, the changing nature of toilets in schools (and in the wider public arena) has been influenced (if not motivated) by the need to address both gender inequality and respond to the negative experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming pupils. Indeed, much of the publicly-available research deals with this aspect of **gender-neutral toilet provision**. However, the benefits to schools, to pupils and to staff are far more widespread, with Glasgow City Council expressing the opinion that more open, [gender-neutral toilets](#) have a significant part to play in reducing bullying, vandalism and anti-social behaviours within those facilities [10]. Other advantages of [gender-neutral toilets](#) are of a more practical and financial nature [11]. The opportunity to build one shared toilet facility introduces opportunities to save resources (in cleaning and maintaining the facilities as well as on initial build cost). Having gender-neutral toilets also addresses the issue of ‘[line equality](#)’ or ‘[potty parity](#)’ [12], allowing the facility to operate at maximum efficiency.

What is clear is that opinion from interested parties far outweighs rigorous qualitative and quantitative research and post-project analysis (including surveying the opinions of the most important stakeholders, the pupils themselves). There is a need for more up-to-date research on toilet provision within schools (an update of the 2012 survey referenced above is long overdue), both with respect to gender-neutral provision and analysing the impact of the degree of ‘openness’ of toilet facilities.

## Principles

Different schools will have different priorities when it comes to toilet provision and budgets or existing space restrictions often dictate what is feasible. Regardless, there are key themes that need to be considered, some practical some more philosophical. The following are not listed in any order of priority.

Every pupil at school has a right to **privacy** when using the toilet. The location of toilets within the school, the location of cubicles in the particular space and the actual design of the cubicles (the height of the door and side panels) are central to the notion of privacy. Knowing that once a cubicle door is locked that it cannot be opened from the outside (except in emergencies) is important for pupils. For the school, the ability to check if there is an **emergency** within the cubicles (e.g. if someone loses consciousness) is important; floor gaps make this easier. How privacy manifests itself might vary from primary school to secondary school; this is important within a shared campus. Acoustic privacy is also important; music or background noises playing can avoid embarrassment.

For those pupils with complex toilet needs, the location of a toilet near a first aid room or medical base should be considered. However, as can be seen with some of the toilet layouts shown in this document, having an accessible toilet integrated into the same space as the standard toilet cubicles assists with **inclusion**.

**Safety** can apply to pupils' own sense of feeling safe within a particular space but also to being able to use the facilities in a safe manner. The former is a balance between openness (reducing the opportunities for bullying) and the aforementioned privacy. The latter can be achieved through careful specification of products and ensuring that appropriate health and safety standards and regulations are adhered to.

Toilets are some of the most heavily-used spaces within a school and are often used when pupils are short on time. In terms of **hygiene** and **maintenance**, ease of access for cleaning staff and robust materials are important during the design and specification. Floor gaps in doors and cubicles make cleaning easier and increase air flow. One of the most quoted reasons reported for pupils not using school toilets is their cleanliness; clean, well maintained facilities should be a given and there should be simple procedures in place for pupils to report when this is not the case. Having regular inspections to check on supplies should also be standard practice.

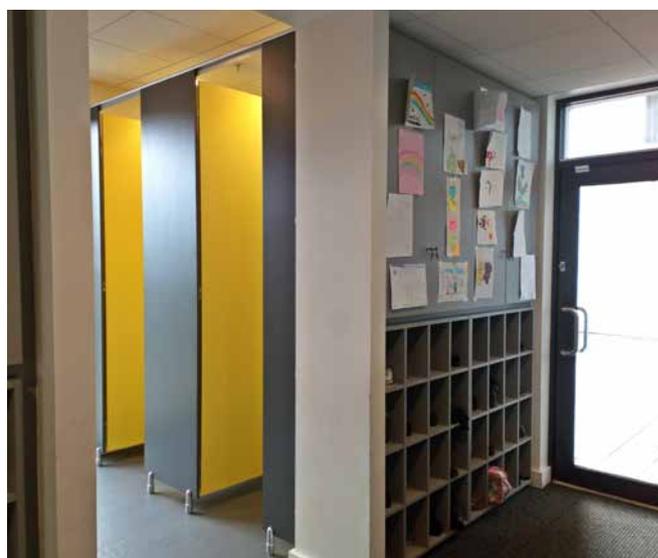
The location of wash-hand basins and the impact on **hand-washing** is an area where there may be different schools of thought. In primary school settings, having the hand-washing facility within the cubicle caters for accidents or other personal hygiene issues. It does however present the opportunity for not washing hands altogether. The communal, 'fountain' style wash-hand basins (as shown in some of the accompanying case study images) make it harder for pupils to ignore washing their hands (if the shared space is busy). In all situations, education and training is important (and as cleaning staff will testify, the ability for students to create a mess does not reduce with age).

Every space within a school needs to be **managed** properly. Again, like safety, the management of toilets (e.g. dealing with vandalism or other problem activities) is a challenge that depends on individual schools and their approach to monitoring private spaces. The design and location of toilets will dictate the ease of **passive supervision** by staff. Cubicles with small floor **gaps** reduce the likelihood of antisocial behaviour or vandalism occurring and since they don't need to be designed specifically for a given space, they can be more cost-effective.

Scotland is leading the way in tackling **period poverty** with schools playing a vital role. The storage and supply of sanitary products need to be considered when designing toilet facilities in both primary and secondary schools. This can be either in the cubicles themselves or in a location that is discreet yet easily accessible.

The question of whether toilets should be all **gender-specific** or all **gender-neutral** will probably vary from school to school and from primary to secondary. From studying different schools, it is obvious that 'no one size fits all' and often use of gender-neutral facilities is self-regulated by pupils.

School toilets need not be dull and uninspiring; they should reflect the **design** approach in the rest of the school. Colour and bold designs are readily available in commercial products. Good lighting and adequate ventilation are as important in a toilet space as they are in a classroom.



Spaces for outdoor shoes and storage above, with access to the outdoor covered area and playground, Lairdsland Primary School

# Example 1: West Calder High School, West Calder

Date of opening:	September 2018
School roll:	c.800
Type:	Secondary
Awards:	Shortlisted for Pupil Awards / Student Experience (2018/2019), Project of the Year (2019), Education Buildings Scotland Shortlisted for RIAS Awards (2019)

## Overview

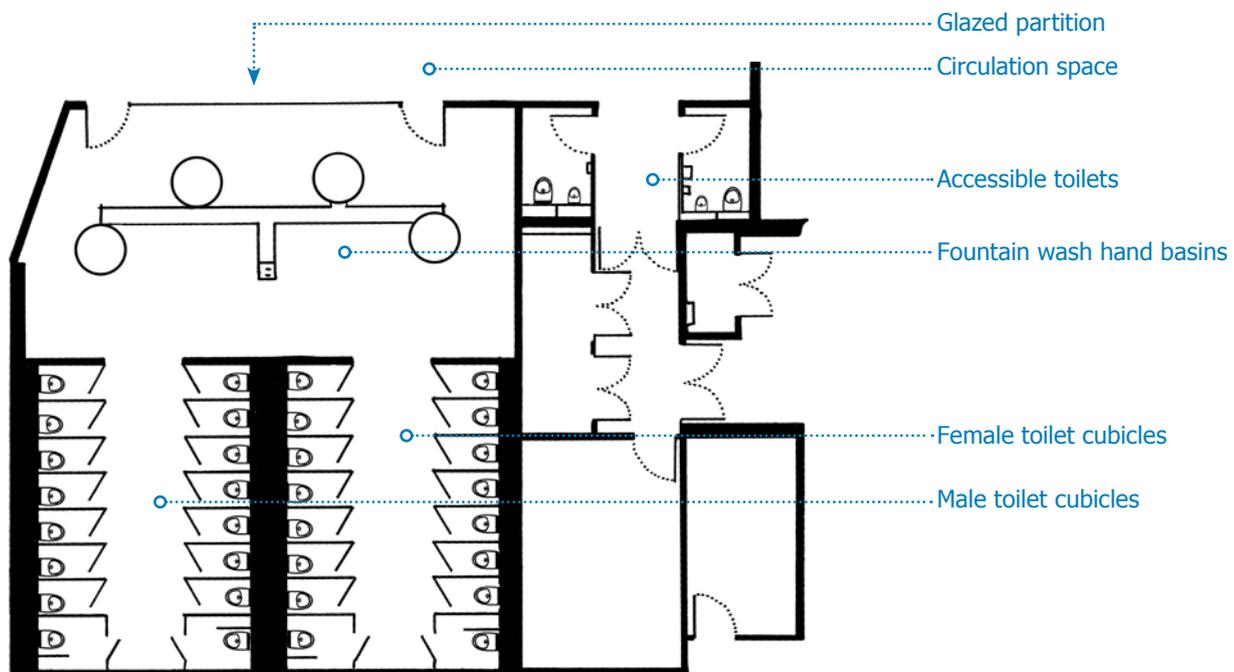
The recently-opened school has won critical acclaim for the design of its learning and social spaces and is built over three levels. The ground floor contains the sports facilities (shared with the local community) with toilets contained within separate male and female changing rooms. The large communal social space on the first floor (the level at which students enter the building) contains the only toilet block on the main teaching floors. The second floor as well as the first contains accessible toilet(s) in order to comply with building regulations. Throughout the school, staff have access to these accessible toilets; there are no dedicated staff toilets.

## Experience

Located directly off the central dining space on the first floor, the main toilet facility is located behind a full-height, double-glazed partition with manifestations; a single self-closing door is located at either end of the partition. The glazed partition permits passive supervision by staff. Toilet cubicles have full-height doors and side panels with no floor gaps and are split into two colour-coded banks of cubicles, though not specifically referred to as 'male' and 'female' toilets. The distinction between the cubicles echoes the glazing manifestation, with additional sanitary facilities and sanitary supplies located in the bank of cubicles to the left (as you face them from outside the space). The central 'fountain-style' wash-hand basins are shared by all students as are the hand-driers; the glazed partition and doors reduces the sound of the hand driers disturbing nearby classes. Mirrors with shelves beneath are provided for pupils in both sides of the space. Two accessible toilets are located directly adjacent to this main toilet block, with other accessible toilets and changing rooms dotted throughout the building. The other standard toilets are located within the sports facility changing rooms on the ground floor. Should the school wish to separate the main toilet facilities into two individual spaces in the future, the symmetric design allows this to be realised via the addition of a solid, full-height partition.

## Reaction

Prior to the move, there was some concern expressed by parents over the introduction of mixed toilet facilities, but this has dissipated following the successful move to the new school. Teachers have reported no issues to date with the toilets and pupils have adapted to the new shared facilities with no problems, being very appreciative of the cleanliness of the toilets.



Layout plan of mixed toilet facilities.



The glazed partition (with manifestation) increases the sense of privacy in the main toilet space.



The cubicles with the orange doors have additional sanitary facilities.

## Example 2: Harris Academy, Dundee

Date of opening: August 2016  
School roll: c.1200  
Type: Secondary

### Overview

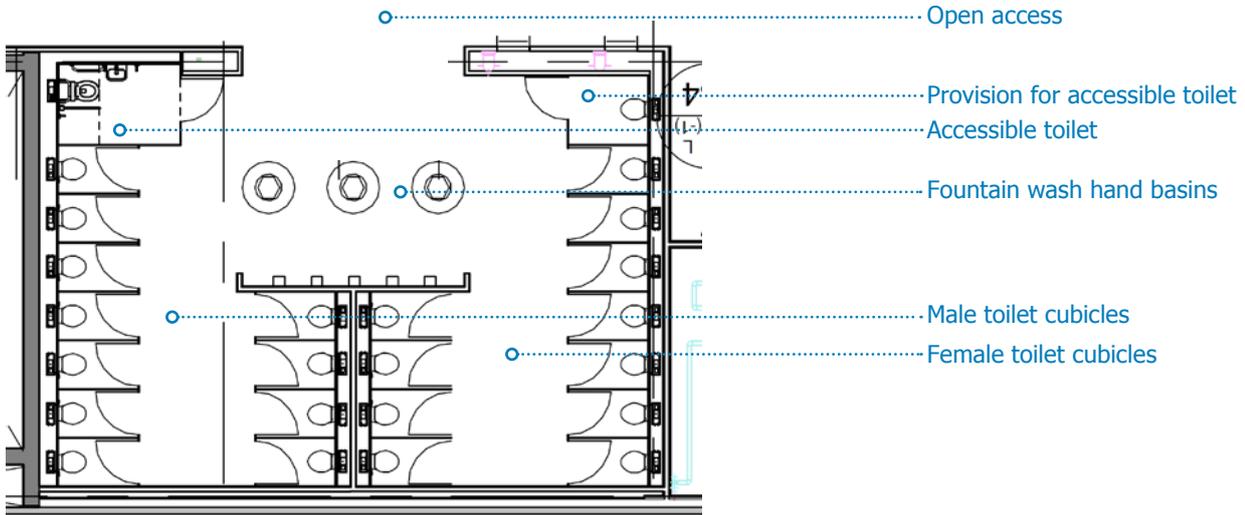
Replacing the former Harris Academy on the same site, the new merged school retains a link with the former building through the incorporation of the original 1931 clock tower and stone portico; it also accommodates pupils from another recently-closed local secondary school. The new building is not only an inspirational learning centre but also provides modern facilities for the local community. Designed to maximise on flexibility and to support the new pedagogies, the four-storey building has a stepped profile that allows it to sit comfortably within the landscape. The new building was designed with enhanced provision for students with special educational needs.

### Experience

Small pods of toilets are located on each of the two main teaching wings, all but one of which have one male, one female (with a shared wash-hand basin facility) and one accessible toilet. The one remaining pod has been designated as gender-neutral and has been specified with appropriate sanitary facilities in the three cubicles. A large bank of 'communal' toilets is located immediately off the large, light-filled main dining social space; the transition from a large space that is filled with lots of natural light to the smaller scale toilet facility is intended to evoke a sense of privacy and seclusion, even though there is no physical separation. The c.4m wide opening leads directly to a very generous space containing three communal wash-hand basins. The 'symmetric' layout has 12 cubicles on each side, with the male toilets to the left and the female toilets to the right. An accessible toilet is located in the cubicle nearest the opening on the female side, with the potential to add a similar accessible toilet on the male side.

### Reaction

The original intention was to have two female toilets in each pod on one teaching wing and two male toilets in each pod on the other wing at each level. The change to the one male and one female toilet per pod was as a result of dialogue with the pupil council. An initial general concern regarded how the pupils from the two merged schools would mix; a secondary concern was how the pupils would react to the open nature of this communal central toilet facility. Regarding the latter, the pupils have adapted very quickly and easily to the new design of toilet provision and the fact that it is open makes managing the space far easier. There is no indication that cubicles further away from the wide opening are more popular. Due to the open nature of the facility, there has been a slight issue over the noise from the hand-dryers disturbing learning and teaching in nearby classes, though the use of the toilets during teaching time is limited.



Layout of the communal toilet facility off the main dining/social space.



The full-height cubicles on the 'female' side of the toilet facility.



The main toilet facility is located adjacent to the main social / dining space.

## Example 3: Ibrox Primary School, Glasgow

Date of opening:	1906 (toilet refurbishments completed 2019)
School roll:	c.200
Type:	Primary

### Overview

Built in 1906, Ibrox Primary School is a historic building with accommodation over four storeys and external buildings containing gym facilities and toilets. It is currently home to a diverse mix of pupils from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities. In 2013 the building fabric was surveyed and found to be in need of significant investment and repair. Glasgow City Council, as part of the five-year, £250 million 4Rs programme ('Right Schools, Right Size, Right Place, Right Time') began a phased (and budget-driven) 'root and branch' refurbishment of key areas within the school, concentrating primarily on the fabric, but also attending to the facilities such as the internal and external toilet accommodation. The upgrading of the external toilet facility was completed in April 2019.

### Experience

It is increasingly uncommon for primary schools to make use of external toilet blocks, but Ibrox Primary School still has a single storey block of toilets, with separate facilities for boys and girls, located on one side of the playground; the school's only accessible toilet is located in the school entrance adjacent to the janitorial office on the ground floor. During the refurbishment project, the idea of transforming the outdoor toilet accommodation into gender-neutral facilities and providing an accessible toilet within the same block was not raised; the eventual design scheme was reached through discussions between the school and Glasgow City Council.

In the boys' toilets, both the internal and external facilities retain a urinal trough with a step up from the floor (which is covered in a vinyl covering rather than the former ceramic tiles). To one end of the space is a row of cubicles with a vanity unit containing individual wash-hand basins opposite. In the girls' toilets, a row of cubicles sit opposite a similar design of wash-hand basins. In both facilities the cubicle doors and side panels have a small gap at the floor for security purposes. The indoor girls' toilets near the upper school classes has a store of sanitary products; it was decided not to have a similar store in the outdoor toilet block.

A relatively neutral colour scheme is maintained throughout all the new toilet facilities with limited flashes of colour (different in the boys' and girls' toilets) under the vanity units and on the cubicle doors. As the school shares the site with a Nursery, one cubicle per facility has an appropriately-sized toilet for pre-school children.

As an 'eco school', Ibrox Primary made the conscious decision to install paper towel dispensers rather than hand driers. A wall-mounted heater is located inside the entrance door to the toilet facilities. Pupils are expected to be outside of the main school building during all breaks so the fact that the toilet block is also 'outside' means that cold temperatures when using the toilets is not a major issue.

### Reaction

Despite external toilets being a somewhat old fashioned concept, the response to the new toilets at the school has been very positive. Such was the condition of the former facilities that the refurbishment was seen as long overdue and the use of indoor toilets during the refurbishment was very time-consuming for pupils during breaks (having to enter the building and walk up a flight of stairs). By virtue of the design (the entrance doors only have small vision panels), staff supervision of the outside toilet facilities is very difficult, though members of staff patrol the playgrounds during breaks and announcements relating to inappropriate behaviours within the toilets are repeated regularly during school assemblies.



The boy's toilets with the urinal trough still in place.



The girls toilets in the external block.

# Example 4: Dalbeattie Learning Campus, Dalbeattie

Date of opening: November 2017  
School roll: Primary c.280 / Secondary c.370  
Type: Nursery, Primary and Secondary

## Overview

Dalbeattie Learning Campus provides upgraded and integrated educational facilities for the Dalbeattie area, amalgamating Dalbeattie High School with both the Dalbeattie Primary School and Nursery School onto one shared, multi-purpose site. This 'all through' learning campus provides both traditional and flexible learning spaces for all pupils as well as a wide-range of social spaces and also spaces designed for more vocational learning; it is the embodiment of the learner journey under one roof. While there is some separation between the primary and secondary school environments, the central, shared space and a common design approach results in a campus where the opportunity for younger pupils to experience their future learning environment on a daily basis is designed to ease the transition process.

## Experience

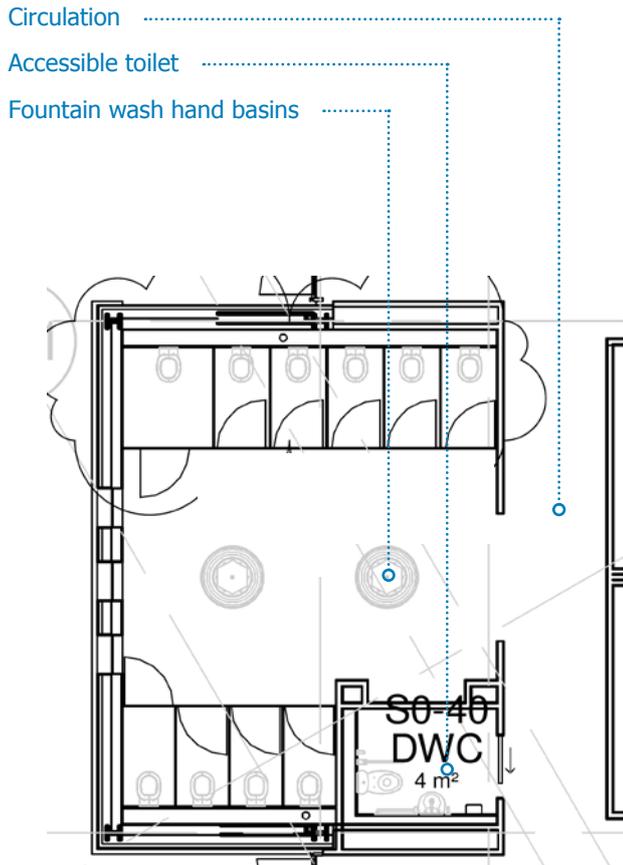
Toilet facilities within the primary school were designed to be gender-neutral, with each toilet cubicle containing a wash-hand basin. The toilets on both floors are located off the main circulation route and are clustered in small groups near the teaching facilities; they are open to the corridor at one end and have a full-height window or emergency exit door at the other end. Accessible toilets are located adjacent to the standard toilet cubicles.

Located just off the main dining / social space on the ground floor (the Heughan Hall) and screened by the 'Hellerup' seating above them, the toilet facilities for secondary pupils are accessed via a wide opening off a circulation route linking two of the school wings. Two 'fountain' style communal wash-hand basins sit in the centre of the space, with full-height toilet cubicles to the sides. The toilet cubicles are gender-neutral, with some of the cubicles containing additional sanitary facilities. On the upper floor the toilet spaces are also open to the primary circulation route and have similar cubicles and wash-hand basin facilities. One of the spaces contains a discreet storage cabinet containing sanitary products.

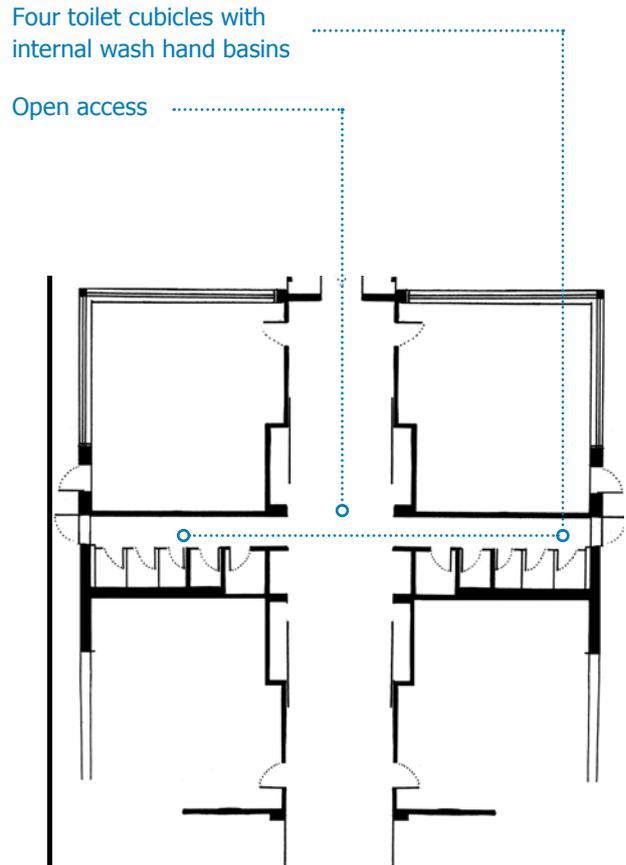
## Reaction

In practice, in the primary school boys use toilet facilities on one side of the corridor and girls on the other; this was favoured by the school from the outset (even though the wall graphics indicate them being gender-neutral). Staff and pupils (and cleaners) are very happy with the way the toilets are working. The only set of toilets where there is a degree of mixing are those closest to the primary seven class, where several of the cubicles contain additional sanitary facilities. Having wash-hand basins in the cubicles was seen by staff as being important; the experience in the old primary school was that hand-washing at a bank of wash-hand basins was an opportunity for disruptive behaviour. Pupils are happy with the new toilet provision, commenting that they are always clean.

In the secondary school, staff have been surprised that pupils have adapted well to the new, gender-neutral toilet facilities on the ground floor; there have been no issues reported by teaching staff and cleaning staff commented on the fact that the facilities are being treated with respect, with no instances of vandalism. The reaction of pupils has been somewhat more mixed. The cleanliness of the facilities is appreciated, but the feeling is that they are too open with a preference for either doors or a partition to provide more screening to the circulation.



Detail of the main toilet facility off the Heughan Hall for use by secondary school pupils.



Detail of the toilet facilities for primary pupils on opposite sides of the circulation.



The main toilet facility for use by secondary school pupils.



Internal wash-hand basins and the accessible toilet located adjacent to the standard toilet cubicles.

## Example 5: Lairdsland Primary School, Kirkintilloch

Date of opening:	April 2015
School roll:	c.315
Type:	Primary
Awards:	Development of the Year (Public Buildings), Scottish Property Awards (2016) RIAS Awards (2016) Education Category, Scottish Design Awards (2016) Education Category, SPACES Civic Building of the Year Awards (2016) Design Through Innovation - Shortlisted, RICS Awards (2015) Education Category, GIA Awards (2015)

### Overview

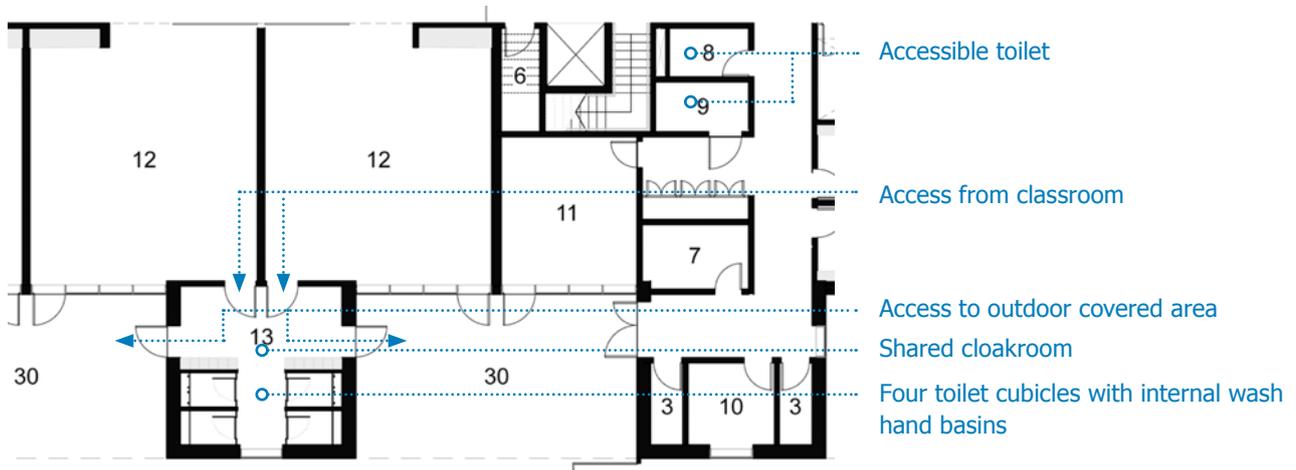
Lairdsland Primary is the result of a Scottish Futures Trust initiative to design a reference school that is suitable for delivering the Curriculum for Excellence, with elements of the layout borrowed from an earlier, and very successful, project by the architects. The two-storey building sits alongside the Forth and Clyde Canal and has classrooms on both floors, the upper classrooms each having direct access to a covered area that sits on top of the toilet blocks situated on the ground floor. The interior of the school has a mixture of semi-enclosed formal and informal learning spaces with easy access to outdoor learning spaces.

### Experience

Borrowing from the design of an exemplar primary school for the Department for Education in 2003, each block of two classrooms on the ground floor has a shared toilet and cloakroom facility comprising of four gender-neutral cubicles with integrated wash-hand basins. Access to an outdoor covered learning space is possible from the cloakroom area. The central block of toilets can be accessed from the playground during break times; the other two toilet blocks are locked. An accessible toilet is located adjacent to the main school entrance. The classrooms on the ground floor are for the youngest children. The location of the toilets on the first floor are different from those on the ground floor, with blocks of standard toilets (again gender-neutral) being provided at both ends of the building with an accessible toilet located at the opposite end of the building from the one on the ground floor.

### Reaction

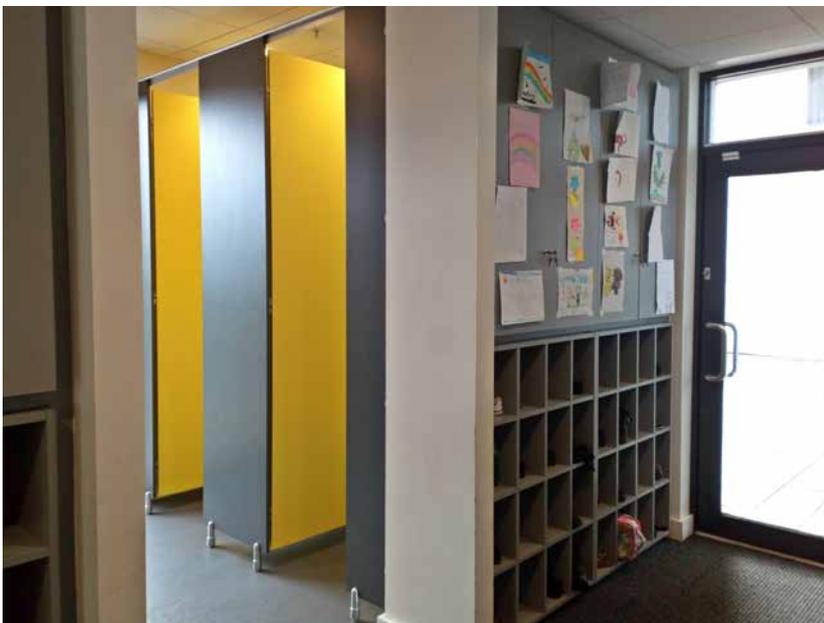
The response to the design of the toilets has been overwhelmingly positive from a staff perspective. The remark that there have been no adverse comments from parents (or reports of any issues with pupils' use of the toilets) is seen as echoing the staff perception of the success of the design. The vision panel on the door from the classroom allows teachers to monitor pupils in the toilet block, the fact that two classrooms share a block of toilets means that both teachers can act as monitors. While there are two sets of two toilets per block on the ground floor, pupils don't feel constrained to use those closest to their classroom; they have adopted the gender-neutral set-up very quickly. The cloakrooms adjoining the toilets have plenty of natural light and can be customised with pupils' artwork. More space for storing coats and jackets would be welcomed by staff.



Layout plan of cloakroom blocks.



Plenty of natural daylight enters to shared toilet and cloakroom area off the classrooms.



Spaces for outdoor shoes and storage above, with access to the outdoor covered area and playground.

## Example 6: Clackmannan Primary School, Clackmannan

Date of opening:	1972 (refurbishment commenced 2018)
School roll:	c.230
Type:	Primary

### Overview

Clackmannan Primary opened in 1972 with a school design and with interior fixtures and finishes that were very much of its era; little upgrading had taken place in the intervening years. Home also to a nursery, the school is situated on extensive grounds with plenty of outdoor learning and social spaces. A phased refurbishment is being managed and delivered by Clackmannanshire Council with the aim of transforming the dated interiors to create an innovative learning and teaching environment that will enable new ways of primary school teaching with spaces designed for maximum flexibility and able to support and promote creativity and achievement. Work to date has resulted in a new main entrance and an extension to the dining hall. Shared social spaces off the classrooms and toilets have also recently been refurbished. The redesign of the toilets to incorporate gender-neutral facilities has resulted in one of the former gender-specific toilet spaces per floor being given over to storage.

### Experience

The circulation space outside the toilets and the toilets themselves had changed little since the school opened, with flooring and wall finishes contributing to a poor student experience. With a limited budget and a tight timescale, these spaces have been transformed into bright, modern toilet facilities. Individual cubicles are located within an alcove off the shared social space, with neutral colours reflecting the unisex nature of the facilities. Cubicle partitions and doors have a small gap at the bottom (for security), with the door extending all the way to the windows at high level. Communal trough wash-hand basins are located directly adjacent to the toilet cubicles, with one mixer tap per cubicle. The accessible toilet is located in the same block as the standard cubicles and has a sliding door.

### Reaction

The introduction of gender-neutral toilets throughout the school was promoted by the local educational authority, with the decision being made in consultation with parents and staff. The school had an input into the final design, being involved in choosing the colour scheme. Initial concern amongst parents was dealt with through dialogue and two years after the toilets were refurbished, staff report that there have been no negative incidents regarding pupils' use of the new space. Staff have welcomed the more open layout, with easier supervision noted as being the key benefit. The freeing up of space through the sharing of toilets has had a knock-on benefit in terms of new storage and the subsequent ability to utilise the shared, flexible social learning spaces better.



The gender-neutral toilet provision off the open social space on the first floor.

## Example 7: Pollokshields Primary School, Glasgow

Date of opening:	1882 (toilet refurbishment completed 2019)
School roll:	c.290
Type:	Primary

### Overview

This B-listed building within Glasgow's southside has been part of the council's school estate transformation project with recent work carried out to update the toilets from their previous 1970s incarnation. Discussions on the toilet refurbishment project were led by the council's Education Department with input from the school and parents. The dual constraints over budget and the listed nature of the school influenced the decision to essentially 'make over' the existing facilities.

There are separate boys' and girls' toilets on different upper floors while the main corridor to the playground on the ground floor has individual toilet facilities for boys, girls and infants, the latter now being gender-neutral. As part of the upgrade, the décor in this 'toilet corridor' was brightened with better lighting also installed. This was in response to the reaction of infants who found the heavy doors and the general appearance of the space quite intimidating.

### Experience

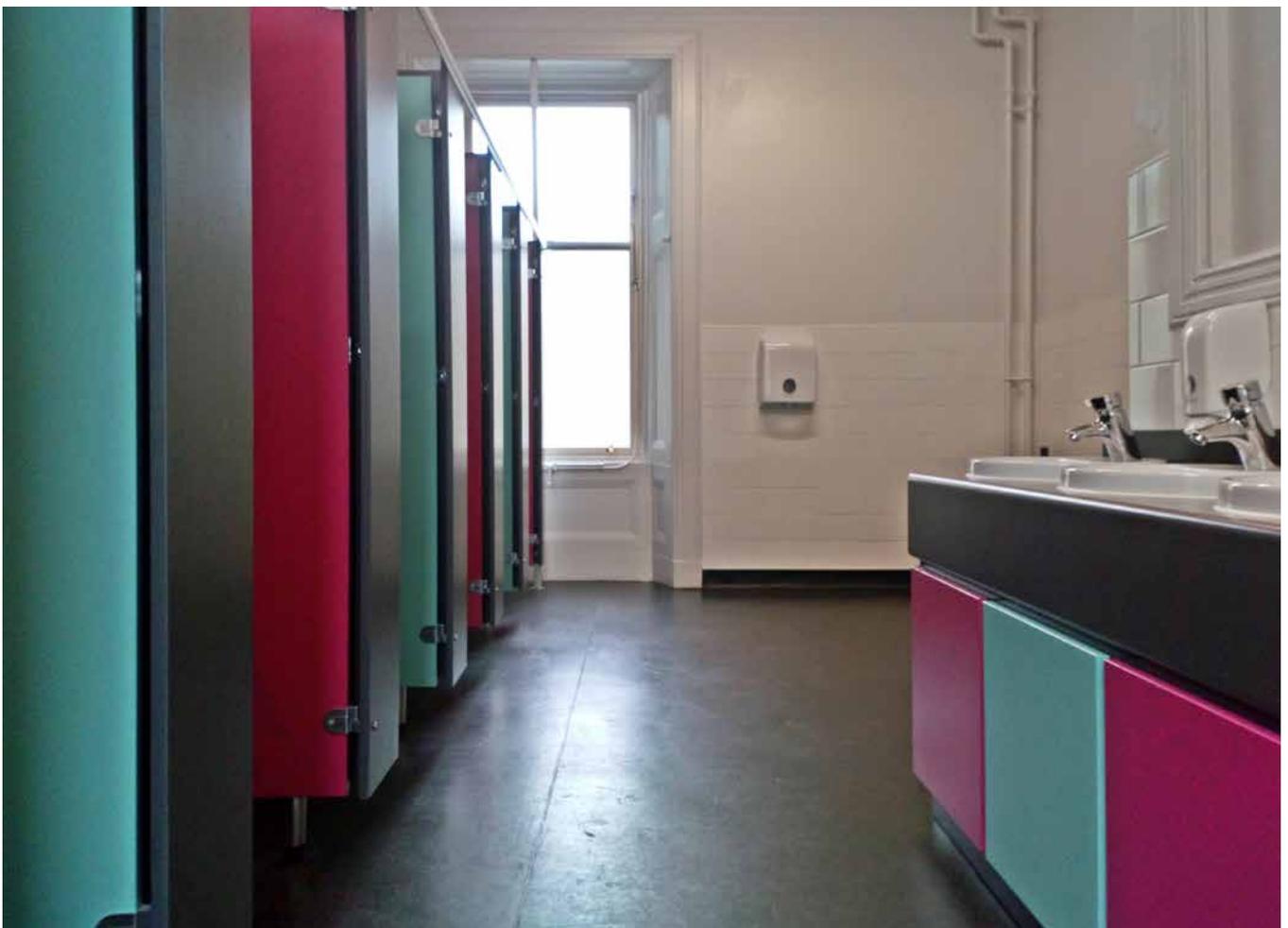
The toilets on the upper floors were refurbished first, with new fixtures and fittings added throughout. Paper towel dispensers have been retained rather than installing hand driers. Dark grey cubicles and vanity units are offset by splashes of colour on the cubicle doors and underneath the sinks. A bank of communal wash-hand basins sit opposite the cubicles. Floor tiles have been removed and replaced with a dark, non-slip vinyl floor covering. In both the boys' toilets on the upper floor and on the ground floor, the trough urinal has been retained, with a step up from the floor marked out with a reflective nosing. The facility on the ground floor for infants is gender-neutral and like the other toilets has individual cubicles and communal wash-hand basins. During breaks and lunchtimes, pupils have access to these ground floor toilets only.

### Reaction

In the past there were problems with behaviour in the boys' toilets; following the refurbishment this problem seems to have disappeared and there have been no incidents involving inappropriate toilet usage (though behaviour in general within the school is generally very good now). Due to the layout and location within the school of the different toilet facilities, passive supervision by staff is not really possible (and never has been). According to the headteacher, had toilet refurbishment been carried out in a different order and the success of the infants' gender-neutral toilets been known, changing all toilets to gender-neutral might have been proposed (though it is unclear how popular a move this would have been with parents, given the pupils' largely ethnic background). Finally, the removal of the urinal troughs in the boys' toilets would have been preferred rather than replacement; the reason given being that pupils arrive at school with little experience of using urinals and this has led to some incidents.



The boys toilet block at Pollokshields Primary School.



The girls toilet block at Pollokshields Primary School.

## Now What?

In any project involving change, communication and dialogue between partners and stakeholders is vitally important, this includes engaging with the pupils themselves (regardless of age and stage). As stated earlier, 'no-one size fits all' and thus there will be school-specific constraints and opportunities, some of which will be building related (particularly when existing spaces are being refurbished). Understanding the 'demand' before designing the 'supply' is essential, as is thinking of flexibility and future-proofing.

Background reading of relevant literature (see below) is important to understand what needs to be done as well as what should be done. Visiting precedent projects (those presented in this document and / or others) will not only show what is possible, but also inspire solutions that might otherwise be dismissed.

Commercial toilet facility suppliers will offer free advice if approached, with high-level design services often offered at no cost and with no obligation.

## Key points

From the different case studies presented, some common themes arise:

- Pupil acceptance of gender-neutral toilet provision within primary schools does not seem to be an issue; there are obvious challenges within secondary schools as pupils become more conscious of body image.
- Designs that permit passive staff supervision whilst ensuring a degree of privacy are favoured.
- The phasing out of urinals in boys' toilets as part of school refurbishment projects will ease the introduction of gender-neutral toilets.
- Especially in older school buildings, the area outside the toilets can be intimidating for younger pupils; this needs to be taken into consideration during any re-design.
- Appropriate signage and wayfinding is required for toilet facilities.

## Reading List

The following is by no means an exhaustive reading list but will provide some background to the topic of school design in general, and touches upon toilets in both primary and secondary schools.

[The School Premises](#) (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967

[Consultation document on updating The School Premises](#) (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967

[Updating of the School Premises](#) (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967: consultation response analysis

A [report commissioned](#) by hub East Central Scotland covering all aspects of school design, but including different options for school toilets

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People launched a campaign '[Flushed with Success](#)' (2013) which looked to address the standard and quality of school toilets for pupils and aims to make sure that the quality of school toilet facilities for children is monitored and guaranteed, in the same way as for adults in the workplace. The webpage below contains all the documents published as part of the campaign.

[This 2017 report](#) by Stonewall covers the experiences of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people in Scotland's schools, with reference to toilet provision

[RIBA Better Spaces for Learning](#) – the report demonstrates how good design can help ensure that capital funding for schools stretches as far as possible, and supports good outcomes for both teachers and pupils. It states that behaviour has an impact on attainment and that smaller and / or fewer toilets can impact on behaviours.

[A summary of research and thoughts on school toilets](#) by educationalist Dr Stephen Heppell can be found on his website.

[Exploring the implications of the Curriculum for Excellence for school buildings](#) is covered in a Scottish Government report published in 2007. It states that an essential element for creating Confident Individuals is the provision of "clean, secure toilets".

[A 2007 Department for Education and Skills report](#) discusses key performance requirements and presents design ideas for toilets in schools. This was published to inform the Building Schools for the Future programme in England.

The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity (ERIC) has a [Schools Toilet Charter](#) that is available via their website.

The Scottish Futures Trust has reviewed the [Schools for the Future](#) project, evaluating school performance against a set of metrics.

**This case study was conducted by haa Design on behalf of Architecture and Design Scotland.**

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# Architecture & Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Bakehouse Close, 146 Canongate  
Edinburgh EH8 8DD

The Lighthouse  
Level 2, 11 Mitchell Lane,  
Glasgow, G1 3NU

+44 (0) 131 556 6699  
[www.ads.org.uk](http://www.ads.org.uk)  
@ArcDesSco