

School Toilets

A Snapshot Survey of Children and Young People in Wales



Children's Commissioner for Wales



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

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Introduction

During March 2025 we asked children and young people about school toilets. We've often heard from children and young people about their concerns about school toilets.

The survey was part of an ongoing series of topical questions we ask children and young people monthly to hear their views on a variety of issues, called Monthly Matters. It was shared directly with all schools signed up to our children's rights schemes for primary and secondary schools, as well as community groups.

As part of the survey pack, children and young people were shown a video introducing the topic, and they were asked to consider some questions, like what are the rules in their school, how do they feel about using the toilets in their school and how would they describe their school toilets. We suggested in our session outline that, following this video, children and young people should have a few minutes to discuss their views with each other before answering the survey. Schools and groups had two options for completing the survey; children and young people could either do it independently, or a teacher or group leader could complete the survey on behalf of the group by answering a different set of questions to give an overview of the discussion.

997 children and young people answered the survey individually. A further 762 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. A broad range of ages took part, from children the age of 6 up to 18-year-olds. We received responses from 20 local authority areas.

Questions were developed by the Commissioner's experienced staff team based on themes that had emerged from previous engagement exercises with children, young people, and professionals.

Questions for children and young people

Are you happy with the toilets in your school?

No (516) - 54%

Yes (443) - 46%

Do all the doors close and lock properly?

Yes (538) - 56%

No (420) - 44%

Is toilet paper always available?

Most of the time (536) - 56%

Yes (214) - 22%

Hardly ever (134) - 14%

No (71) - 7%

Do you think the toilets are clean?

No (400) - 42%

Not too bad (387) - 40%

Yes (175) - 18%

Do the toilets smell nice?

No (577) - 60%

Not too bad (305) - 32%

Yes (74) - 8%

Are you able to go to the toilet during lesson time?

Yes (601) - 63%

No, it's hard to get permission (300) - 32%

No, the toilets are locked (52) - 6%

Can you wash your hands in your school toilets?

Yes (701) - 73%

Usually (189) - 20%

No (66) - 7%

Is bullying a problem in your school toilets?

No (771) - 81%

Yes (180) - 19%

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your school toilets?

The highest number of responses related to:

- The toilets are dirty / gross / unhygienic / smelly
- Children vape in toilets
- There's no soap / it usually has run out

Which words best describe your school toilets?

You can pick as many as you want

Smelly (315) - 71%

Unclean (297) - 67%

Messy (291) - 66%

Inaccessible (not easy for everyone to use) (116) - 26%

Accessible / easy for everyone to use (104) - 24%

Scary/dangerous (100) - 23%

Private (66) - 15%

Spacious (53) - 12%

Safe (41) - 9%

Clean (22)- 5%

Does your school have rules about when you can use the toilet?

We can use them in lesson time but need a key/ pass (284) - 64%

We can only use them during break and lunch time (64) - 15%

Something else (31) - 7%

We can use them whenever we need (30) - 7%

We are not allowed to use them during lesson time (30) - 7%

We can use them in lesson time but staff need to take us (3) -1%

What are the rules in your school?

The highest number of responses related to:

- We need a pass/permission to go to the toilet during lessons
- We're not allowed to go during lessons
- It depends on the teacher/their behaviour

How safe do you feel in your school toilets?

Quite safe (164) - 37%

Not safe or unsafe (142) - 32%

Quite unsafe (65) - 15%

Very safe (35) - 8%

Very unsafe (34) - 8%

Can you tell us why?

The highest number of responses related to:

- Pupils vape/smoke in the toilets
- We feel intimidated by others who are in the toilet
- Doors don't lock/ we can't lock doors because pupils deliberately break them

How often do you use the toilets in school?

Only when I'm desperate (142) - 32%

Not a lot - I try not to use them (90) - 20%

I try not to use them (80) - 18%

Every day (65) - 15%

I've never used the school toilet (33) - 7%

Not a lot - I never get the chance to go to the toilet (27) - 6%

Other (6) - 1%

Please tell us more

The highest number of responses related to:

- Only use the toilet when needed
- Only use the toilet when I'm desperate
- Only go to the toilet once or twice a day
- Never

Can you get period products in school if you need them?

Yes (159) - 36%

It's not relevant to me (139) - 32%

I'm not sure (99) - 23%

No (41) - 9%

Where are period products kept?

In the office (44) - 28%

In a special cupboard (30) - 19%

In every toilet (29) - 19%

In some specific toilets? (27) - 17%

With a specific member of staff (15) - 10%

Other (12) - 8%

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your school toilets, good or bad?

The highest number of responses related to:

- They stink / they're small / they're unhygienic
- The toilets are not clean / they need more soap / have no toilet paper / they're messy

Questions for Teachers

How did they describe the toilets?

The highest number of responses related to:

- The toilets are dirty / smelly
- There are issues with the doors – they don't lock / they're ripped off
- Pupils vape in the toilets

What are the rules in your school and what were young people's views on them?

The highest number of responses related to:

- The rules are related to standard toilet etiquette - including food / standing on toilets / number of pupils in cubicles and peeking over cubicles / no vandalism / no bullying
- Pupils need a toilet pass / medical pass
- Pupils can't go to the toilet in the first 15 or the last 15 minutes of the lesson
- Limited to the number of pupils who can go to the toilet at the same time

How did young people feel about using the toilets in school?

The highest number of responses related to:

- They feel uncomfortable if the toilets are overcrowded with pupils
- They feel unsafe
- The toilets are dirty / smelly

From a teacher's perspective, what are the biggest issues when it comes to school toilets?

The highest number of responses related to:

- Pupils vape / smoke in the toilets
- Pupils use the toilets as an excuse to leave their lesson
- Pupils gather in the toilets to socialise

Has your school found a system that works well? If so, what is it?

The highest number of responses related to:

- No, they haven't found a system that works well
- They have a system in place, but it hasn't worked / it's not being followed
- Toilet passes work well and so does a display board that limits the number of pupils who use the toilet

Conclusion

Over half of primary school aged children who responded are not happy with their school toilets. School toilets were consistently described 'smelly' and 'dirty' by teachers and respondents from primary and secondary settings.

Only 7% of secondary aged young people reported being able to use the toilet whenever they needed it. With almost a third of primary aged children reporting they are unable to use school toilets during lessons as it's hard to get permission. Secondary age respondents mostly reported being able to use toilets during lessons with a key/pass (64%), however 15% reported only being able to use them during break or lunch time.

In relation to safety, primary aged children, secondary aged children and teachers all commented on the use of vapes in toilets. 19% of primary aged children also shared that bullying was a problem within their school toilets.

The results highlight the need for ongoing work to address the environments of school toilets to promote a rights-based approach which ensures the safety of children and young people and creates healthy environments which are supportive of personal-care.

Over 20 years ago, the Children's Commissioner for Wales' office published the report, ['Lifting the Lid'](#). When comparing the findings of this Monthly Matter to the report findings, the results are very starkly similar, highlighting the lack of progress in this area.

As a result of these findings, we will be doing further engagement work with children and young people across Wales to further understand their experiences of school toilets. We will publish an update to this report once the work has been completed.