

Green, Matthew ORCID logoORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8065-0446>, Haines Lyon, Charlotte
ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8341-744X>, Little,
Alice ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2214-5814>
and Telford, Jamie (2025) Teachers', parents' and pupils'
perceptions and described experiences of toilet provisions and
practices within English schools. British Educational Research
Journal.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/12048/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If
you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4198>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of
open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form.
Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright
owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for
private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms
governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Teachers', parents', and pupils' perceptions and described experiences of toilet provisions and practices within English schools

Matthew J. Green¹ | Charlotte Haines Lyon² | Alice Little² | Jamie Telford²

¹School of Science, Technology and Health, York St John University, York, UK

²School of Education, Language and Psychology, York St John University, York, UK

Correspondence

Matthew J. Green, School of Science, Technology and Health, York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX, UK.

Email: m.green2@yorks.j.ac.uk

Funding information

Gender and Education Association

Abstract

This paper explores teachers', parents' and pupils' perceptions and described experiences of school toilet policies, provisions and practices within state-funded primary (5–11 years) and secondary (11–16 years) schools in England. In doing so, this research critically examines how school-specific policies and toilet provisions influence children's and young people's use of toilets at school and identifies issues which pupils must navigate within this heavily tabooed space. Seeking to portray a range of perspectives, we present data generated through three mixed-method surveys completed by 96 school-teachers, 158 parents and 198 secondary school pupils. Adopting an overarching wide-angled lens, we combine descriptive statistics with thematic analysis to detail similarities and nuances of parents', teachers' and pupils' perceptions around (a) accessibility of school toilets, (b) problematic pupil behaviour and (c) provision quality. The different perspectives offered provide a wide-angled lens which allows for a wider dialogue between pupils, parents and teachers. Our key findings underscore the need for standardised, equity-focused guidelines that address both infra-structural inadequacies and behavioural dynamics.

KEYWORDS

sanitary provisions, schools, toilet policy, toilets

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2025 The Author(s). *British Educational Research Journal* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of British Educational Research Association.

Key insights

What are the main issues that the paper addresses?

This paper explores how school toilet policies, provisions and practices in English state-funded primary and secondary schools affect pupils' access, comfort and wellbeing. It critically examines how teacher-enforced restrictions, infrastructural inadequacies and peer behaviours shape children's and young people's use, or avoidance, of toilets during the school day.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

The study reveals systemic inconsistencies in school toilet policies and highlights the negative impacts of restricted access, poor hygiene and inadequate menstrual support on pupils' wellbeing and dignity. It calls for national, equity-focused guidance that supports pupil wellbeing, accommodates diverse needs and ensures inclusive, safe and sanitary washroom facilities in schools.

INTRODUCTION

Excretion and urination are things that we all experience; we all shit and piss.
(Slater et al., 2018, p. 519)

This extract captures how defecation and urination are natural bodily functions which are fundamental for good health (Saleem et al., 2019; Tasoglu, 2022). However, there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that at school, some children develop urination and defecation habits which can foster negative physiological and psychological consequences (see Kitstner, 2009; Michels et al., 2019; Vernon et al., 2003; Yang et al., 2018). Across many nations, children have been found to avoid school toilet facilities due to reported issues of bullying (Francies et al., 2022; Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018; Tatlow-Golden et al., 2019), safety concerns (Senior, 2014; Vernon et al., 2003) and dissatisfaction with the quality and cleanliness of restrooms (Reeves et al., 2012; Senior, 2014; Shao et al., 2021). Such issues appear to be compounded by constraining school policies which often limit pupils' access to toilets to certain periods of the day (i.e., break and lunchtime) (Coram, 2024; ERIC, 2024ⁱ; Shao et al., 2021), short intervals during which these spaces are likely to be used by many pupils for a range of purposes, including urination/defecation, socialising, vaping/smoking, mobile phone usage and make-up application (Norling et al., 2016; Senior, 2014; Zemer et al., 2023). Whilst such issues have been explored across the past two decades, more recently there has been growing academic (Atherton, 2024; Peng & Wu, 2023) and civic (Department for Education, 2023; ERIC, 2024; Gov.AU, 2023; Gov. UK, 2024; NSPCC, 2024ⁱⁱ) interest in sex segregation and how to make school toilets more inclusive spaces for all children and young people. Arguably, one reason for such increasing interest is the growing number of pupils identifying as trans or non-binary, with 85% of teachers surveyed in a YouGov poll reporting an increase since 2019 (Sex Matters, 2022).

As this study is located in England, for cultural specificity it is important to frame national legislation and policy-based recommendations. Legislation foregrounded in the *School Premises Regulations 2012* details that all schools maintained by local authorities (state-funded) must provide suitable toilet and washing facilities for the sole use of pupils, and separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over, except where the toilet

facilities are provided in a room that can be secured from the inside and that is intended for use by one pupil at a time. Additionally, Section 100 of the *Children and Families Act 2014* (see Department for Education, 2014) places a duty on maintained schools and proprietors of academies to support pupils with medical conditions, ensuring separate toilet facilities are provided for disabled pupils. National policy does not set a minimum number of fittings to be provided in relation to age or number of pupils, but the Department for Education (2015) recognises that younger pupils' needs are likely to be greater than older pupils, recommending one toilet and washbasin for every 20 primary school pupils. It is also important to note growing discussions about single-sex bathrooms and gender-neutral toilets (Jones & Slater, 2020; NSPCC, 2024), with some calling for the abolition of toilet provisions being organised around binary choices of 'boy' and 'girl' (Benato et al., 2024; Ingrey, 2012; Slater et al., 2018). Despite such academic recommendations, the Department for Education (2023) reiterated that schools 'must always protect single-sex spaces with regards to toilets, showers and changing rooms', recommending that children use the toilet facility 'designed for their biological sex unless it will cause distress for them to do so'. Additionally, in responses to calls for the state to address period poverty, in September 2024 the Department for Education (2024) introduced the *period product scheme for schools and colleges*, providing free period products to girls and women in their place of study. Running across the 2024/25 academic year, this scheme aims to ensure that period products will be available to all who need them when they need them, designed to ensure periods are not a barrier to education (Department for Education, 2024).

Whilst English national policy is prescriptive in its aims, schools govern their own policies, with teachers and support staff often tasked with implementing guidelines (Coram, 2024). Within the United Kingdom, some schools enforce policies which include securing toilets during lesson times via locked doors or barriers, with pupils often having to request a key before use (ERIC, 2024). Considering the growing academic and civic interest in policies and issues which children and young people may face within school toilets, this paper explores teachers', parents' and pupils' perceptions and self-described experiences of such spaces. In doing so, this study seeks to add to the growing body of literature regarding how contemporary policies, provisions and practices influence children's and young people's use, or avoidance, of school toilets. To achieve this aim, we present data drawn from three mixed-method surveys completed by teachers, parents and pupils within England. Whilst specifically exploring school toilet policies, practices and provisions within English schools, the following section reviews literature published across many Western and non-Western nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first theme to be explored is children's and young people's perceptions of access to toilets at school, a factor which appears to significantly impact upon their experiences. Interviewing 8 boys and 11 girls (aged 9–16 years) from five Swedish schools, Lundblad et al. (2010) discovered a shared teacher expectation that toilet needs should be addressed during recess (breaktime), a rule implemented by teachers but not always clearly regulated within each school. Pupils reported regularly needing the toilet during lessons. Many expressed concerns regarding recess time being too short to use the toilet, whilst some shared their anxieties of not knowing when they may need to use the toilet (Lundblad et al., 2010). Supporting Lundblad et al.'s (2010) findings, presenting questionnaire data provided by 19,557 children from 252 schools in Denmark, Jorgensen et al. (2021) highlighted that 50% of boys and 60% of girls were dissatisfied with their school toilets. A central concern in such dissatisfaction was the lack of access to toilets during lesson time. Many pupils reported that

breaks were too short, whilst others reported wanting to play during recess. Such concerns fostered distress around toilet usage for some children (Jorgensen et al., 2021). There is also evidence to suggest that teacher and/or senior leadership-imposed restrictions are not isolated to schools in Western nations. Presenting questionnaire responses provided by 761 primary school pupils in China, Shao et al. (2021) detailed how pupils were unable to use the toilets during lessons. However, contrasting with Lundblad et al.'s (2010) and Jorgensen et al.'s (2021) findings, these pupils reported having enough time during breaks to use the toilets and did not disclose concerns regarding the restricted access to these spaces. Providing insights into potential consequences of restrictions to toilet access, Tatlow-Golden (2019, p. 217) detailed how a third of primary school children often felt 'bursting'—a term used to denote feeling urgency or on the verge of involuntary incontinence—with some children sharing fears of being refused access to the toilets by teachers despite such urgency.

Adequacy of toilet provision

Whilst accessibility issues may partly underpin children's avoidance of school toilets, it is also important to recognise many pupils' dissatisfaction with the perceived adequacy of toilet provisions. Presenting environmental survey data from 68 primary schools in New Zealand, Reeves et al. (2012) report how only 28% of surveyed toilets met all standards of the *Ministry of Education, Health and Educational Health Safety Code of Practice for State and State Integrated Schools*, as many handwashing facilities lacked warm water. The environmental surveys also revealed that toilet paper was not always available at the end of breaktimes, which Reeves et al. (2012) highlights as a concern, considering such provision a reasonable expectation within all schools. Presenting similar concerns when surveying 2020 pupils in an Australian primary school, Senior (2014) detailed how 61% of boys and 47% of girls raised the problem of a lack of toilet paper. Pupils also expressed concerns regarding handwashing and drying facilities, with only 38% of girls and 41% of boys reporting that they can wash and dry their hands at school (Senior, 2014), concerns also reported elsewhere (Jorgensen et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2021; Shoham et al., 2020). Reporting questionnaire data provided by 3962 girls in England, Shoham et al. (2020) detailed how many girls rated toilets as having at least two problems, which most commonly included dirtiness (56%), lack of toilet paper (45%) and lack of privacy (35%). Shao et al. (2021, p. 29) also discovered that cleanliness was a primary concern in pupils' use of school toilets, specific issues including the 'presence of faeces, urine, vomit, and smell'. Across these studies and others (see Lundblad et al., 2010; Michels et al., 2019; Norling et al., 2016; Zemer et al., 2023), pupils raised concerns about the infrastructure of school toilets, including broken locks, graffiti, loud hand dryers, inadequate flushing mechanisms, lack of privacy and lack of (sanitary) bins. Collectively, the studies reviewed within this section demonstrate how pupils often face more than one issue related to the quality and cleanliness of school toilet provision, which contributes to many avoiding toilet usage.

Emotion-laden avoidance

Children and young people have also expressed concerns over safety and desires to avoid embarrassment when explaining their toilet avoidance at school. Surveying 394 primary school pupils in England and 157 in Sweden, Vernon et al. (2003) discovered that across both nations children were afraid to use the toilets at school. Across both schools, pupils described how inadequate privacy was coupled with fears of bullying, contributing to a

significant number of children purposefully avoiding pooing at school (Vernon et al., 2003). Considering how peer behaviour (real or perceived) influences toilet usage, Senior (2014) found that 71% of girls and 65% of boys feared the behaviour of other students in the toilets, whilst most qualitative comments mentioned a lack of privacy. Similarly, interviewing 21 students (aged 16–18 years) from four Swedish schools, Norling et al. (2016, p. 168) detailed how many students felt exposed within the toilets as the cubicles 'allowed others a clear impression of or to hear, and even film, toilet usage'. Such feelings of exposure led to students avoiding school toilets, causing constipation and abdominal pain, which also negatively impacted upon concentration levels in class (Norling et al., 2016). As referenced by Vernon et al. (2003), concerns over privacy may be exacerbated by fears of bullying. Presenting focus group data provided by 24 secondary school students (aged 14–17 years) in South Africa, Ngidi and Moletsane (2018) discovered that the toilets were considered the most dangerous spaces in school, whereby the rife nature of bullying was attributed to the isolated nature of toilet blocks and the lack of security (i.e., cameras and staff presence). Similarly, in Australian primary schools, Francies et al. (2022) identified school toilets as 'hotspots' for bullying, with pupils (aged 4–12 years) attributing increasing prevalence to a lack of adult supervision. Likewise, Shoham et al. (2020) reported an association between bullying and school toilets, detailing how pupils bullied in school toilets often avoided these spaces despite an urge to pass urine. Offering a nuanced finding, Shoham et al. (2020) found that some children used school toilets as a refuge from bullying, with cubicles perceived to provide protection. Whilst school toilets may serve as a safe space, there is more evidence to suggest that school toilets are 'hotspots' where bullying can occur.

Teachers' perceptions and imposed practices

As those responsible for enforcing school toilet policies, attention is now paid to teachers' perceptions and experiences of children's and young people's use of toilets at school. Seeking to understand teachers' attitudes and strategies in regulating toilet usage, Lundblad et al. (2016) interviewed 17 teachers from five compulsory schools in Sweden. Across the sample group, teachers discussed how the time needed for pupils to visit the toilet was ruled by physiological needs, yet no teachers had a clear understanding of whether children regularly used the toilet at school nor an awareness of a formal school toilet policy (Lundblad et al., 2016). Discussing their imposed practices, most teachers believed that children must learn to adapt their visits to the toilet as they get older, with older pupils expected and constrained to toilet usage at breaktimes (Lundblad et al., 2016). One reason for such constraining practices was a wide shared understanding amongst teachers that pupils often request to use the toilet to take a break from schoolwork (Lundblad et al., 2016). Also seeking teachers' reflections of pupils' experiences, Lundblad et al. (2016) discovered that few teachers considered hygiene standards as problematic, yet many noted how pupils may feel uneasy about using the toilet at school due to embarrassment. For these teachers, pupils' emotion-laden reluctance was centred on fears of peers knocking or pulling on toilet doors, concerns commonly shared by pupils (see Norling et al., 2016; Shoham et al., 2020; Vernon et al., 2003). Further exploring teachers' perceptions of school toilets, Kasule et al.'s (2017) questionnaire revealed that under-adequacy of resources, shortage of sanitary bins and hygiene products may negatively impact upon pupils' toilet usage. Seeking to address such concerns, the authors recommended that teachers should allow 5-min breaks for toilet usage between lessons and establish a code of conduct for toilet etiquette, whilst schools should provide sanitary bins, implement a weekly toilet rota for staff and ensure effective cleaning through the school day (Kasule et al., 2017). Seeking to explore teachers' perceptions of menstruation at school, when surveying 209 teachers in the Midwestern United States,

Huseth-Zosel and Secor-Turner (2022) discovered that less than half of teachers (47.8%) had menstrual products available for pupils in their classrooms. Moreover, teachers commented that pupils are often embarrassed about getting their period at school due to societal taboos towards menstruation, leading to a culture of concealment amongst pupils (Huseth-Zosel & Secor-Turner, 2022). Teachers also expressed concerns over pupils missing class due to menstruation experiences, whilst the authors detailed how inconsistent approaches were adopted by teachers as many sought to limit pupils' bathroom visits (Huseth-Zosel & Secor-Turner, 2022). Collectively, these findings reinforce the need for clearer institutional guidance to balance safeguarding, academic attainment and pupil wellbeing, also highlighting the unintended outcomes of teacher-imposed toilet practices with regards to menstruation, embarrassment and equal access.

Parents' perspectives of school toilet practices

Whilst several studies have examined pupils' and teachers' perceptions of and experiences in school toilets, there is sparse evidence of parents' perceptions of school toilet practices and provisions. Although not specifically examining school toilets per se, Maxwell's (2000) survey completed by 131 parents detailed how 54% believed that the toilets make their child's school an unwelcoming place. Furthermore, Maxwell (2000) noted that whilst pupils consider toilets to be important areas of the school, adults (parents and teachers) may not consider these spaces as high-priority areas. Instead, parents judged the cleanliness and quality of the school by the condition of public areas (i.e., classrooms, dining halls) rather than the more private spaces of pupil toilets (Maxwell, 2000). More recently, when interviewing parents of children with lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), Venkatapuram et al. (2024) noted how parents' inability to monitor bathroom usage and hydration led to responsibility being placed on their children or teacher. Indeed, teachers were considered the primary stakeholders in 'making healthy bladder habits available' for their children, with school nurses, facility managers and senior leadership staff seldom mentioned (Venkatapuram et al., 2024, p. 967). Discussing school policies, many parents noted wide variations in bathroom rules and practices, whilst some parents had received no communication about school toilet policies and were unsure if they existed (Venkatapuram et al., 2024). Parents who were aware of school practices problematised children's need to signal (raise a hand) to use the toilets due to potential embarrassment, a concern seemingly compounded for pupils given the potential for bullying in such spaces (Venkatapuram et al., 2024). Finally, a few parents shared their desire for all-gender toilets in schools to facilitate 'more inclusive' and 'more comfortable' spaces for children (Venkatapuram et al., 2024, p. 969). These findings reflect growing parental recognition of diversity in gender identity and signal a shift in expectations regarding inclusive toilet facilities. However, they also highlight the lack of widespread engagement with such issues in schools and the importance of including parental voices in policy development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore and triangulate teachers', parents' and pupils' perceptions and described experiences of school toilet policies and practices. Recognising the sensitive and multi-faceted nature of the topic, the researchers opted for a survey-based approach that combined quantitative measures with open-ended qualitative responses. It was decided to conduct surveys with each group of stakeholders—teachers, parents and pupils—that held perspectives and could share experiences of using school

toilets. Together, this multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the school toilet problem from varied perspectives. The predominantly qualitative nature of the surveys enabled a comprehensive 'wide-angled lens' capturing a diversity of perspectives, experiences or sense-making (Braun et al., 2021; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). Analogous to photographic techniques where wide-angle lenses provide expansive scene representation, this methodological approach permitted a holistic examination of issues pertaining to school toilets. The combined data offers a collage in which 'multiple methods are used because they each provide different fragments of information that, when pieced together, help to explain a broad research area' (Freeman, 2020, p. 332). Ethical approval was gained separately for each survey. Participants were asked to create a pseudonym code which they could use should they wish to withdraw their data from the project, within the set timeframe. The teacher and parent national surveys incorporated a longitudinal element, as respondents were asked about their cumulative experiences and observations over time, rather than a single snapshot (Davies, 1994). Conversely, the pupil survey was local, disseminated in one school and focused on pupils' current perceptions of toilet facilities.

Teachers' survey

Conducted between July and September 2024, the teachers' survey aimed to investigate educators' interpretations of toilet-related policies and their professional experiences. The survey included 21 questions, with both fixed and open-text formats, covering policy awareness, pupil behaviour, medical accommodations and the teachers' own ability to access staff toilet facilities at school. Distribution occurred through a university-school partnership newsletter and X (formerly Twitter), yielding 96 completed responses from primary ($n=70$) and secondary school ($n=26$) staff. Of these participants, 78 identified as female and 18 identified as male. Teachers had between 2 and 20 years of teaching experience, with a mean of 9.4 years. The design of the teacher survey was informed by prior research emphasising the importance of teacher discretion in shaping pupils' toilet access (Huseth-Zosel & Secor-Turner, 2022; Lundblad et al., 2016). Additionally, by integrating longitudinal questioning around cumulative experiences rather than single events, the survey addressed the challenge of capturing embedded school cultures and evolving practices (Davies, 1994; Freeman, 2020). This survey design enabled insights into critical tensions between safeguarding learning time and responding compassionately to pupils' physiological and emotional needs.

Parents' survey

The parents' survey was conducted earlier, between December 2021 and March 2022, constituting the preliminary phase of the wider research project into school toilets. This online survey was comprised of 12 questions and focused on whether children discussed school toilet-related concerns at home, parental awareness of school policies and perceptions of sanitary provisions. A total of 158 responses were gathered via social media platforms, specifically Facebook and X. Within this sample, 46% had a male child, 52% a female child and 2% preferred not to say. Moreover, 43% were parents of primary school children and 57% of secondary school children. The findings underscored the high frequency of children raising toilet-related concerns at home and provided the impetus for further enquiry. The parents' survey highlighted some of the tensions between home expectations and school practices, providing an important rationale from which two external research grants were obtained (as detailed at the end of the paper).

Pupils' survey

The pupil survey was co-designed with a group of student researchers from a state-funded secondary school in a former mining town in Northern England. This institution served approximately 1500 pupils aged 11–16 years and had a below average (13%) Pupil Premiumⁱⁱⁱ funding allocation signifying relative affluence. Drawing on a 'children as researchers' approach (Kellett, 2005), the young researchers received training in ethical research practice (see Haines Lyon et al., 2024), before developing a Qualtrics survey instrument focusing on: (a) toilet access and usage; (b) sanitary provision; and (c) adequacy of school toilet facilities. This approach enabled the youth researchers to enact the role of knowledge producers, helping to centre their lived experiences and reduce adult-centric bias in the study design (Kellett, 2005). The young researchers made the decision to share the survey via school email and school online notice boards, outlining the voluntary nature of the survey and the steps they had taken to safeguard pupils with participant codename entries. The survey was distributed digitally in May 2024 and remained open for 2 weeks. In total, 198 secondary school pupils (aged 11–16 years) completed the survey. Of these respondents, 63% identified as female, 35% male and 2% transgender or gender diverse. The mixed-question format allowed for nuanced quantitative analysis and open-text responses, enriching the understanding of how policies and provision shape young people's perceptions and lived experiences.

Analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis approach was utilised to analyse the qualitative data generated from the three surveys. This analytical technique was particularly suitable given the study's wide-angled lens survey design, which sought to capture teachers', parents' and pupils' perspectives on and described experiences of school toilet policies, practices and provisions. The analysis followed Braun et al.'s (2021) six-phase approach: (1) data familiarisation; (2) initial code generation; (3) theme searching; (4) theme review; (5) theme definition and naming; and (6) report production. First, all qualitative responses were read and re-read to ensure immersion in the data. Coding was then conducted, with initial codes capturing explicit concerns such as 'restricted toilet access', 'cleanliness and hygiene' and 'problematic pupil behaviour'. Following this, codes were systematically grouped into broader themes that aligned with the research aims and reflected shared or contested perspectives across participant groups. Themes were refined iteratively, with particular attention given to how they intersected with the descriptive statistical findings. For example, the high proportion of pupils and parents who expressed dissatisfaction with school toilet cleanliness (quantitative data) was reinforced by qualitative responses detailing specific concerns about unsanitary conditions. Similarly, while teachers cited behavioural concerns as justification for restricted toilet access, pupils' responses highlighted the discomfort and distress such policies generated, revealing a fundamental tension between safeguarding learning environments and accommodating physiological needs. The process also facilitated an integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative insights, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of school toilet policies and practices in English schools.

RESULTS

Teachers' perceptions of school toilet practices

As those responsible for enforcing school toilet policies into practice, it is important to ascertain teachers' perceptions of their school's toilet policies and pupils' use of toilet spaces.

Analysis of teachers' survey responses revealed three key themes regarding children's and young people's use of toilets at school: (a) problematic pupil behaviour; (b) disruption to learning; and (c) implementation of a case-by-case approach. It was evident that teachers often had multiple decisions to make around toilet use in lesson time, but a primary concern centred around the potential for pupils to misbehave and cause damage to school property. One primary teacher shared a belief that *'younger children use it as an excuse to mess around'*, whilst two secondary teachers added *'they are too disruptive, too many wanting to go and too much damage caused'* and *'using the toilets in lessons is disruptive and is open to abuse'*. Using the toilet in lesson time usually means that there are fewer, if any, adult staff supervising toilet spaces and the decision to allow usage is down to individual teachers to manage and monitor. Irrespective of the stage of schooling, concerns over pupil misbehaviour were described and linked to reasons why teachers may restrict pupils' access to toilets during lesson time.

Disruption to learning was also cited as a central consideration in teachers' restrictions of toilet usage during lesson time. Whilst some teachers cited disruption to learning as a reason to restrict pupil access during lessons (as above), many teachers cited disruption to learning as a reason to support why pupils should be able to access the toilets during lessons. The following primary teacher quotes recognise how children may struggle to engage if they are needing to 'go': *'if a child needs the toilet, they would struggle to concentrate on learning of the lesson so this would hinder progress and make children feel uncomfortable'*, *'if you need the toilet then you need to go and are unable to concentrate'* and *'needing the toilet is a barrier to learning'*. This tension is carefully considered in the following quote from a secondary school teacher:

If a child needs the toilet, it can have an impact on their concentration. However, they should not be able to go whenever they need to as it is used as a distraction from learning and somewhere to go to gather and elongate being out of class. Time restrictions [not the first 5/10/15 minutes] are used.

Acknowledging how discomfort may negatively impact upon young people's concentration, and therefore their learning, this teacher's suggestion of 'time restrictions' clarifies when pupils should be granted permission to use the toilet. Arguably, such an approach may serve as an effective and equitable approach to minimising disruption to learning for all pupils.

There was a clear distinction within the survey made by teachers about how pupils' age may partly determine whether they grant permission to children to access the toilets during lessons. One primary school teacher reported, *'for young children or those who struggle with their bladder, they should be able to use the toilet when needed to prevent accidents and embarrassment. However, old[er] children should wait until break/lunchtime'*. This extract captures a wider perception that younger pupils (4–7 years) should be allowed to use toilets for biological (i.e., bladder control) and emotion-laden (i.e., embarrassment) reasons, considerations perceived to be less applicable to older pupils (7–11 years). Whilst age was a common differentiating factor in teachers' perceptions around toilet usage, most participants proposed that pupils (of all ages) should be permitted to use the toilet if they have a diagnosed medical condition. Teachers were able to expand upon their answers within the survey and highlighted how medical needs were the only non-negotiable allowance, *'some children have different medical needs'*, *'no [access to toilets] unless they have a medical toilet pass'* and *'some children have medical needs so require the toilet to be accessible immediately'*. Teachers' insights in these cases suggest that there are no clear rules around medical use and medical toilet passes, yet, as documented later in this paper within our pupil survey, it is evident that when needs are related to menstruation the rules are not so easily established or consistently policed.

Seeking to examine tensions that teachers may face when enforcing school-wide toilet policies, all participants were asked: Has a child ever raised concerns about using the toilet at school? Of the 96 respondents, 65% of teachers answered 'yes'. As a follow-up, teachers were asked what specific concerns pupils had raised, with prevailing themes including emotion-laden avoidance, problematic peer behaviours and the inadequate quality of toilet provisions. In relation to the former, teachers disclosed how pupils are *'worried about going for a poo'*, *'worried about older children in there'* and *'unwilling to go to the toilet and held for most of the day due to embarrassment'*. The presence of peers appears to underpin young people's emotion-laden concerns over using the toilet at school, a finding further qualified when teachers disclosed how pupils have previously problematised peer behaviour. For example, one teacher commented, *'some children have mentioned other children opening the door, being too close or being too loud in the toilets'*, whilst another recalled, *'others making comments while [the] child is in [the] loo [toilet]'*. Such behaviours may reflect pupils' preferences for quieter times due to lack of privacy or anxiety around social scrutiny. Taken collectively, it appears that many children's and young people's concerns regarding toilet usage at school are centred around peer behaviours and interactions within this otherwise private space. Understandably, when concerns about peer interactions are coupled with unclean conditions, pupils are likely to avoid using the toilets.

Parental insights into school toilet provisions

Seeking to further understand pupils' experiences of school toilet policies, practices and provisions, parental survey data is now presented. Of 158 parents surveyed, 84% reported that their child has spoken to them about their use of toilets at school, evidencing young people's conscious considerations of these spaces. To this end, 81% of parents indicated that their child has raised concerns about using school toilets, 68% identified that their child has commented on feeling uncomfortable in school toilets and 55% raised concerns over the cleanliness of school toilets. In relation to cleanliness and hygiene, several parents shared comments raised by their child: *'she says they are disgusting, wet floors, no toilet roll, chewing gum stuck all over the place, they smell awful'*; *'she says it's disgusting in there, unclean floors, dirty and/or blocked toilets, dirty sinks'*; *'my child dislikes the toilets at school and although they have to be used for handwashing, they feel they are unhygienic'*.

Reiterating an issue raised within the teacher survey, many parents explained how their child had expressed concerns over peer behaviour within the toilets. Many parents raised concerns about how pupils were using the toilet spaces, particularly secondary school girls, often leading to unpleasant experiences for those next in line: *'many times she has complained about the fact that people are not cleaning after themselves'*; *'kids smoking in toilets'*; *'used to eat and leave used food in toilet paper, sanitary products not disposed of properly'*; *'girls' toilets have had the mirror removed because they graffiti on it. In boys' toilets they graffiti, they graffiti on the urinals [which can't be removed]'*. Collectively, these reflections imply that pupils acknowledge that the misuse of toilet spaces by other pupils contributes to the inadequate conditions of the toilets. However, other parents highlighted how the lack of provision, particularly sanitary provision, within school toilets was often a barrier to use: *'often the sanitary bins are overflowing. There have been clouds of flies in the sanitary bins. Sometimes there are piles of soiled sanitary towels on the floor. The toilets are not cleaned during the day'*. Providing further insights into why many young people (68%) reported feeling uncomfortable in school toilets, some parents reported concerns over bullying: *'they are worried about being bullied by other pupils when using the toilets'*, embarrassment: *'using sanitary items is obvious and embarrassing as only one cubicle [has a] sanitary disposal bin'* and safety: *'[they] will never*

go alone, says they are unsafe'. Such concerns detailed by many parents may partly explain why many pupils actively avoid toilet usage when at school, as evidenced by the following extracts: *'refuses to use them and did in junior [primary] school too—will go all day without using the bathroom'*; *'my son stopped using them. Often desperate for the loo when he comes home from school'*; *'she will not use these and there is a queue to use the others, therefore she will avoid them completely'*.

Finally, parents were asked to report whether their child has ever commented on their school's approach to toilets, to which 58% answered 'yes'. Key themes that emerged from parental comments on this matter included: (a) usage constraints; (b) inconsistencies in teacher-imposed restrictions; and (c) problematising of current constraining practices. Exemplifying the former, several parents cited: *'not allowed to go in class time, even if you're on your period. Need to have a toilet pass to leave the classroom and go to the toilet'*; *'feels it's unfair that there isn't open access to them and that they're all expected to use them during breaks'*; *'they are not allowed to the toilet in lesson time. Toilets are locked between lessons and only opened at lunchtime'*. Many responses in the survey suggested that pupils are unable to access the toilets during lesson times, a constraining approach which many pupils disliked and some felt were unjust. Reinforcing the latter point, one parent shared their child's experience:

Yes, some teachers regularly restrict access to the toilet, which I disagree with completely. I have talked about this many times with my teenager and they tend to go whether or not they have 'permission'. The enforcement of rules [if there are rules about this, it is not entirely clear] seem unevenly applied and often one or two teachers are very strict, particularly with certain kids.

Parents made further comments about restrictions or inconsistent policies around toilet use, with one adding: *'toilets at break only. Permission from teachers but only if they judge you are deserving'*. Such accounts reveal how teachers may adopt an individual-centred, rather than whole-class/school, approach to toilet usage; differential practices that are considered 'unfair' by some pupils and parents. It is clear here that such practices, where there is no clearly implemented policy of toilet use, are problematic for both pupils and teachers.

Parents were more open, and shared a range of insights, about how girls' menstruation needs were often overlooked, uncatered for or there was inadequate application of policy. Respondents disclosed concerns regarding restrictions placed on girls during their menstrual cycle, a finding which mapped across primary and secondary school data. A parent of a primary school pupil described how inadequate sanitary provision had revealed her daughter's 'needs': *'she felt embarrassed when starting her period at age 9. Having to ask to be excused to use a disabled toilet [where there is a sanitary towel disposal bin] made her feel extremely uncomfortable as it brought unwanted attention to the reason why from her peers'*. Revealing how such constraints and concerns map into secondary school, two parents noted: *'unreasonable lack of access during lesson time, especially during a heavy menstrual period when she is extremely anxious that the pad might leak and is unable to find time to change it'* and *'they are often not allowed to go in lesson which when they have started periods can be an issue, particularly as teenage girls don't want to raise this in front of the class'*.

Pupils' perspectives on school toilet policies, practices and provisions

The final area of exploration is 198 pupils' perceptions of toilet policies and provisions at one state-funded secondary school. When asked to provide their thoughts on current school

policies around toilet access, teacher-imposed restrictions on the toilets during lessons was a point raised multiple times. Detailing toilet policy in practice at [pseudonym school name], one pupil noted: *'students can't go to the toilets unless they have a pass'*, whilst another pupil reported: *'you have time at break only. Not lunch because you only have five minutes to eat anyway after queuing and you can't go in-between lessons as we only get three minutes. You also can't go in lessons'*. Revealing how toilet use during lessons is prohibited, with the exception of a medical exception (toilet pass), pupils highlight the challenges they face in using toilets during designated times (breaks, lunch and transitions between lessons). Sharing further insights around access to toilets during these periods, one pupil stated: *'a lot of them [toilets] are in areas restricted at break and lunch, and those that aren't are often full. I understand why there's limited toilet areas, so the staff know students are safe, but with lots of students and only a certain number of toilets for a year group it's hard to be able to go to the toilet in time'*. This quote draws attention to the pragmatics of a large number of pupils using a relatively small number of toilets during a time-restricted period, which in practice would undoubtedly cause queues in school corridors and may impact upon pupils' ability to use the facilities before their timetabled lessons. One response clearly explains how this plays out for pupils during their school day:

There is usually a lot of crowding around the toilets, especially [at] lunch so people feel embarrassed or intimidated to use the toilets. Students have around five minutes to go to the toilet before we are told by staff to leave the corridors—this can be uncomfortable [especially for female students] after waiting a couple of lessons or more to access a toilet.

This extract demonstrates how policy-based restrictions coupled with further teacher-imposed constraints limit pupils' abilities to use the toilets at school. As in the parent survey, in addition to constraining policies and practices, many pupils also described inadequate sanitary provision within the toilets. Evidencing a widely cited concern, pupils noted: *'every toilet for women should have a sanitary bin and the school could provide free sanitary products in the toilets. The sanitary bins should be cleared more often as they are often overflowing'; 'there should be sanitary products in female toilets'; 'GIVE US TAMPONS!'*. These responses evidence how many pupils were unhappy with current sanitary provisions at their school, expressing a need for better provision in terms of sanitary products and suitable bins for disposal of used sanitary products.

Whilst for many pupils, school toilet policies and provisions were highlighted as a major concern, when asked how the toilets are used by pupils, several also shared concerns about how these spaces are (mis)used by their peers. More specifically, many pupils declared issues associated with (a) cleanliness, (b) anti-social behaviours and (c) use as a socialising space. Many students described how *'there is always litter and people need to learn how to flush!!!'*, *'they always have rubbish in'*, *'they leave litter in there, e.g., empty cardboard drink bottles'* and *'a lot of the toilets have food and drink left in them which is very gross'*. Such assertions reveal how pupils' concerns regarding the cleanliness of toilets may be partly due to their peers' etiquettes within these spaces, a finding which extended to some pupils' displeasure with a minority of their peers' behaviours within the toilets. The toilets discussed in this survey were all single cubicle room-like toilets, each including a wash basin, mirror and toilet, with some including sanitary bins. As the space was large enough for groups of young people to enter, some pupils suggest how this enables 'misuse': *'lots of people go in one at once to vape'; 'I have heard people vape under sinks to stop detectors and hide illegal stuff in the ceiling panels'; 'they use their phones and go in the toilets and they are in big groups'*. Many also acknowledged how the toilets are used as a socialising space, which has a detrimental effect upon those needing to use the toilet, by contributing to queues and further teacher-imposed restrictions. To this end, many students noted: *'people spend around ten*

minutes in the bathroom doing their hair and makeup while there is a massive queue waiting to actually use the toilet'; 'a lot of people are just doing makeup and other things in the toilets so people who actually need the toilet can't go or have to wait ages'; 'I've seen quite a few groups of girls crowding into disabled toilets to brush hair, apply makeup, etc., which I don't think is very supportive of the students who require access to disabled toilets'.

Whilst the surveys did not directly ask about the intersection of gender and toilets, three parents raised concerns about gender-neutral toilets, although only one of them said their child was concerned. Two parents said their children had been bullied for not looking female or male enough. Within the pupils' survey there was one complaint that the gender-neutral toilets were gross and two complaining that they did not contain sanitary bins. Two teachers expressed concerns about pupils having gender-neutral toilets and one about staff having gender-neutral toilets. One teacher said that the gender-neutral toilets were less vandalised. Considering the overwhelmingly negative nature of media stories about this issue, we were surprised how few people complained about them. This aligns with our group work in the wider project where the main concerns were about the adequacy of gender-neutral toilets, especially regarding the lack of sanitary bins.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In seeking teachers', parents' and pupils' perspective of school toilet policies, provisions and practices, the findings presented above highlight the complex relationships between structural, behavioural and cultural factors which influence children's and young people's experiences of toilet usage at school. A finding consistent across all three surveys was the tensions concerning teacher-imposed restrictions on toilet use during lesson time. Reflecting Lundblad et al.'s (2010, 2016) and Jorgensen et al.'s (2021) findings, teachers frequently cited concerns about disruptive behaviours and distraction from learning as key justifications for restrictive toilet policies. However, teacher responses also revealed a paradoxical finding that restrictions on toilet use may also negatively affect pupils' concentration, and therefore learning, aligning with Tatlow-Golden et al.'s (2019) suggestion that denying toilet access can hinder educational engagement. Interestingly, whilst pupils mirrored the frustrations of Danish students who shared dissatisfaction with restricted access (Jorgensen et al., 2021), our findings revealed a nuanced finding that some teachers implement more flexible practices. More specifically, some teachers acknowledged the importance of accommodating young children's toilet needs, as well as those with medical conditions, revealing a flexible, yet inconsistent, approach to toilet policy enforcement. As called for by Reeves et al. (2012) and Coram (2024), this tension between school-based policy and individualised requirements reveals the need for clearer, more consistent and equitable school toilet policies.

The findings underscore inconsistencies in the implementation of toilet policies across the surveyed schools. Parents and pupils described experiences of arbitrary or uneven enforcement, often dependent on individual teachers' discretion. This aligns with prior critiques of policy gaps identified by Michels et al. (2019) and Coram (2024), but the current study further illuminates how these inconsistencies exacerbate perceptions of unfairness and hinder effective policy adherence. Notably, the study sheds light on menstruation-specific barriers, with both parents and pupils recounting instances where pupils were denied access to toilets during their periods. This finding resonates with Norling et al. (2016) but also reflects the limited progress in addressing gender-sensitive needs, despite policy advancements like the *period product scheme* (Department for Education, 2024). There were also two teachers who said they could not access toilets enough when they were menstruating, revealing potential further issues regarding current access restrictions. Such accounts highlight the urgency of embedding gender-equity considerations into broader discussions on toilet accessibility.

Reflecting many children's and young people's perceptions (Reeves et al., 2012; Senior, 2014; Shoham et al., 2020), our findings revealed consistent dissatisfaction with the cleanliness and adequacy of school toilet provisions within English schools. Parents and pupils highlighted recurring issues, including a lack of toilet paper throughout the school day, unclean toilet facilities and insufficient and/or inadequate sanitary bins. Such concerns align with Shoham et al.'s (2020) findings that dirtiness and insufficient waste disposal vessels deter many pupils, particularly girls, from using school toilets. Moreover, whilst the Department for Education's (2024) *period product scheme for schools and colleges* will improve pupil's access to sanitary products, these findings highlight the pressing need for more adequate sanitary disposal bins provision and servicing within English schools. Further extending our original findings, the surveys revealed that problems with cleanliness are coupled with perceived problematic pupil behaviours within school toilet blocks. Teacher, parent and pupil reports indicated that misuse of facilities—such as leaving litter and/or engaging in anti-social activities (i.e., vaping)—compounds perceived infrastructural shortcomings.

A further theme emerged regarding the social and emotional consequences of toilet usage at school. Resonating with Vernon et al.'s (2003) and Norling et al.'s (2016) findings, pupils' shared concerns about bullying within school toilets, whilst also sharing their dissatisfaction with the lack of privacy within these spaces. In this study, parents and pupils shared a recognition that school toilets are emotionally fraught spaces, highlighting how peer behaviours exacerbate pupils' discomfort and feelings of embarrassment, which ultimately contribute to problematic avoidance behaviours (Green & Mierzwinski, 2025). A unique contribution of this study is the dual role that toilets play in bullying, as some pupils considered these spaces as bullying 'hotspots', whilst others considered them a safe space to escape peer victimisation. To this end, whilst pupils may avoid toilets due to real or perceived peer surveillance (Green & Mierzwinski, 2025; Shoham et al., 2020), the more private space of a toilet enabled some pupils to momentarily avoid school-based bullying, a finding which underscores the complex nature of these spaces. Significantly, the study demonstrates the commonalities between the parents, teachers and pupils in perspectives and common struggles with toilets and toilet policies. This reinforces the importance of our wider project, in which we encourage dialogue and listening to the evidence from different sides, to enable wider effective improvement.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on school toilet provision by adopting a multi-perspective approach that integrates the voices of teachers, parents and pupils. While prior research has predominantly focused on children's experiences (i.e., Lundblad et al., 2010; Shoham et al., 2020), this study's triangulation of viewpoints reveals deeper complexities in policy implementation and its ramifications. By illuminating the interconnected factors that shape school toilet experiences, this study contributes valuable insights to ongoing debates on educational environments and pupil wellbeing. Despite our multi-stakeholder perspective, we acknowledge the limited generalisability of our findings given our surveying of pupils from one secondary school, as well as a majority of female teachers and parents of female pupils. Subsequently, we propose that future studies may adopt qualitative and/or participatory methodologies with primary and secondary school pupils, teachers and participants within more diverse educational institutions. Nonetheless, the findings call for a holistic reimagining of school toilet policies that transcends infrastructural improvements to address cultural and behavioural dimensions, ensuring these essential spaces support the health, safety and dignity of all pupils. One significant contribution is the identification of a tension between safeguarding learning environments and accommodating basic physiological needs. Teachers' accounts of managing toilet access highlight a broader pedagogical challenge of balancing instructional priorities with pupil wellbeing. Additionally, the study's emphasis on menstruation-specific barriers advances the discourse on gender equity, offering actionable insights for policymakers and educators to better support pupils.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need for standardised, equity-focused guidelines that address both infrastructural inadequacies and behavioural dynamics.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was supported by the Gender and Education Association and Institute of Social Justice, York St John University.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data included in this research is available from the York St John University Repository.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

All participants provided informed consent prior to completing the surveys.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This project received ethical approval from the York St John University Research Ethics Committee.

ORCID

Matthew J. Green  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8065-0446>

Endnotes

ⁱERIC is the national charity in England dedicated to improving children's bowel and bladder health.

ⁱⁱThe National Charity for the Prevent of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the United Kingdom's leading children's charity, dedicated to protecting children and preventing abuse, offering services like helplines, counselling and working with communities to create safer childhoods.

ⁱⁱⁱThe Pupil Premium grant provides funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England.

REFERENCES

- Atherton, S. (2024). The privacy and visibility paradox: Trans students' experiences of toilets and changing rooms in UK secondary schools. *Gender and Education*, 36(7), 747–762.
- Benato, R., Fraser, J., & White, F. R. (2024). Getting beyond peeing and pronouns: Living non-binary gender in higher education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 33(5), 698–710.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(6), 641–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>
- Coram. (2024). *Toilets in schools*. <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/toilets-in-schools/#:~:text=Local%20authority%20maintained%20schools%20are,the%20sole%20use%20of%20pupils>
- Davies, R. B. (1994). From cross-sectional to longitudinal analysis. In A. Dale & R. B. Davies (Eds.), *Analyzing social and political change: A casebook of methods* (pp. 20–40). SAGE.
- Department for Education. (2014). *Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions: Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7556eed915d6faf2b23b2/Statutory_guidance_on_supporting_pupils_at_school_with_medical_conditions.pdf
- Department for Education. (2015). *Advice on standards for school premises: For local authorities, proprietors, school leaders, school staff and governing bodies*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a800013ed915d74e622be2b/Advice_on_standards_for_school_premises.pdf
- Department for Education. (2023). *Gender questioning children: Everything you need to know about new draft guidelines for schools*. <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/12/19/gender-questioning-children-guidance-schools-colleges/>

- Department for Education. (2024). *Period product scheme for schools and colleges*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/period-products-in-schools-and-colleges/period-product-scheme-for-schools-and-colleges-in-england>
- ERIC. (2024). *School toilets*. <https://eric.org.uk/information/school-toilet-policy/>
- Francies, J., Trapp, G., Pearce, N., Burns, S., & Cross, D. (2022). School built environments and bullying behaviour: A conceptual model based on qualitative interviews. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(23), 1–16.
- Freeman, C. (2020). Multiple methods beyond triangulation: Collage as a methodological framework in geography. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 102(4), 328–340.
- Gov.AU. (2023). *Changing rooms for gender diversity: An issues paper regarding gender identity discrimination in public facilities*. <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2023-02/Changing%20rooms%20for%20gender%20diversity%20issues%20paper%2002.23.pdf>
- Gov.UK. (2024). *The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/1943/made>
- Green, M. J., & Mierzwinski, M. F. (2025). A figurational analysis of secondary physical education gendered changing room procedures and practices in England. *European Physical Education Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x251326481>
- Haines Lyon, C., Little, A., Dobson, E., Glover, O., Patterson, J., Telford, J., & Noret, N. (2024). Toilet talk: Using a students as researchers approach to problematize and co-construct school toilet policy and practice. *Gender and Education*, 36(7), 801–816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2024.2389108>
- Huseth-Zosel, A. L., & Secor-Turner, M. (2022). Teacher perceptions of and experiences with student menstruation in the school setting. *Journal of School Health*, 92(2), 194–204.
- Ingrey, J. C. (2012). The public school washroom as analytic space for troubling gender: Investigating the spatiality of gender through students' self-knowledge. *Gender and Education*, 24(7), 799–817.
- Jones, C., & Slater, T. (2020). The toilet debate: Stalling trans possibilities and defending 'Women's protected spaces'. *The Sociological Review*, 68(4), 834–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934697>
- Jorgensen, C. S., Breinbjerg, A. S., Rittig, S., & Kamperis, K. (2021). Dissatisfaction with school toilets is associated with bladder and bowel dysfunction. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 180, 3317–3324.
- Kasule, D., Silo, N., & Seetso, G. T. (2017). Teachers' voices on school toilet sanitation. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 10(5), 520–532.
- Kellett, M. (2005). *How to develop children as researchers: A step by step guide to teaching the research process*. Sage.
- Kitstner, M. (2009). Dysfunctional elimination behaviours and associated complications in school-age children. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 25(2), 108–116.
- Lundblad, B., Berg, M., & Hellström, A. (2016). Teacher's attitudes and strategies when schoolchildren need to go to the toilet. *Journal of Health Science*, 4(2), 99–104.
- Lundblad, B., Hellström, A., & Berg, M. (2010). Children's experiences of attitudes and rules for going to the toilet in school. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 24(2), 219–223.
- Maxwell, L. E. (2000). A safe and welcoming school: What students, teachers, and parents think. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 17(4), 271–282.
- Michels, N., Van den Dussche, K., Walle, J. V., & De Henauw, S. (2019). School policy on drinking and toilets: Weaknesses and relation with children's hydration status. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 51(1), 32–40.
- Ngidi, N. D., & Moletsane, R. (2018). Bullying in school toilets: Experiences of secondary school learners in a South African township. *South African Journal of Education*, 38, 1588.
- Norling, M., Stenzelius, K., Ekman, N., & Wennick, A. (2016). High school students' experiences in school toilets or restrooms. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 32(3), 164–171.
- NSPCC. (2024). *Safeguarding LGBTQ+ children and young people*. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/lgbtq-children-young-people>
- Peng, Y., & Wu, W. (2023). Who would (not) use all-gender toilets... and why? A study on university students in Taiwan. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 30(2), 161–182.
- Reeves, L. M., Priest, P. C., & Poore, M. R. (2012). School toilets: Facilitating hand hygiene? A review of primary school hygiene facilities in a developed country? *Journal of Public Health*, 34(4), 483–488.
- Saleem, M., Burdett, T., & Heaslip, V. (2019). Health and social impacts of open defecation on women: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 19, 1–12.
- Senior, E. (2014). We love our school toilets: Involving primary school students in improving their school toilets. *Global Health Promotion*, 21(1), 23–28.
- SexMatters. (2022). *Sex and gender identity: Keep your pupils safe and comply with the law. Guidance for schools in England*. <https://sex-matters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Edited-schools-guidance-2022.pdf>
- Shao, T., Zhao, J., Hu, H., & Zhang, Q. (2021). Analysis of factors affecting students going to school toilets in a rural primary school in China. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 21–32.

- Shoham, D. A., Wang, Z., Lindberg, S., Chu, H., Brubaker, L., Brady, S. S., & Berry, A. (2020). School toileting environment, bullying, and lower urinary tract symptoms in a population of adolescent and young adult girls: Preventing Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms Consortium analysis of Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children. *Urology*, 151, 86–93.
- Slater, T., Jones, C., & Procter, L. (2018). School toilets: Queer, disabled bodies and gendered lessons of embodiment. *Gender and Education*, 30(8), 951–965.
- Tasoglu, S. (2022). Toilet-based continuous health monitoring using urine. *Nature Reviews Urology*, 19(4), 219–330.
- Tatlow-Golden, M., O'Farrelly, C., Booth, A., & Doyle, O. (2019). 'Bursting' to go and other experiences: Children's views on using the toilet in the first school year. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 33(3), 214–222.
- Toerien, M., & Wilkinson, S. (2004). Exploring the depilation norm: A qualitative questionnaire study of women's body hair removal. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1(1), 69–92. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088704qp0060a>
- Venkatapuram, P., Angulo-Lozano, J. C., Spinzi, S., Brown-Johnson, C., Phorod-Toy, A., & Kan, K. M. (2024). Parental knowledge, beliefs, practices, and barriers related to children's bladder health in school environments. *Journal of School Health*, 94(10), 965–974.
- Vernon, S., Lundbald, B., & Hellstrom, A. L. (2003). Children's experiences of school toilets present a risk to their physical and psychological health. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 29(1), 47–53.
- Yang, S., Chua, M. E., Bauer, S., Wright, A., Brandström, P., Noebeke, P., et al. (2018). Diagnosis and management of bladder bowel dysfunction in children with urinary tract infections: A position statement from the International Children's Continence Society. *Pediatric Nephrology*, 33, 2207–2219.
- Zemer, V. S., Cohen, H. A., Richenberg, Y., Gerstein, M., Atias, I., Gur, S., et al. (2023). Personal hygiene, environmental conditions, and toilet use of children in primary schools: A cohort study. *Journal of Pediatric Urology*, 19(6), 721–727.

How to cite this article: Green, M. J., Haines Lyon, C., Little, A. & Telford, J. (2025). Teachers', parents', and pupils' perceptions and described experiences of toilet provisions and practices within English schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4198>