



Health & Safety Update – April 2018

Changing Areas in Physical Education:

The afPE Health & Safety team are often asked questions about changing areas for PE and the item for this month's newsletter is centred on this topic.

Changing areas in PE need to ensure **dignity, decency and privacy** where needed be it for reasons of physical development or other individual needs.

The changing space should be **checked** regularly, before and during use, to ensure that:

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

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

Many **primary schools** lack purpose-built changing rooms but find spaces where the sexes, individuals or small groups can change separately. Preference expressed for separate sex areas regularly extends to students as young as the start of Key Stage 2. Schools should begin to consider how they can accommodate this safely by:

- using screens in a classroom to separate the room
- allowing one sex to change during a break time, if this occurs directly before the lesson
- using two different areas, such as a cloakroom and a classroom if supervision is available
- considering how appropriate changing areas might be provided in their long-term planning.

When changing, there is no statutory requirement for students to be **supervised** at all times. However, case law provides a clear indication that the incidence of injury is much higher when students are not supervised than when they are.

The degree and method of supervision will vary according to the particular circumstances, but age, behaviour, potential bullying, and safety aspects of the space itself will contribute to deciding whether constant direct supervision is necessary or intermittent direct supervision is safe. The location of the staff responsible for the group is of particular importance. It must be considered whether they can provide the level of supervision required while they are fulfilling their usual pre-lesson organisational tasks. Some schools use changing time as a positive part of the learning experience.

Remote supervision refers to a situation in which a member of staff responsible for a group of students is not directly present. This type of supervision may be implemented in appropriate circumstances where only one member of staff is available for changing-room supervision (e.g. in situations such as teaching mixed-gender groups). Remote supervision might involve tasking a reliable student with reporting any concerns in the changing area to the member of staff who is outside the changing area.

The suitability of remote supervision would be dependent on the location of the changing areas, student behaviour, age and ability. This method is only satisfactory when the member of staff remains on hand in the immediate vicinity outside the changing area to respond to any alert.

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

At **swimming pools**, separate school **changing areas** should be made available. Where this is not possible, and 'village style' changing areas are used, attendance at the pool at different times to the public may be requested. Failing this, schools should request that students are provided with a section of the changing area specifically for their use, away from that being used by the public.

Whatever the circumstances, changing rooms should be **adequately supervised**. Ideally, a male and female member of staff should accompany each mixed-gender class in order to fully supervise the changing areas. Staffing pressures may mean a known adult volunteer of the opposite gender is used. If this adult is unsupervised, disclosure and barring clearance would be required for this role with children in this situation. Where this level of staffing is not available, it may be possible to enlist the cooperation of pool staff to supervise the other changing room. This arrangement with the pool management needs to be assured and consistent. If only one suitable adult is available, they would need to establish procedures to deal with any emergency in the other changing room.

If these arrangements are not to the school's satisfaction, it may be necessary to combine classes and take single-gender groups, where appropriate staffing allows this. Adults supervising students need to be familiar with, and adhere to, the relevant safeguarding policies.

Further information on **changing provision** can be found in [Safe Practice in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity](#) in Chapter 2, Section 13.

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