



Department
for Education

Advice on standards for school premises

**For local authorities, proprietors, school
leaders, school staff and governing
bodies**

March 2015

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Summary

About this departmental advice

This is advice from the Department for Education. This advice is non-statutory, and has been produced to help recipients understand their obligations and duties in relation to the School Premises Regulations 2012, which came into force on 31 October 2012, and Part 5 of the revised Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010¹, which came into force on 1 January 2013.

Expiry or review date

This advice was updated in March 2015 to take account of changes to linked regulations and guidance. It will next be reviewed in May 2016, when the need for any further advice, or revisions to this advice, will be assessed.

Who is this advice for?

This advice is primarily for:

- Local authorities, proprietors, school leaders and governing bodies in all schools in England

It may also be useful for:

- School staff and parents
- Those involved in the design of school premises

Key points

- There are fewer regulations than previously and they are less prescriptive, allowing schools more flexibility in how they use their premises.
- Many regulations state that provision must be 'suitable'. This is not precisely defined, but schools must take into account the age, number and sex of pupils, and any special requirements they have, when determining whether provision is suitable.
- This guidance advises on how to meet the regulations. It also provides signposts to other, more general, premises related legislation and guidance of relevance to schools.

¹ As amended in 2012.

Standards for all Schools

This guidance describes, and advises on meeting the requirements of, the premises regulations for all types of schools in England. To aid clarity, the main regulations are included in a blue box before each piece of guidance.

Background

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on the Secretary of State to prescribe standards for the premises of all maintained schools in England and Wales². Those for England are set out in The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012 (SPRs) and they apply to all existing and new schools maintained by a local authority³.

Similarly, the Education Act 2002 empowers the Secretary of State to prescribe standards for the premises of independent schools, which include Academies (including alternative provision Academies) and Free Schools. These are set out in Part 5 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010⁴ (ISS).

While there continue to be two sets of school premises regulations in place, their requirements are now identical and all types of schools now have to meet the same standards. This guidance therefore applies to all types of schools in England.

Land and buildings covered by the regulations

A school's premises comprise all the land and all the buildings provided for the school, including both permanent and temporary buildings and detached playing fields.

Interpretation

Both sets of regulations include these clarifications of what is meant by the term "suitable" and what is meant by "special requirements".

"Any requirement that anything provided under these Regulations must be "suitable" means that it must be suitable for the pupils in respect of whom it is provided, having regard to their ages, numbers and sex and any special requirements they may have.

A pupil has "special requirements" if the pupil has any needs arising from physical, medical, sensory, learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties which require provision which is additional to or different from that generally required by children of the same age in schools other than special schools."

² The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 continue to apply to maintained schools in Wales.

³ The Regulations apply to nursery, community, community special, foundation, foundation special and voluntary schools and to pupil referral units.

⁴ As amended by the Alternative Provision Academies and 16 to 19 Academies (Consequential Amendments to Subordinate Legislation) (England) Order 2012 and the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012.

The Standards

Toilet and washing facilities

ISS Regulation 23A — (1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—

- a) suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils;
- b) separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over are provided except where the toilet facility is provided in a room that can be secured from the inside and that is intended for use by one pupil at a time; and
- c) suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.

(2) Where separate facilities are provided under sub-paragraph (1) (a) for pupils who are disabled, they may also be used by other pupils, staff, supply staff, volunteers and visitors, whether or not they are disabled.

SPRs Regulation 4 — (1) Subject to paragraph (3), suitable toilet and washing facilities must be provided for the sole use of pupils.

(2) Separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over must be provided except where the toilet facility is provided in a room that can be secured from the inside and that is intended for use by one pupil at a time.

(3) Where separate facilities are provided under paragraph (1) for pupils who are disabled, they may also be used by other pupils, teachers and others employed at the school, and visitors, whether or not they are disabled.

(4) Suitable changing accommodation and showers must be provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.

Numbers of fittings

The regulations do not set the minimum number of fittings to be provided in relation to the ages and numbers of pupils. Generally the needs of younger pupils are likely to be greater than those for older ones. So, for example, a provision of one toilet and washbasin for every ten pupils under 5 years old would be adequate, while that ratio could be doubled for pupils aged 5-11 to one toilet and washbasin for every 20 pupils. For pupils over 11 one toilet per 20 pupils would be sufficient, but there is scope to reduce the number of washbasins where the washing facilities are shared.

General planning

Toilet facilities need to be planned and designed so that:

- a) hand washing facilities are provided within or in the immediate vicinity of every toilet;
- b) the rooms containing them are adequately ventilated and lit;
- c) they are located in areas around the school that provide easy access for pupils and allow for informal supervision by staff, without compromising pupils' privacy.

Where there is unisex provision (under ISS 23A (1) (b) or SPR 4 (2)), the privacy of the occupant needs to be ensured and this will be achieved by, for example, having adequate enclosure and a full height door.

Facilities for disabled pupils

Each toilet for disabled pupils needs to contain one toilet and one washbasin (and possibly a shower or other wash down fitting) and have a door opening directly onto a circulation space that is not a staircase and which can be secured from the inside. Where possible, the number and location of accessible toilets will be sufficient to ensure a reasonable travel distance for users that does not involve changing floor levels⁵.

Changing accommodation and showers for pupils

It is preferable for showers to be in areas separated from toilets and they need to provide adequate privacy. Consideration may also be given to providing changing rooms, with or without showers, at primary schools for pupils who need to wear sports kit for physical education, but this is not required under the regulations.

Toilets and washing facilities or staff

Toilets and washing facilities for staff⁶ may be also be used by visitors. They should be separate from those provided for pupils, except where they are designed for use by those who are disabled.

⁵ The requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations will be satisfied if any wheelchair user does not have to travel more than 40m horizontally to reach an accessible toilet. With young pupils the travel distance may need to be less.

⁶ Regulations 20 and 21 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 set out the standards for staff toilets and washing facilities.

Medical accommodation

ISS Regulation 23B —(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including—

- (a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
- (b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility; and
- (c) where a school caters for pupils with complex needs, additional medical accommodation which caters for those needs.

(2) The accommodation provided under sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purposes set out in sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b).

(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(c), a pupil has “complex needs” if the pupil has profound and multiple learning difficulties in addition to other significant difficulties, such as a physical disability or sensory impairment, which require provision which is additional to or different from that generally required by children of the same age in schools other than special schools or by children with special requirements.

SPRs Regulation 5 — (1) Suitable accommodation must be provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including accommodation for —

- (a) the medical examination and treatment of pupils; and
- (b) the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.

(2) The accommodation provided under paragraph (1) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purpose set out in paragraph (1).

(3) Where a school caters for pupils with complex needs, additional medical accommodation must be provided which caters for those needs.

(4) For the purposes of this regulation, a pupil has “complex needs” if the pupil has profound and multiple learning difficulties in addition to other significant difficulties, such as a physical disability or sensory impairment, which require provision which is additional to or different from that generally required by children of the same age in schools other than special schools or by children with special requirements.

The requirements for medical and therapy rooms enable pupils that are ill or injured to be looked after appropriately, and for therapy to be offered to those with special educational needs or disabilities who need it. In mainstream schools this may involve assistance from visiting specialists, such as a physiotherapist or speech therapist.

Some therapy can take place in a teaching space or in a small quiet room, such as an office. The dedicated accommodation can be used for other purposes, except teaching, so long as it is readily available for medical use when needed.

In special schools a range of facilities will typically be required to suit different therapy options. A school catering for children with complex needs will also need to provide a nurse's room and a physiotherapy room, while some therapies require specially equipped rooms. Some special school pupils will require access to a hydrotherapy or warm water pool. Specialist advice will be needed on these facilities.

Health, safety and welfare

ISS Regulation 23C — The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

SPRs Regulation 6 — School premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein must be maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

These regulations are specifically about maintaining school premises so that the health, safety and welfare needs of pupils are safeguarded. There is also a substantial amount of other health and safety legislation that applies to most buildings, including schools.

General health and safety

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA), and regulations made under it, are aimed at securing the health, safety and welfare of employees (e.g. teachers and other school staff). They also aim to protect others (e.g. pupils and school visitors) against risks to their health and safety (but not welfare) arising from the activities of a work undertaking. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 expand on the HSWA and aim to ensure that workplaces meet the health, safety and welfare needs of a workforce (e.g. school staff) and cover most spaces in schools. They cover a range of requirements such as for heating, ventilation, cleanliness, workstations, seating and welfare facilities.

Fire safety

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires schools to undertake risk assessments to identify the general fire precautions needed to safeguard the safety of occupants in case of fire, including their safe means of escape. These will include ensuring procedures are in place to reduce the likelihood of fire, maintaining fire

detection and alarm systems, and familiarising staff and pupils with emergency evacuation procedures. These risk assessments will need updating if any significant changes to the premises or their use takes place.

Pupils with special educational needs

The Equalities Act 2010 requires all schools to prepare and implement an accessibility strategy to improve the physical environment of the school for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). This should include consideration of their particular health and safety needs on the school premises and how these can be met.

Building work

The Building Regulations 2010 apply to most buildings in England and Wales. They set standards which are mainly to ensure the safety and health of people in or around buildings, but also cover energy conservation and accessibility. They apply to the construction of new schools and to many alterations of, and improvements to, existing school buildings.

Acoustics

ISS Regulation 23D — The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the acoustic conditions and sound insulation of each room or other space are suitable, having regard to the nature of the activities which normally take place therein.

SPRs Regulation 7 — The acoustic conditions and sound insulation of each room or other space must be suitable, having regard to the nature of the activities which normally take place therein.

In a school with a good acoustic environment, people will experience:

- good sound quality – enabling people to hear clearly, understand and concentrate on whatever activity they are involved in;
- minimal disturbance from unwanted noise (such as from activities in adjacent areas, teaching equipment, ventilation fans or road traffic).

In classrooms, class bases and other areas used for teaching, this will allow teachers to communicate without straining their voices. In some types of spaces, such as music rooms, recording studios, open-plan areas and rooms where pupils with hearing impairment are taught, there are additional requirements that may require higher acoustic standards than those for normal class bases.

Acoustic conditions

[“Acoustic Design of Schools”](#)⁷ sets out performance standards in terms of:

- a. adequate sound insulation of internal walls and floors to minimise disturbance from sound generated in adjacent areas;
- b. appropriate reverberation times (RT) to suit the teaching and other activities planned to take place in each space. Reverberation time measures how ‘echoey’ a particular room is. A relatively short RT is needed in most teaching spaces not only to ensure that speech, including teachers’ voices, is clearly heard and understood, but also to control the build-up of occupancy speech noise. Some spaces, for example some types of music room, require a longer RT;
- c. suitable indoor ambient noise levels to enable clear communication. A part of the way to achieve this is to minimise disturbance from external noise by ensuring adequate sound insulation of the building. Suitable indoor ambient noise levels will vary depending on the activity taking place. Some noise sensitive activities, such as listening to music or learning a language, are less tolerant of background noise, as are rooms used for teaching pupils with hearing impairment and some other special educational needs; and
- d. adequate speech intelligibility in open plan areas to avoid disturbance from adjacent activities and to ensure that the wanted speech can be understood.

Requirement E4⁸ will be satisfied if performance standards a – c are met. School buildings are subject to detailed design checks by Building Control Bodies to ensure compliance with this requirement. Acoustic tests can be carried out on any new school accommodation to demonstrate that performance standards a – c are achieved⁹.

Management issues

Good management is needed to ensure that the acoustics of each area remains suitable for its use. For example, a lack of maintenance can lead to deterioration in acoustic conditions.

Pupils with special educational needs

Pupils with special needs may need to be taught in spaces with lower noise levels and shorter reverberation times than in mainstream classrooms and class bases. Special schools and SEN units in mainstream schools therefore require designing to a higher

⁷ An update of Building Bulletin 93, which was published in December 2014.

⁸ From Part E of schedule 1 to The Building Regulations 2010 (as amended).

⁹ See “Good Practice Guide for Acoustic Testing of Schools”, Association of Noise Consultants, 2011.

acoustic standard. Where pupils with these special needs are taught in mainstream schools, the acoustics of the spaces where they are taught may need to be enhanced to the same standards as those in special units. Provision will usually be required to teach these pupils in smaller groups so that ambient noise from other pupils is lower and the distance between teacher and pupil is minimised.

Lighting

ISS Regulation 23E — The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—

- (a) the lighting in each room or other internal space is suitable, having regard to the nature of the activities which normally take place therein; and
- (b) external lighting is provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises.

SPRs Regulation 8 — (1) The lighting in each room or other internal space must be suitable, having regard to the nature of the activities which normally take place therein.

(2) External lighting must be provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises.

For lighting to be suitable, attention needs to be paid to:

- achieving adequate light levels, including the lighting of teachers' and pupils' faces for good visual communication;
- giving priority to daylight in all teaching spaces, circulation, staff offices and social areas;
- providing adequate views to the outside or into the distance to ensure visual comfort and help avoid eye strain;
- providing lighting controls that are easy to use;
- providing means to control daylight and sunlight, to avoid glare, excessive internal illuminance and summertime overheating;
- providing external lighting to ensure safe pedestrian movement after dark;
- floodlighting outdoor sports areas;
- providing emergency lighting in areas accessible after dark.

Further guidance on lighting in schools can be found in Lighting Guide 5, "Lighting for Education" (LG5), and British Standard BS EN 12464-1.

Lighting for pupils with special educational needs

Pupils with special educational needs, including visual impairment and other disabilities, may have additional lighting requirements¹⁰ and specialist advice may be needed. Key points include:

- colour and contrast, which can help people locate doors and their handles, stairs and steps, switches and socket outlets, etc.;
- glare should be avoided (including from high gloss finishes that can appear as glare sources when they reflect bright lights);
- use of light sources such as high frequency fluorescent luminaires to avoid subliminal flicker that can induce epileptic fits in susceptible pupils;
- large areas of glazing should be clearly marked to avoid accidents¹¹;
- additional local task lighting may be needed.

Water supplies

ISS Regulation 23F — (1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—

(a) suitable drinking water facilities are provided;

(b) toilets and urinals have an adequate supply of cold water and washing facilities have an adequate supply of hot and cold water;

(c) cold water supplies that are suitable for drinking are clearly marked as such; and

(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.

(2) The facilities provided under sub-paragraph (1)(a) will be suitable only if—

(a) they are readily accessible at all times when the premises are in use; and

(b) they are in a separate area from the toilet facilities.

¹⁰ For example, see “Building Sight”, Peter Barker, Jon Barrick, Rod Wilson, RNIB, ISBN 011 701 993 3, HMSO, 1995.

¹¹ Building Regulations AD N, Glazing – “safety in relation to impact”, opening and cleaning, applies.

- SPRs Regulation 9** — (1) Suitable drinking water facilities must be provided.
- (2) The facilities provided under paragraph (1) will only be suitable if —
- (a) they are readily accessible at all times when the premises are in use; and
 - (b) they are in a separate area from the toilet facilities.
- (3) Toilets and urinals must have an adequate supply of cold water and washing facilities must have an adequate supply of hot and cold water.
- (4) Cold water supplies that are suitable for drinking must be clearly marked as such.
- (5) The temperature of hot water at the point of use must not pose a scalding risk to users.

Drinking water facilities need to be maintained in good working order and kept clean and the outlets need to be clearly marked 'drinking water'. Tanked supplies can be difficult to maintain in good condition, and so it is generally preferable if drinking water supplies in schools can be connected directly to the cold water main.

Water supplies for other uses

To avoid the risk of scalding, 43°C is generally the maximum temperature for hot water in baths and showers, and in all cases where the occupants are severely disabled. It is also good practice to limit hot water supplies to washbasins in nursery and primary schools to 43°C.

Distribution temperatures and legionella controls need to comply with HSE guidance on managing legionella in hot and cold water systems.

Outdoor space

- ISS Regulation 23G** — (1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable—
- (a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and
 - (b) pupils to play outside.
- (2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply in relation to an alternative provision Academy.

SPRs Regulation 10 — (1) Suitable outdoor space must be provided in order to enable—

- (a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and
- (b) pupils to play outside.

(2) This regulation does not apply to pupil referral units.

Physical education (PE) includes the playing of games. There are two types of outdoor space used for PE, sports pitches and hard surfaced games courts. Sports pitches, grass and/or all-weather, are used for team games such as football, hockey and cricket, and for athletics. Games courts are for sports such as netball and tennis and are usually provided as a multi-use games area, with additional courts in larger schools. Outdoor space is also needed for informal play and socialising, and this is usually both hard and soft surfaced.

On-site and off-site provision

Schools often need to maximise the use of their sites in order to provide the variety of spaces needed. Advice on the sizes of spaces can be found in the [area guidelines](#)¹². Some schools will be on restricted sites and will not have enough outdoor space to meet requirements. In these situations pupils will need to be provided with access to suitable off-site provision.

Protection of school playing fields

Playing fields at maintained schools are protected under section 77 of the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. Playing fields at Academies, where the land is owned by the local authority (and, as is usually the case, is leased to the Academy) and has been used as a playing field in the last 10 years, are also protected.

Other legislation on school premises

The [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) sets standards for pupils under the age of 5 at both maintained and independent schools. It includes requirements for premises, such as minimum space standards and the provision of toilets and wash basins.

The [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), in force from 1 January 2013, cover requirements for boarding accommodation at all mainstream boarding schools for all age groups of pupils up to 18. There is a separate set of national minimum standards for residential special schools.

¹² “Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools”: Building Bulletin 103.

Further sources of information

Associated resources (external links)

- [The Workplace \(Health, Safety and Welfare\) Regulations 1992](#)
- [The Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
- [The Equalities Act 2010](#)
- [The Building Regulations 2010](#)
- [HSE Guidance on Managing Legionella](#)

Other departmental advice and guidance you may be interested in

- [Departmental advice on health and safety](#)



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