

Top tips for Primary School Ofsted Inspectors: A guide for what to consider and look out for when assessing settings with regards to the management of issues relating to continence (bladder and bowel health) and toileting.

Introduction:

It is very important that education settings understand bladder and bowel difficulties and issues faced by children and young people. When measures are put in place to support learners and good practice is combined with timely and sensitive management by education staff, children will benefit from a positive experience of education and attain their full potential.

How many children are affected?

- Over 900,000 children in the UK experience continence difficulties (day and night wetting, constipation and soiling)
- Increasing numbers of children starting school each year still in nappies without having fully mastered bladder and bowel control
- Almost a third of children will suffer with constipation
- Many children continue to have issues with continence in the long term. Some have difficulties into adulthood
- Continence difficulties in childhood are sometimes assumed to be as a result of disability, behavioural issues, or ineffective parenting. This is rarely the case however

The impact on children and young people:

- The 'fear of being found out', embarrassment and stigma associated with bladder and bowel issues can have a lasting impact on a child's learning, development and quality of life
- A lack of awareness amongst health and education professionals and poor management of issues negatively affects many learners' experience of school
- Affected children and young people are at high risk of bullying and withdrawing from social situations
- Continence difficulties may also be associated with behavioural or psychological problems, poor self-image and peer victimisation
- [Research by the University of Bristol](#) has found that teenagers with incontinence are at greater risk of underachieving academically and need more support to remove barriers so they can reach their academic potential
- Frequent toilet trips mean that young people often miss time during lessons or exams
- Time off for medical appointments, sick days and repeated toilet trips during lessons risks young people falling behind in class
- Reduced concentration due to anxiety about needing to use the toilet can affect exam performance

Bowel and bladder health in primary school aged children

- Children should open their bowels three times a day to three times a week.
- Younger children may require prompting to use the toilet particularly after lunch
- Both bladder capacity and awareness increase as children get older. Beyond the age of 5 years, children usually void 5-7 times a day
- Those who continue to have problems with bladder control when they are 4 - 9 years old are at increased risk of ongoing continence problems in adolescence

TOP TIPS – what to look out for when assessing a Primary School setting:

- ✓ Children must not be refused admission to a setting due to continence difficulties
- ✓ Children who are known to have continence difficulties should be offered a care plan, to ensure their individual needs are met in school
- ✓ School should have a clear and discreet procedure for pupils to disclose continence problems
- ✓ Regular drinking should be promoted throughout the school day. Water is ideal but suitable alternatives should be allowed. Children should be having half their daily fluid intake in school hours
- ✓ Parents should not be expected to come to school to change their children
- ✓ Children should have access to clean, well-stocked toilets at intervals appropriate to the needs of the individual child
- ✓ School toilet facilities should allow privacy and must include bins for continence waste for boys and girls
- ✓ Schools should have a clear policy for appropriate use of toilet/medical cards during class and ensure that supply teachers are made aware
- ✓ Staff should be aware of how a change in routine such as moving to a new class and using a different toilet can potentially affect a child with bladder and bowel difficulties
- ✓ Education settings should be aware of bladder and bowel conditions and their role in supporting affected children. All school staff need education/information about continence problems in young people in order to provide appropriate support

Further Resources and more information

[Managing continence issues in nurseries, schools and colleges](#) – best practice guidance produced by [Bladder and Bowel UK](#) and [ERIC, The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity](#)

University of Bristol Policy Report: [Young people with continence problems need better support at secondary school](#)

Managing Continence Issues in Secondary Schools - short film: <https://youtu.be/QHBIjlsSjPI>