

# Improving the Scottish School Estate Research

## Pupil Focus Groups *Report*



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## **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

Audit Scotland is undertaking a study to review the effectiveness of improvements to the Scottish School Estate. Professional assessments have been undertaken at a sample of 20 schools. It is important also to actually speak to the people using the school buildings on a daily basis, namely the pupils and the school staff, in order to specifically examine the difference that the investment is making to the quality of the learning and teaching environment. In simple terms we need to find out what pupils and school staff think about their school building.

George Street Research was commissioned to undertake this element of the work, using a self completion survey approach for school staff and focus groups amongst pupils. The objectives were to:

- find out what pupils and school staff think about the quality of their new/refurbished school buildings as learning and teaching environments;
- develop an understanding of what matters most to them about their school building; and
- identify what they think are the best and worst features of their new/refurbished school buildings.

Design guidance provided by the Scottish Executive<sup>1</sup> identified the following ten features of a well designed school building:

1. Good, clear organisation, a clear plan and full accessibility
2. Spaces that are well proportioned, efficient, fit for purpose and meet the needs of users

3. Circulation that is well organised and sufficiently generous
4. Good environmental conditions throughout, including appropriate levels of natural light and ventilation
5. Attractiveness in design, comparable to that found in other quality public buildings
6. Good use of the site, and public presence as a civic building
7. Attractive external spaces with a good relationship to internal spaces and offering appropriate security and a variety of different settings
8. A layout that encourages broad community access and use out of hours, where appropriate
9. Robust materials that are attractive, that will weather and were well and that are environmentally friendly
10. Flexible design that will facilitate changes in policy and technology and which allows expansion or contraction in the future, where appropriate

Features 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are within the scope of this study and are covered in this report.

There were two elements to this study: a self completion survey amongst teachers and other staff and a series of focus groups amongst pupils. This report presents the findings of the pupil focus groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Executive 'School Design – Building our Future: Scotland's School Estate (2003)  
07-08-27 Geo St Res Pupil Focus Groups Report

## **METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE**

A qualitative research approach was used for pupils, allowing the opportunity to explore concepts and views in depth, get pupils thinking and working together and get children and young people to expand on their ideas and identify key issues of importance to them that could otherwise be missed.

The sample schools were selected by Audit Scotland to ensure a mix of rural and urban locations, new and refurbished (PFI and non-PFI) buildings and smaller and larger schools. The sample is described in Table 1.

**Table 1      Sample**

	<b>School</b>	<b>Building</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>Primary</b>	Strathdearn Primary School	New '02	PFI
	Masterton Primary School	New '06	PFI
	St Maria Goretti Primary School	New '06	Non-PFI
	Uphall Primary School	Refurb '04	Non-PFI
	Dunbar Primary School	Refurb '01	Non-PFI
<b>Secondary</b>	Drumchapel High School	New '02	PFI
	Knox Academy	Refurb '05	PFI
	Whitburn Academy	Refurb '02	PFI
	Williamwood High School	New '05	PFI
	Mearns Castle High	Refurb '01	Non-PFI

## **Pupil Groups**

Two focus groups were conducted in each of the 10 sample schools, a total of 20 pupil groups. Groups contained between 6 and 10 pupils and each group reflected the gender mix of the year groups. The sample for the focus groups was as follows:

<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
Strathdearn Primary School, Tomatin,	P4	P6
Masterton Primary School, Dunfermline	P4	P6
St Maria Goretti Primary School, Glasgow	P3	P6
Uphall Primary School, West Lothian	P5	P7
Dunbar Primary School, East Lothian	P5	P7

  

<b>Secondary Schools</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
Drumchapel High School, Glasgow	S1	S6
Knox Academy, Haddington, East Lothian	S4	S6
Whitburn Academy, West Lothian	S3	S5
Williamwood High School, E.Renfrewshire	S3	S6
Mearns Castle High, East Renfrewshire	S2	S4

Groups were held in the schools, during the school day and were organised through the schools. Copies of the topic guides are appended to this report.

The focus groups were audio recorded for subsequent transcription and moderators' notes and material generated by the pupils during the groups were collected and used to contextualise the analysis. Unfortunately, in two of schools the rooms provided did not have great acoustics and the sound recordings have not been of sufficient enough quality to produce specific quotations, although the findings from these schools were included from moderator notes and recollections.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

These findings are all the result of pupil focus groups. They report the reality as perceived by the pupils at the schools, although we do recognise that not all their “facts” may be accurate or up to date.

### **Overall ratings**

Generally, pupils’ overall ratings of their school building were very positive; few would rate their school building less than 7 out of 10. All the respondents at Maria St. Gorretti gave their school building 10 out of 10 and at the other schools scores ranged between 7 and 10. Most pupils notice improvements in their environment compared to their old school building. The only exception was Dunbar primary School which attracted several ratings of only 4 out of 10; the old parts of the school building were rated very poorly and the new parts a little better.

*The insides of the classrooms are a lot better now.*

Uphall Primary

*I think we’re all really really lucky we’ve got a really good well equipped school*

Williamwood High

Favourite places in the school building tend to reflect what pupils do there. For primary school pupils, this is usually activity related – art or music room/space, playground, “Astroturf” pitch, dining hall. In secondary schools it is more influenced by where pupils socialise. Designated social areas are mentioned frequently, but other spaces also feature and one group of girls even said their favourite place was the particular toilets they have claimed as their social space.

*The ones there – they’re kind of like where everybody meets up. It’s our kind of group and we all like ‘that’s our toilet’ if someone goes in*



*and we're there they go away - it's 'our toilet'. It's quite funny.....It's nicer than the other ones; it's got like the window and stuff.*

Knox Academy

At Whitburn Academy, the library tends to be used as social space and is a favourite for this reason.

*And there's like a big group of seats in there and you can just go in and sit if you've nothing else to do.*

*Aye, there's like tables where you can all sit but round in a circle and talk....*

Whitburn Academy

Favourite buildings or places in general tend to be based on how they look and/or what is done there: for example, in Haddington, the Bridge Centre, a community centre with lot of facilities and activities for young people, in particular music space. But children also appreciate good and interesting architecture, both modern and older.

*It's a place where a lot of folk hang out. There's a pool table and we practice and do gigs there or whatever.*

Knox Academy

*The Armadillo in Glasgow 'cos it looks like an armadillo.  
I like the Eiffel Tower.*

Knox Academy

*Linlithgow Palace is a nice building....It looks nice on the outside.*

Whitburn Academy

In refurbished schools, the contrast with new parts of the school building impacts negatively on views of the state of the older parts and generally pupils would like to see some improvements to the older parts, which are shabby and generally not well maintained.

*I think it would be easier to learn; I would be so much happier, if it was brighter and stuff. Like. . totally depress you!*

Knox Academy

At Dunbar Primary in particular there are several examples of poor linking between the old and new, and the older parts of the building seem to be in a particularly poor state of repair.

One respondent had a different perspective:

*I don't really think they should do up the old parts of the school because we've got all this modern technology. . .but it gives the school some history and some new things to learn about the history of the school and all that.*

Knox Academy

And in the new Williamwood High School (seen by some as dull, bland and characterless) there was some sense of nostalgia for their old building.

*There was something about the old school – I thought it was not very nice and it was scabby but I still loved it.  
I'd rather be in my old school but if they did it up a bit.  
If they put an extension onto it or something.*

Williamwood High

## **Internal spaces**

### ***Space and temperature***

Temperature and space are the key features children talk about when discussing internal spaces. Rooms they like are described as 'spacious', 'clean' 'cool' and 'bright' .

*It's like really big and [our teacher] has decorated it all nice and everything.*

Masterton Primary

*It's clean  
Yeah it's always tidy  
It's clean and tidy  
Its not too many people in all the classrooms  
It's not cramped  
Is quite spacious*

Strathdearn Primary

Conversely, where pupils don't like particular spaces, size/feeling cramped in or being too hot tend to be the main reasons they give. And when discussing where are good and not so good places to sit in a classroom, children most often mention temperature and the inability to control it as an issue.

*Yeah, I'm right beside a radiator so I don't really like it...It doesn't turn.  
[off].The lights go off when it's too light... They're automatic lights.*

Masterton Primary

*Sometimes where me and [my friend] sit right next to the window it can  
get kinda drafty or if it it's really sunny it can get really warm.  
Yeah, there's three windows and us three are in front of them facing  
away but your back gets all sweaty.*

Strathdearn Primary

*You see in chemistry you have to sit at the back of the classroom it's  
too warm  
In English it's the opposite coz you have to sit down at the front or the  
sun shines on the board and you can't see it*

Williamwood High

In some school buildings, where the windows and blinds can be easily operated by pupils and staff, these problems can generally be overcome. However, children are quick to point out that they cannot control the heating satisfactorily in their classrooms and in every school building we visited, overheating was mentioned as an issue.

*[The heater] doesn't switch off till night time so it's on the rest of the  
day apart from night time so it can get really warm especially when the  
sun is shining as well as the heater being on.*

Strathdearn Primary

At Williamwood High, pupils talked about being too hot in most classrooms and did not feel that the problem could be simply addressed by opening windows.

*They don't open much, and it's a hassle to open them. It's like a big stick downstairs.*

Williamwood High

In Masterton Primary School the children talked about having to change the number of groups they were taught in because the room was not big enough to have four groups of tables.

*We had to get rid of a group cos there wasn't enough room in the classroom for the four.....there wasn't enough room for three tables.*

Masterton Primary

In some schools, even where pupils described classrooms as spacious and noted that there was plenty of storage, occasionally they find they do not have enough space on their tables to accommodate all the books, paper or other things they need for some subjects – maths was mentioned in Strathearn Primary School, for example and others talked about having to write at an angle because of insufficient desk space. Ad hoc problems with being able to see the teacher were also mentioned occasionally; for example when doing art in Masterton Primary School.

Pupils in most schools gave examples illustrating lack of sufficient space in classrooms, though there was often discussion about whether the classrooms were actually too small, or whether it was simply a matter of using the space more effectively.

*And the spaces are a big thing as well...like the seats are too close together so you can't like move. Because I want to push my chair back*

*so I've got like space but I'll hit the table behind me so the person behind will get annoyed.*

Knox Academy

*There's a wall beside where my desk is and when I try to stand up I normally can't stand up because of the way my table is, and the wall is right beside me, so... All the paintwork has been all scratched off from me and previous people sitting there.*

*I just think we need a classroom arrangement. It's quite arranged, it's quite orderly, but I think if we changed around that certain piece of furniture, I think we'd all be able to get out a bit better.*

Masterton Primary

At Dunbar Primary School, there are problems with space in the school building in general. There are not enough classrooms and pupils talk about having to do maths in the dinner hall, which has obvious impacts on learning.

*It's not just the classrooms that we're in, it's also the dinner hall that we go in for Maths. It gets bad, very messy... People throw food everywhere.*

*And there's a big freezer and it's sort of taps and that. And it makes funny noises....when they're cleaning up and putting the chairs on the tables and sweeping it, there's lots of noise.*

Dunbar Primary

### ***Other classroom features and facilities***

Generally pupils have a preference for lots of colour and variety in their surroundings and while this is achieved in all the primary schools we visited, in some secondary schools, notably Drumchapel, and Williamwood, the classrooms are viewed as being characterless and all looking the same.

*All the classrooms look the same and boring colours*

Drumchapel High

Light is also mentioned as an important feature of a good classroom and the environmental benefits of automatic lights are appreciated (sometimes mischievously!) and mentioned often by the children.

*The good thing about the toilets is the lights are automatic when the doors opens, they go on, and everyone tries to open the door and see how far they go in without the lights going on.*

Strathdearn P4

*That's like saving energy.  
Yeah, it's good. Good stuff, good stuff.*

Williamwood High

*I think windows are quite important because it gives a freshness to a room. The light I think as well, because some of the classrooms are a lot darker than the rest and it doesn't make you want to work.*

Knox Academy

*When they do flash off there's enough light coming in through the window.*

Masterton Primary

In some refurbished schools (probably more accurately described as extended schools) there are notable differences between the old and new parts of the school building. For example, in Dunbar Primary, classrooms in the old part of the school building are too small and have no wall or door on one side and the pupils find these spaces both noisy and distracting to work in. Classrooms in the old part of the school building also have various other problems, such as leaking sinks, rickety or ill fitting furniture, and there is a sense of injustice surrounding this. Those taught in classrooms in the old part of the school building feel it is unfair.

Some facilities have been introduced to all classrooms as part of the refurbishment, but do not work effectively in the older rooms.

So have all the classrooms got those new projectors...?  
*Yeah...! [unison]*

*Some of them only have stands.*

*I know but also: we were in [our teacher's] classroom which has the projector working, and we were watching our films that we'd made, and there was a top bit about that big that had been cut off because the boards didn't go high enough.*

Dunbar Primary

Noise is another feature often cited. At most schools, there was some mention of noise from adjoining or nearby classrooms

*But when you're down in the library and there's music...it's really loud and it gets disturbing because you're trying to read a book, to find out what it's about.*

Dunbar Primary

*There's always noise form next classroom and scraping chairs – also smells - experiments in Biology and they're burning acids and things – you can smell it!*

*You can hear people's voices from there, five classrooms down, you can hear somebody shouting.*

Williamwood High

### **Facilities outside the classrooms**

In both new and refurbished schools, it was clear that pupils recognise and genuinely appreciate improvements in the facilities they have for PE and sport, describing some of their facilities as 'amazing' and 'really huge'.

*There's the big PE hall and there's a small gym thing in another room. It's really good.*

Knox Academy

*We do have good equipment for gym that's all really good.*

Dunbar Primary

*And it's got quite a high ceiling so if you're like playing like tennis or something it won't like always bounce off the ceiling.*

Strathdearn Primary

*You can take it down and slide down and make it bigger, and like, there's loads of resources. We've even got hurdles.*

Masterton Primary

*In the gym hall I like the basketball nets, the big ones that are up on the wall because they're like, yeah for the backboards. They give you a taste of the real basketball, not just these wee netball nets that other schools use.*

*It's just a big area where you can, you can really do your sport, really good games.*

*And when you're playing basketball...*

*Yes! It's either you have four small games, or you have one big game because there's mechanical systems for bringing a full court.*

Williamwood High

In Dunbar Primary, the extra space that has been created by extending the gym hall has made a big difference. However, the shortage of space in the school building means that sometimes two classes are taught in the gym hall at a time, which can be distracting, though pupils believe a wall is to be built, that will improve matters.

*It's because they only have a curtain that goes across but when they have the wall it will be much quieter. And we have to go outside and then the class stays in the gym hall and then the teacher had to come back and get them.*

Dunbar Primary

There are issues arising from the fact that the old half of the hall has not been brought up to the standard of the new bit. In the old half there are broken floorboards and problems with lack of storage space.

*The gym hall is one of the only good bits of the school – but [our teacher] always yells at us, 'mind the broken floorboards' because there's broken floorboard literally which goes like that... and like that, there's this mega-big hole.*

Dunbar Primary

*They have this stage at the back but it's got a whole load of stuff in it, and when they're doing plays on it you've got to move all this stuff into one corner, which is really annoying...But there's no cupboard to put it in...*

Dunbar Primary



*I liked the new foam in the PE hall because you don't burn yourself if you skid across the floor.*

Uphall Primary

Some facilities are seen as pointless or redundant for school use. This is the case wherever showers are provided and there were several stories about mishaps and mis-behaviour in relation to showers, usually resulting in them being kept locked.

*We never use the showers... Oh remember that time [xxx] leaned against it and it went on...!*

Masterton P4

*The little girls before the showers were locked, they used to run and push it and then run back out and the teacher was cross cos they used up some of the water in the school.*

Strathdearn P4

In general pupils could not see the point in there being showers in their changing rooms since they are never allowed any time to have one, and would not particularly choose to anyway. So showers, where they are provided are viewed as a waste of space (although in some cases they may be used by community groups using the facilities, pupils did not comment on this).

Facilities for changing are appreciated where they have been provided, though they are sometimes not large enough.

*...it's quite cramped when everybody's got their stuff. We've got lockers in there but we don't use them because the keys haven't come. The actual changing room needs more space. There's like four classes so it's like there's loads of people. So people are putting their clothes on the floor.*

Knox Academy

Where there are no changing facilities and children have to change in the toilets, there are additional problems.

*Well we have to get changed in the classroom.  
Or the toilets.  
There's not enough toilets to change in.  
And the toilets are all wet on the floor and everything*

Dunbar Primary

Most pupils are happy with the amount of provision in the toilets, cloakrooms and changing areas, though there are a few mentions of insufficient facilities. For example in the girls cloakrooms in Strathdearn Primary, there are no spare pegs and this can mean cramped conditions at times when lots of pupils are accessing the space at once. It will also become a problem if the school role increases at all. Boys felt there were not enough sinks in their bathroom.

*I would say you need a few more taps in the boys because before lunch you have to wash your hands and people are just standing there waiting for a tap.*

Strathdearn P4

Also in Strathdearn, ceiling tiles in the toilets lift in the draft when the door is opened. In other schools there were similar examples of fixtures that do not work as effectively as they could. For example, taps that stay on for too long filling up and splashing over sinks that are too small to cope with the pressure, or toilet seats that are too low down.

Girls in both Williamwood and Mearns Castle commented that the mirrors in their toilets were 'wonky' producing a distorted image and causing considerable annoyance and inconvenience.

*I don't know why they have those kind of mirrors...  
I know, it's funny.  
It's so stupid!  
Like a house of mirrors.*

Williamwood High

In refurbished school buildings the state of the toilets in older parts was not up to the same standard as newer parts of the building. Some were described as 'shocking' 'smelly' 'minging' and so on and were often in a poor state of repair.

*Right, the one on the right, they don't get put on properly, right, so it's like falling off; the lid is falling off and then there's bits snapped off... It's just a nightmare... The toilets in the new part of the school are fine, but the toilets in the old part of the school aren't so good.*

Dunbar Primary

Libraries are cited as favourite spaces in several school buildings, largely because they are spacious and comfortable as well as often cooler than classrooms and other areas. In some schools access to the library is limited by booking systems.

*We've got computers and that at the back, so it is quite spacious, 'cos we had like something like – I can't remember – a thousand and fifty books on the shelf.*

*The library's bigger than the classroom!*

Masterton Primary

Music rooms are also much liked, though in Dunbar Primary the music room is described as too hot and too small, with unused tables taking up space and not enough room for the orchestra to fit in, even if they took the tables out.

*It's quite good, 'cos we get like drum-kits and guitars and everything and in the old school there was really nothing, except for maybe a piano!*

Masterton Primary

There is some frustration about lovely new facilities that pupils feel they don't get to use, for example the recording studio at Williamwood High and some PE or athletics facilities in various schools.

The medical room at Masterton primary was highly praised.

*Oh it's wicked. You've got a wheelchair and a shower and a toilet ... There's two rooms and there's one of those beds and you've got blankets and everything.*

Masterton Primary

In contrast, the medical room at Dunbar Primary is not considered big enough and pupils gave examples of it being inadequate, particularly when under pressure during events such as sports day.

In Williamwood the more open plan arts space (with high partitions, rather than walls, between classes and one side completely open) is not liked.

*It's all the Arts teachers wondering around relaxed, but because . .so we don't like it. .and things and it was so warm and it was really noisy so you can't concentrate on anything.*

Williamwood High

Also in Williamwood, the main PE hall converts to a theatre, seen as a great idea that hasn't worked as well as it might have. Because it takes several hours for the conversion, the room tends to be set up as a theatre for quite long periods of time, meaning that the PE facilities suffer. Although there are two other halls, they are not as large and not suitable for some activities.

*I take PE as a subject and we had basketball for six weeks, so if you can't get into the gym hall you're missing out on your subject for your exam.*

*Actually. . .when it came to it, yeah. It's not really a good idea when it's put into practice, like the half-theatre, half-gymnasium. It's not really worked.*

Williamwood High

### **Assembly and social space**

In pupils' views space for school assemblies and for social use during break and lunchtimes is the feature that has probably been least successfully addressed in the design of both new and refurbished schools. In primary schools, playgrounds are generally of a good size and appropriately equipped, apart from lack of seating, and serve as the key social space.

In secondary schools, pupils believed that the playground appears not to have been considered at all. For example, at the Knox Academy, there is a field pupils can use, but it is open to the public and there is a problem with dog fouling and rubbish (the only bin is broken). At Williamwood High, there is a large car park and track and field facilities, but very little social outdoor space. Pupils generally therefore tend to socialise inside the school building or away from the school building altogether during lunch and break times.

Indoor social space in secondary schools buildings is provided, but not always successfully. At Williamwood High, a large social space, known as 'the Street', which includes the dining facilities is available for the use of the whole school. However it becomes very busy and noisy and there is not sufficient seating. Pupils describe a range of problems: finding their friends, having to sit on the floor to eat lunch and so on. Most felt it would have been better to have several different social areas for different year groups, though they appreciate the reasoning behind the single area.

*And there's definitely not enough seats, I know some people go outside but see in the winter months when it's raining people were sitting on the floor with their plastic trays*

*I think they have to aim to get our social areas back again, cos they were like so useful ...then you would know where you could always be with your friends.*

*Cos it's like in the old school you'd eat your lunch and then you would go somewhere else but you can't do that here you just have to sit in the same place all lunch*

Williamwood High

Other secondary school buildings have similar problems with the suitability of social space.

*One bad thing about the social area is it's a bit crowded sometimes...when you're trying to get; like if you're trying to get from the food court to the toilets there in the social space, you have to cram your way through all those people sitting down and standing up and chatting and all of that.*

*If you want to do homework or something you have to lie on the floor. I think that's what the library is for but you know it's like always closed all the time, so you don't get the opportunity.*

Knox Academy

Use of space is often seen as an issue, rather than availability. At the Knox Academy, pupils cited other areas of the school building that they thought they could use, including the seminar room in which the group was being held and the assembly hall, both of which have chairs so they could sit down. The importance of having your own social space, where you can meet your friends is illustrated by a senior pupil at the Knox Academy.

*I don't actually like the common room - it's just the thought of it being ours, more than the actual room*

Knox Academy

Social space for teachers was also mentioned at Williamwood High, where pupils thought the teachers have missed out on a central staff room.

*Science teachers they have to stay in the Science space. They can't socialise with Art teachers...[they need] another big staffroom. You have to eat with pupils down the street and I don't think they like – because they're with the pupils every day, teaching them; and they don't want to mix...*

Williamwood High

At Strathead primary, the assembly/PE hall is echoey and cold and tends not to be used for assemblies for these reasons. The foyer tends to be used instead for activities like music and drama and the biggest classroom for assemblies. This can be a problem for noise, particularly when younger classes are using the foyer for singing.

*You get interrupted when you're doing group singing people come to the toilet or the teacher goes to the office or something, they just walk right past you and they always get distracted.*

*You can fit quite a lot of people in it cos we can fit the whole school in the foyer*

### **Corridors and circulation**

At all schools except the smallest there are at least occasional problems with overcrowding in corridors.

*If you're in the corridor in the morning when everyone's trying to get changed, it's really squashed. There's an awful lot of people.*

Dunbar Primary

*It gets crowded at the Office when everybody's going for After School Club, because we were coming back from a trip and the whole office was jammed, like a traffic jam.*

Masterton Primary

*If you were trying to look for a room because the teacher told you to get a message and you didn't know what it was you'd get lost and you'd just be going round in a circle because it goes round and then you go down and up...!*

Dunbar Primary

*For most of the corridors actually everyone's kind of like crushed together and you like move maybe ten steps and then you have to stop while someone moves forward...it's a big long queue.*

*You actually get dragged and you have to wait and then you have to go back because there are so many people dragging you through.*

Knox Academy

*Everyone's all crushed at the same time and everyone keeps walkin' and pushin' each other and you end up' absolutely crushed!*

Whitburn Academy

Again though, some pupils believe that the corridor space would be less of a problem if it was managed differently. In some cases there are doors that are only open at certain times of day, restricting flow (Knox Academy) or corridors that are out of bounds (Williamwood High) meaning that other corridors come under more pressure and doors locked in the mornings (Whitburn academy) so that the whole school is crammed into a small space. Corridors where there are lockers can also be congestion points.

*That's the thing about those corridors is it was small anyway, so people are standing all at their lockers, people are bent down, and then there's people trying to get through, so it's ... There's always like a traffic jam.*

Knox Academy

### **Dining**

Canteens and dinner halls are often cramped and/or don't have the right amount of tables and seating. Some operate systems that pupils view as causing problems with getting around before and after eating. Often there is not enough space between tables to move around with a tray. In general dining areas are not considered to be large enough. Even in Williamwood, where the dining is in the enormous 'street', there are not enough tables and chairs. At Masterton Primary, there is concern that the dining hall is small and that when the school is filled to capacity next year, they will need to use the PE hall as well.

The biggest problems with dining areas, however is where they are used as dual or multi purpose spaces.

*For lunch, it's in the assembly hall, so we don't have a actual assembly hall . . . But when we have PE all the crumbs from lunch and that are there. School dinners are on the stage - sometimes when there's like shows on and that, and you can't always eat your lunch in there so sometimes you have to eat in the classroom.*

Uphall Primary

In Dunbar primary, they have an extended room, but, like the PE hall there is poor linking with the old part of the room.

*It's got pillars in the middle and you can sort of see where the new bit is and it would be nicer... if it was all painted the right colour or something.*

Dunbar Primary



At Uphall Primary, the children described a dining area in the playground as a cage.

*We get pushed into that wee cage...!  
It's like that, except it's silver, right? And-  
It's got a big door.  
You have to be in there to eat...!  
But like the whole school gets in there, and it's really squashed, and  
people run about in there but they get away with it.  
And we're not allowed to stand somewhere else.*

Uphall Primary

## External spaces

In primary schools the playground is often one of pupils' favourite spaces and the more space the better. Boys and girls both generally like the grassy bits of their playground, where they can play football or gymnastics without hurting themselves when they fall over. Tarmac areas where playground games such as hopscotch and so on have been painted on the surface are also popular. The only issues for these children are when they are not allowed in a particular part of the playground, for example on the grass when it is wet or being cut. At new schools, where the grass is still 'baby grass' pupils find it frustrating that they are not yet allowed on it to play.

*The field's quite good cos you can like do like cartwheels and handstands It's got lots to do like cos most of us like doing gymnastics it's soft and if you like fall or anything you won't rally hurt yourself cos it's nice soft grass.*

Strathdearn P4

*It's annoying because there's hardly no grass there now because they put tar all over it.*

Dunbar Primary

Comments about improvements to playgrounds in primary schools tended to be about more or better play equipment, from slides and climbing frames to just more footballs and skipping ropes being made available. Benches to sit on are liked and in most schools pupils would like to have more benches than they currently do. Occasional remarks were made about mud.

*I think it's a good school because there's a big playground*

*There's a red hole in the ground where they play football and if it's been raining there's always water there and when like the ball goes in and then we still play but if you kick the ball and it hits you you're covered in mud and all that.*

Uphall Primary

In Dunbar and Masterton primary schools, the garden areas of the playgrounds, where there is some planting, attract positive comments from the pupils and are very much liked. However, in Uphall the appearance of the playground is not liked.

*The playground is kind of like jail...  
Yeah! With all that barbed wire. We put a mural in to make it look a bit more colourful.  
It makes us feel – well, more secure but it doesn't look very nice.  
It's colourful on the inside but not on the outside...  
I don't like the big wire at the top of the school because it makes it look like a prison.*

Uphall Primary

External spaces in secondary schools are not so well liked and are not thought to have been designed with the needs of pupils in mind. Often there is very little space that could be described as a playground, nowhere to sit and no demarcation between space for cars and for people. Not many secondary school pupils felt they had access to a real playground. In Whitburn Academy the playground is described as 'a mix between a playground and a carpark'.

*You just need to watch...and dodge the cars!  
No, but it's a big bit of space going to waste – I mean it's not even being used as car park. But it's just a big space.*

Whitburn Academy

*There's not really a playground, there's like the fields. Or the courtyard.*

Knox Academy

In Drumchapel High pupils say there is nothing to do in playground. At the Knox Academy, there is the public field or a small courtyard, which is liked, but seems to have very restricted access. Secondary school pupils too would like to have seating outside.

*There should be more seats outside so you can sit outside.*

Whitburn Academy

*I don't think it is really used as a play ground, its more just how you get home, you walk through it to get home, I don't think it's really used*

*I thought we were meant to be getting picnic benches for outside*  
Williamwood High

### **Quality of design and construction**

Opinions on the quality of the design of the school building varied. Some of the new school buildings are described as 'bland' (Williamwood High) and 'ordinary' (Masterton Primary) and, particularly for the secondary school buildings, the lack of colour and differentiation between rooms inside is an issue.

*Every one you walk into is exactly the same as the one you have just been in  
It feels like a building rather than a school  
I do like it, I think it's good but I just think it's not a child friendly as it could be*

Williamwood High

Not being allowed to pin or stick anything to the walls is an issue in these schools and several pupils pointed out that, for pupils making the transition from a nice colourful primary school building, the blandness and sameness of their building must be quite depressing. As one or two said, even painting some of the walls different colours would help.

Particular features of the new school buildings are not liked, for example, pupils at Williamwood find the glass doors on their classrooms distracting. There was some debate about noise in Williamwood, but certainly, there are parts of the school building where soundproofing is not sufficient (perhaps the walls between classrooms).

*You can hear different teachers giving instructions but you can't hear the corridor*

Williamwood High

Some specific features of design were commented on; for example in Williamwood, pupils pointed out that it would have been better to have the drama department at the back of the stage – as it is pupils have to walk through the theatre to get to the stage. Similarly, the music department is on the first floor and it is not possible to get a piano up there.

Also in Williamwood, the layout of the science labs is criticised.

*Normally in the old school the work benches in rows going back, so the teacher could stand at the front of the class and see what everyone's doing with their experiment, including if its wrong or something dangerous, but you cant see it cos they're shielding what they're doing, and plus all the cupboards, as well people are looking about for flasks and stuff, having to move people out the way to get into the cupboards.*

Williamwood High

Generally, apart from a few snagging problems, which have usually been sorted out quickly and efficiently, things work and very few things have broken. At the Knox Academy however, there are a few damp patches and other things that have never been sorted out.

*The finishing touches. Again, you can always see straight through the plasterboard in some places. If you touch the wall and the paint falls off! All these marks and darkened colours all over...!*

Knox Academy

Opinions vary on the appearance of the overall design and external appearance of school buildings. Williamwood is liked by those who like more modern architecture and the street as you enter the building is viewed as impressive, but for those who prefer more traditional architecture, it is seen as clinical and bland in appearance, like a prison or hospital building.

*It looks really nice from outside, really modern  
It's a cross between a factory and a hospital*

Williamwood High

In both Dunbar Primary School and Knox Academy the respective groups of pupils felt that their schools were divided into two halves. The old and the new parts felt like separate buildings. At least at the Knox Academy, though, pupils recognise an improvement in the appearance of their school building overall.

*If you look at it from that side it looks really nice. But go around the other side, there's the teachers car park, there's windows, there's wood. There's bin bags.*

Dunbar Primary

*It's so different on this side with the big bright blue front... The old building, but the old building looks wrong, compared to the front and that side.*

Knox Academy

*Well the school – the way the school looks now, compared to the way it used to look like, there's quite a difference. The way school used to be there was vandalism everywhere and like the corridors smelled really bad and everything, but the way the school looks now is quite different. It looks good.*

Knox Academy

Masterton Primary's building has a design feature that some like and others think looks strange.

*There's a big hump on the top.  
That's the gym hall.  
I don't really like the roof bit...  
...because there's a big, like, circle.  
That's what I was talking about – I like that.  
If the ball got kicked it would easily just come back down.  
Yeah, because there's big gutters... big gutters in the roof.*

Masterton Primary

Pupils at Uphall Primary really dislike the look of their school building. There are bars on the windows and security fencing round the perimeter.

*Those big bars, they're all on our classroom...  
They're dangerous.  
And we're not allowed a view from our classroom.  
And there's always chipped paint on the walls.*

*And it looks really ugly.  
And see, last Easter someone through a egg at the window that's still  
not been cleaned.*

Uphall Primary

In general pupils have a lot to say about specific design features in their school buildings. For example, there was much positive comment about automatic lighting.

*So when you go in the lights go on automatically instead of pressing a  
button*

St Maria Goretti, P3

*Guess what they do: you walk into the changing rooms in the toilets,  
and the light would come on when we move...*

Masterton P4

As well as some examples of the feature failing:

*So it's really good.  
Sometimes - once when we gone into the changing rooms, the lights  
didn't go on.*

Masterton P4

Similarly, in some schools there was discussion of the pros and cons of taps that turn off automatically, with differing views as to whether the length of time the tap runs for is sufficient. For example, P4 pupils at Masterton had the following exchange:

*And it stays on for the right amount of time that you need to wash your  
hands.*

*It could be better for the taps if you could just turn them.*

*Yes, but somebody could flood the toilets if you could just turn them –  
because that's what someone done in the old school - because  
someone done it on purpose. He put all the paper towels in the plug-  
hole.*

*Do you know what I think? I think they could improve one thing, 'cos  
the cold tap stays on longer than the hot tap and when you go to wash  
your hands with the hot tap it really annoys you.*

## APPENDIX





**5576**  
**Areas to explore within primary school  
pupil focus groups**

**Welcome – Introduce yourself**

***Background/ Warm-up: Introduction***

- What are your names?

**School**

- What sort of things do you do in school?
  - (Moderator to draw up list of activities)
- Where do you do them?
  - (Moderator to put location beside activity)

**FOR EACH LOCATION**

- What is it like?
  - Best bits?
    - Why
  - Worst bits?
    - Why
- (Classroom) Are there any good seats or bad seats?
  - Why?
    - Is there enough
      - Space for storage
      - Room to work
      - Room to play
- (Playground) Best places to hang out? (and worst places) – why?
  - *Probe to see if factors are place or people.*
  - *And what about when it is too wet to go outside?*
- What happens at break time when it is wet?
- FOR THINGS NOT IN A CLASSROOM
  - How do you get to those places?

- Is it easy?
- Any problems?
- Are there ever any times when it gets crowded?
  - Where and when?

## **Building**

ACTIVITY – ASK PUPILS TO DRAW THEIR FAVOURITE PLACE IN THE SCHOOL

- *Pupils to show their drawing.*
- What is your favourite place in the school?
  - Why?
- What is the best part of this school building?
  - Why?
- Do you like your school building?
- Is anything broken?
  - (ask pupils to expand on any problems that are building related)
- Do you actually like the way your school looks (inside and outside)?
  - Why

## **Marks**

- If you had to give your school building a mark out of 10 – like in a test – what score would you give it? ASK PUPILS TO WRITE THEIR SCORE ON PAPER.
  - Why?

# 5576

## Areas to explore within secondary school pupil focus groups

### Welcome – Introduce yourself

#### ***Background/ Warm-up: Introduction***

- What are your names?
- What are your favourite buildings - anywhere?
  - Why are they favourite?
  - What makes a building “good”?

#### **School**

ASK PUPILS TO LIST ALL THE PARTS OF THEIR SCHOOL BUILDING  
THEY CAN THINK OF ON FLIP-CHART  
ACTIVITY – ASK PUPILS TO RANK PLACES IN THEIR SCHOOL  
TOP THREE – BOTTOM THREE

- *Pupils to show their rankings.*
- What is your favourite place in the school?
  - Why?
- What is the best part of this school building?
  - Why?
  - What feature do you think is the most important thing for any school building?

#### **Layout**

- Do you have any problems getting around the school?
  - What are they?
  - Does anybody ever get lost?
    - Why?
  - Does anybody ever find it hard to get to places in time?
  - Are there ever any times when it gets crowded?
    - Where and when?

- What are your classrooms like?
  - Best bits?
  - Worst bits?
    - Are there good rooms and bad rooms?
      - What makes a room good?
      - What makes a room bad?
    - Are there any good seats or bad seats?
      - Why?
    - Does anybody ever have any problems with lighting?
      - What are they?
- Is the school always at a comfortable temperature?
  - What problems (if any) have there been?
- What do you do that does not take place in a classroom?
  - How do you get to those places?
    - Is it easy?
    - Any problems?
  - What are those places like?
    - Other classrooms
    - Playground
    - Assembly hall
    - Sports field
      - Problems?
      - Anything fantastic?

## **Building**

- What do you actually think of the state of the building?
- Does everything in the school work properly?
  - (ask pupils to expand on any problems that are building related)
- What do you think that teachers think of the school building?
  - Why
- Do you actually like the way your school looks (Outside And Inside)?
  - Why

## **Marks**

- Finally, If you had to give your school building a mark out of 10 – like in a test – what score would you give it? ASK PUPILS TO WRITE THEIR SCORE ON PAPER.
  - Why

