

## **How should schools ensure that they support the needs of all their students in relation to physical education?**

PE is a national curriculum subject that has to be taught to all students in all schools. However schools should adopt a sensitive, flexible approach to this issue. There is some evidence to suggest that participation and enjoyment of sport is enhanced where students feel comfortable about their PE uniform; this is particularly true for girls. Schools should therefore choose a PE uniform, which is practical, comfortable and appropriate to the activity involved. Gender, religious and racial discrimination issues must also be considered.

Where schools do not have changing rooms, they should organise separate changing facilities. There are a number of ways that this can be achieved. They could organise separate space by using curtains or screens to create individual or gender appropriate changing spaces. Alternatively students could change in shifts.

Clothing for PE or swimming needs to be appropriate for the activity while at the same time ensuring modesty and dignity are respected. Schools should have agreed examples of a range of acceptable and unacceptable clothing, explaining the reasons for school policy and practice.

All jewellery should be removed in order to prevent injury to the wearer of the jewellery or other participants. Where difficulties arise in relation to the removal of religious symbols contact should be made with parents/carers to ensure they are aware of the potential dangers associated with the wearing of such items. Sometimes danger can be reduced if items can be attached to the skin with sweat bands or plasters.

Attention also needs to be paid to options related to changing facilities and showering. Some religions or beliefs do not allow individuals to undress or shower in the company of others. If an organisation requires its staff, for reasons of health and safety, to change their clothing and/or shower, it is good employee relations practice to explore how such needs can be met.

Insistence upon same-sex communal shower and changing facilities could constitute indirect discrimination (or harassment) as it may disadvantage or offend staff or pupils belonging to particular religions or beliefs whose requirement for modesty extend to changing their clothing in the presence of others, even of the same gender. In Islam for example public showering or being naked in front of others is forbidden. Where schools have showers students could shower in their swimming costumes, although the practice of allowing Muslim children to shower in bathing costumes does not solve the problem while other children are naked and in the same communal shower area. Islam forbids undressing in front of others or being among others who are undressed.