



## **UNISEX TOILETS IN NI SCHOOLS – IS THIS THE LATEST MONEY SAVING MEASURE?**

Schools in Northern Ireland could save thousands of pounds by opting for unisex toilets – but will they want to, a local union wants to know.

The Ulster Teachers' Union was responding to a recent decision in Glasgow that all new-build primary schools there will have gender-neutral toilets.

“This is a highly contentious as it raises questions of equality and child protection,” said Avril Hall Callaghan, General Secretary of the Ulster Teachers' Union.

“Glasgow City Council has said its decision to opt for gender neutral toilets is to help children struggling with gender identification issues.

“However, as schools grapple with ever-shrinking budgets it is one which also has financial ramifications and which we too will probably have to face sooner rather than later.

“On average new schools cost about £3,000 per square metre so if thousands of pounds can be saved by building a single toilet block instead of two then it is an area of fiscal saving which must be considered along with all the others.

“Indeed, only last year the school Inspectorate raised the issue when teachers were asked why they were lining up children as girls and boys and why there were boys' and girls' toilets.

“Many schools in America and mainland Europe already have gender neutral toilets and it is no longer an issue, however, our members would be concerned about child protection issues.

“Those in favour of the unisex toilets argue that they will help combat bullying and antisocial behaviour, as well as being more cost-effective and saving space in a school.

“On one level unisex toilets teach kids it doesn't matter what their gender is, but at primary school age girls especially mature more quickly than boys and they start to develop towards the end of primary school so need their privacy.

“Gender neutral toilets are something on which parents and governors need to be in full agreement before any decisions can be taken.”