



Department
for Education

Launch date 5 March 2014
Respond by 16 May 2014
Ref: Department for Education

Public Consultation on DRAFT

**Acoustic design of schools: performance
standards 2014**

Departmental advice for all schools

Acoustic design of schools: performance standards 2014

Including the specification of acoustic performance to comply with the Building Regulations.

This consultation seeks views on the draft Acoustic Performance standards for schools which will replace those given in Building Bulletin 93, *Acoustic Design of Schools*, published in 2003.

These draft standards would provide the normal means of compliance with the Acoustic Requirement E4 on Acoustics in Schools of Part E of the Building Regulations and provide non-statutory guidance in support of the acoustic requirement in The School Premises Regulations 2012 and The Independent Schools Standards 2013.

To Schools, Colleges, HTs/teachers, Trade Unions, OGDs, LAs/Council's Universities, Building Control Bodies

Issued 5 March 2014

Enquiries To If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Department on 0370 000 2288

e-mail: AcousticStandards.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

Contact Details

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's '[Contact Us](#)' page.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 We are consulting on the proposed changes to our guidance on the acoustic design of schools. The existing guidance, Building Bulletin 93 "*Acoustic Design of Schools*" was published by DfE in 2003.

The revised guidance will support requirement E4 of the Building Regulations, which applies to both new schools and schools formed by change of use of existing buildings. It will also support the School Premises Regulations 2012, which apply to all state-funded schools and the Independent Schools Standards which apply to all independent schools.

Building Regulations Requirement E4 states that:

“Each room or other space in a school building shall be designed and constructed in such a way that it has the acoustic conditions and the insulation against disturbance by noise appropriate to its normal use”.

The recently revised School Premises Regulations, which came into force on the 31 October 2012, require that:

“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.”

The independent Schools Standards were revised in 2013 to contain the same requirements for acoustics and other premises standards as the School Premises Regulations.

The proposed changes to “Acoustic Design of Schools - Performance Standards for Schools” are described in the Consultation response form.

The Consultation Response Form containing 10 key questions is available on line at <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>. This should be completed on line if possible.

Please go to www.education.gov.uk/consultations/ to view the proposed draft standards.

2 Background

- 2.1 The existing acoustic standards were introduced in 2003 as part of Building Regulations to ensure that the design and construction of school buildings provide acoustic conditions that enable effective teaching and learning. Prior to the introduction of the standards, expensive remedial work was often required to new buildings in order to provide conditions suitable for teaching and learning. Such acoustic remedial work is much more expensive than providing good acoustics as part of the original building work and is usually much less effective.

Poor acoustic conditions put strain on a teacher's voice, reducing their ability to control classroom noise and increasing the incidence of voice loss. Academic research has also shown that higher levels of background noise have a detrimental impact on pupils' educational attainment.¹ The research shows that pupils with special needs, including hearing impaired (HI) pupils and those with speech, language or communication (SLC) difficulties, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of noise. As legislation currently provides for HI and SLC pupils to be taught in mainstream schools, ensuring that ambient noise levels are low enough to allow these children to integrate into mainstream schools is a key consideration. By setting minimum standards for teaching areas, our acoustic guidance aims to address these problems.

3 Proposed Changes

- 3.1 There are three issues with the current acoustic standards that need addressing:

The standards require revision, in the light of the experience of applying them since they were introduced in 2003. We propose to make 18 detailed changes to the standards which are described in the Questionnaire. In addition, we propose to make the regulations less bureaucratic by removing the more qualitative requirement for good speech intelligibility from Building Regulation requirements, which duplicates school responsibility as part of the School Premises Regulations.

1 - The effects of noise on children at school: a review. B M Shield and J E Dockrell. In Collected papers in Building Acoustics: Room Acoustics and Environmental Noise (ed B Gibbs, J Goodchild, C Hopkins and D Oldham), 159-182, 2010, ISBN 978-1-907132-14-8.

Building Control Bodies (BCBs) will therefore no longer need to make their own judgements on whether or not acoustics in open plan spaces will provide suitable conditions for teaching. BCBs will continue to check that building designs meet the values for sound insulation, reverberation time and internal ambient noise which are given in the DfE standards.

Current standards apply only to new build schools, not to changes of use and refurbishments. This discrepancy means that acoustic standards in the latter two cases are not optimal or consistent with new builds. DfE School Building Survey data shows that there are approximately 4200 classrooms refurbished and a similar number newly built each year. Currently, in the case of refurbishments which involve changing the use of a building, the Building Regulation on acoustics in schools applies. However, contractors and building control bodies can either apply the new build standards in BB93 or must decide on a case by case basis what is an appropriate refurbishment standard. We have now produced clear minimum standards supported by guidance for refurbishment of teaching areas which will make it easier to apply consistent standards and prevent the adoption of unsuitable standards in refurbishment projects. These standards for existing buildings are the minimum which we think are necessary to comply with the Equality Act and the School Premises Regulations.

Experience and feedback from schools suggests that current DfE design guidance for school buildings is too lengthy and over-prescriptive, imposing unnecessary burdens. The James Review recommended that the Department: (a) revises its School Premises Regulations and guidance to remove unnecessary burdens and ensures that a single, clear set of regulations apply to all schools and (b) significantly reduces the amount of guidance it issues. The recent revision of the School Premises Regulations retained a regulation on acoustics. The Department's Departmental Advice on acoustics will, however, be reduced from 207 pages to 30. The Institute of Acoustics and the Association of Noise Consultants in consultation with the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf will produce and maintain more detailed guidance needed by the construction industry and specialist teachers of deaf children.

The James Review also recommended that “There should be a clear, consistent Departmental position on what fit-for-purpose facilities entail. A suite of drawings and specifications should be developed that can easily be applied across a wide range of educational facilities. These should be co-ordinated centrally to deliver best value.” The Department has therefore produced baseline designs for the Priority Schools Building Programme (PSBP). As part of the development of the baseline designs the proposed new acoustic standards have been tested and shown to result in cost savings.

4 How To Respond

4.1 Consultation responses can be completed online at: www.education.gov.uk/consultations

by emailing: AcousticStandards.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

or by downloading a response form which should be completed and sent to:

Richard Daniels
Education Funding Agency
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

5 Additional Copies

5.1 Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the Department for Education e-consultation website at: www.education.gov.uk/consultations

6 Plans for making results public

6.1 The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on the DfE e-consultation website in early 2014.

7 Code of Practice on written consultation

7.1 All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left at each stage.
2. It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
3. A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
4. Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.
5. Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.
6. Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and the reasons for decisions finally taken.
7. Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.