

Shropshire Council

Accessibility Strategy 2016 to 2020

Learning and Skills

Local Authorities are required by law to plan to improve access to every aspect of education for pupils with disabilities, and to monitor and review the effectiveness of their plans at regular intervals. The detail of these plans form the basis of the local authority's Accessibility Strategy. This responsibility sits alongside the many other duties the Council has towards the children and young people who attend schools in the Council area.

The previous strategy covered three areas as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, these duties have now been consolidated within the 2010 Equality Act.

Shropshire Council is responsible for;

1. Providing an Access Strategy to ensure that all pupils can participate and access the National Curriculum.
2. Improving the physical environment of schools to increase the extent to which [sic] disabled pupils can take advantage of education and associated services.
3. Improving the provision of information in a range of formats for disabled pupils.

The time period for this strategy is 2016 to 2020 and this planning duty sits alongside the other disability duties for the local authority.

The disability duties relating to school pupils who would be defined as disabled in the Disability Discrimination Act 2006.

The SEN and Disability Act 2001 extended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) to cover education. In addition to its duties under SEN legislation, since September 2002, the Local Authority has had three key duties towards disabled pupils, under Part 4 of the DDA:

- I. Not to treat disabled pupils less favourably for a reason related to their disability;
- II. To make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils, so that they are not at a substantial disadvantage;
- III. To implement an accessibility strategy to increase access to school education for disabled pupils.

Schools also have a duty in Part 3 of the DDA “Provision of Goods and Services” to make the school accessible to parents and adult visitors with a disability.

3. The term and scope of the strategy.

Definition of ‘disability’.

A person has a ‘disability’ according to the Equality Act 2010, if –

“he or she has a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This definition includes, for example, children with certain medical conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes. It may apply if a child is experiencing difficulty with physical co-ordination or has speech problems, as well as to pupils with sensory impairments, or communication or cognitive difficulties.

The Accessibility Strategy therefore provides a framework for improving the educational opportunities for children and young people who meet the legal definition of disability. The strategy also assists the Council in meeting its general and specific duties to promote the equality of its disabled children and young people.

Please note that this strategy does not apply to all children who need additional support in order to benefit from their education, it applies only to those who meet the definition of disability as outlined above.

Definition of 'school' and 'school education'

The accessibility strategy must cover those schools for which the Local Authority is, at least in part, the responsible body and must be in writing. When the strategy refers to 'schools' or 'school education', this covers all maintained nursery, primary, secondary schools, specialist resource bases or units and special schools and Pupil Referral Units. It also refers to Children and Family centres where the Foundation Stage curriculum is taught.

School Education is a broad term that covers all aspects of school life – in the classroom, the playground, the dinner hall and on trips and outings etc.

The list below identifies a range of activities that may be covered:

- Preparation for entry to the school
- The curriculum; teaching and learning; classroom organisation; timetabling and grouping of pupils; homework
- Access to school facilities; the school's arrangements for working with other agencies
- Activities to supplement the curriculum, e.g. a drama group visiting the school; breaks and lunchtimes
- School sports; school clubs and activities; school trips
- School policies; assessment and exam arrangements; school discipline and sanctions; exclusion procedures
- Preparation of children and young people for the next phase of education

4. The purpose and direction of the local authority's strategy: vision and values

Shropshire Council promotes a positive attitude towards equality and diversity. The local authority is committed to providing a service that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the diverse community it serves. This commitment is therefore reflected in the authority's accessibility strategy. The strategy encourages a proactive approach to improving access for pupils with disabilities.

The following strategic goals for the accessibility strategy are:

- To maximise access and inclusion for disabled children to its early years and school settings as defined in paragraph 3;
- To ensure a place for every disabled child at his/her local early years setting and mainstream school where this is the preferred parental choice and it is appropriate and reasonable;
- To minimise the need for disabled children and young people to be placed in settings outside the Council area;

- To pursue improved access and inclusion as a shared goal in partnership with all early years settings, schools, support services and other agencies including Health and voluntary organisations;
- To ensure that accurate and up to date information is available on school accessibility, using information gained through accessibility audits, information obtained from Shropshire's Access and Inclusion team, Health and Social care teams and schools to target capital funding so that it can better meet the needs of disabled children and young people with the maintained schools of Shropshire and to liaise with the academy schools to enable inclusion at non maintained schools out of the Council's control.
- To facilitate the sharing of good practice between schools, and between schools and services, other agencies and voluntary organisations.

The accessibility strategy outlines the steps the authority is taking to improve access and inclusion for pupils with a disability. The strategy aims to:

- Promote a proactive approach to improving access;
- Ensure that the rights of pupils with disabilities are upheld;
- Ensure statutory duties are carried out;
- Support the aims and aspirations of children and young people with a disability;
- Improve access to information, curriculum and the environment;
- Create a positive attitude towards disability and challenge negative perceptions;
- Develop a culture of awareness, acceptance and inclusion.

Although the Accessibility Strategy relates specifically to children and young people with a disability it is recognized that many of the actions within it will benefit all users of early years settings and school sites.

5. Individuals and representative groups consulted during the development of this strategy.

To be confirmed

6. Information from pupil data and school audits

Further research required with data colleagues for this.

7. Current Provision

The Local Authority has 150 mainstream schools; 2 special schools; 1 Pupil Referral Units. The Council also has a resourced provision which is linked into the Lakelands Academy. This provides for children aged 11 to 16 whose primary area of need is Interaction and Communication and who may have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC). This provision is for children with complex needs who are able to access a mainstream curriculum but who require a highly personalised approach to learning.

A review is currently taking place to identify the level and type of provision anticipated in future years. A capital programme is in place to financially support the development of specialist resourced provision attached to mainstream settings.

The Local Authority has continually improved the access to schools through the Special Access Initiative capital fund. This funding specifically deals with the reasonable adjustments and modifications required to enable a child/pupil to physically access the school environment across all ages. This provision continues on from the initial work carried out by the Council to provide “accessible schools” within Shropshire.

In addition, the Council will also fund items of equipment such as adaptable tables, ICT and various other aids and equipment above the value of £300 in a primary school and £500 in a secondary school. Schools are required to fund any equipment below that threshold.

Improving the general environment access for pupils with sensory impairments

Sensory Inclusion Service (SIS) provide advice to schools with regard to appropriate environment including:

- Blinds, curtains and carpets are used when appropriate to improve acoustic properties for hearing impaired pupils and help with visually impaired pupils who are photosensitive
- Highlighting of potential hazardous objects in playgrounds
- Stairwell enhancement
- Levelling of playground areas
- Tactile surfacing to help with navigation skills

Improving the acoustic conditions for sensory impaired pupils

- Advice is sought from SIS and Occupational Therapists in respect of specific equipment or modifications for these particular impairments and are funded based on recommendations.

The main priorities in the local authority's strategy:

The accessibility strategy will respond in turn to each of the three aspects of improvement that must be addressed; access to the curriculum, the school environment and school communication.

Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum

Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. The Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum are the starting points for planning a school curriculum that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils. The National Curriculum statutory inclusion statement on providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils outlines how teachers can modify, as necessary, the National Curriculum programmes of study to provide all pupils with relevant and appropriately challenging work at each key state. It sets out three principles that are essential to developing a more inclusive curriculum:

- I. Setting suitable learning challenges
- II. Responding to pupil's diverse learning needs
- III. Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

Applying these principles should keep to a minimum the need for aspects of the National Curriculum to be disapplied for a pupil. The Disability Discrimination Act 2001 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities; this includes adjustments to the curriculum to enable pupils with disability to access learning.

Agreed priorities:

Improving the physical environment of schools to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can take advantage of education and associated services.

A programme for the provision of access audits is being prepared and will result in a commission to establish in priority the most accessible schools for various needs.

Schools under the Act are equally responsible for ensuring as part of their dedicated Access Plan, that continual improvements are made to the accessibility of the school.

Improving the provision of information in a range of formats for disabled pupils

To comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, pupils will be given information in the format that they need to enable accessibility, this will take into consideration;

- Font sizes
- Specific resources (equipment/software) for visual/hearing impairment (SIS to advise)
- Services from external providers e.g. speech and language therapies
- Supported communication and plain English.

Management, co-ordination and implementation

School's accessibility strategies will be monitored and training offered

The accessibility strategy links to the following policies to assist with successful accessibility planning within our schools:

- SEND Strategy
- All age autism strategy
- SEN Code of Practice
- School Development Plans and accessibility plans

Monitoring and Evaluation

This strategy will be reviewed biennially and a full evaluation carried out at the end of the strategy period or when changes to legislation and codes of practice determine.