Newcastle City Council: Accessibility Strategy

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# Section 1: INTRODUCTION

Improving access to education and educational achievement for disabled pupils is essential to ensure equality of opportunity, full participation in society, access to employment opportunities and inclusion within mainstream education.

# 1.1 Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 replaced existing equality legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act and others. Its function has been to simplify the law and bring together the duties and requirements within one piece of legislation. The effect of the Equality Act is to extend protection to groups of people who were previously covered by separate laws and to incorporate the provisions included within previous equality legislation.

The Equality Act has introduced a single Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (sometimes also referred to as the ‘general duty’) that applies to public bodies, including maintained schools and academies (including Free Schools) and which extends to all protected characteristics - race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. This combined equality duty came into effect in April 2011. The duty has three main elements. In carrying out their functions, public bodies are required to **have due regard to the need to:**

* eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
* advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
* foster good relations across all characteristics, between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Although, from 1 October 2010, the Equality Act replaced most of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, the Disability Equality Duty in the DDA continues to apply. The main duties are not to treat disabled pupils less favourably and to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage.

The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) introduced the duty to promote disability equality from December 2006. This duty applies to EY settings, schools and LAs. Schools and LAs have a planning duty to prepare and publish access plans and accessibility strategies in order to:

* increase the extent to which children and young people can participate in the curriculum;
* improve the physical environment of schools to increase the extent to which disabled children and young people can take advantage of education and associated services;
* improve the delivery of information to disabled children and young people that is provided in writing for children and young people who are not disabled.

# 1.2 Vision and values

This strategy will promote a cohesive, integrated approach to inclusive, accessible education for all children and young people.

Newcastle City Council’s four key priorities:

* Working City
* Tackling Inequalities
* Decent Neighbourhoods
* Fit for Purpose

Newcastle City Council and its partner organisations believe that all children and young people have the right to live and learn in a socially inclusive community. This is a community in which no child, young person, family or group should experience barriers that prevent their full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community.

The Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People 2015 – 2020 has three overarching priorities:

* Keeping children and young people safe and supporting families
* Reducing inequalities and promoting equality
* Raising aspirations, achievements and opportunities

# We are committed to the delivery of high quality education in accommodation that stimulates a successful learning environment.

# 1.3 Definition of Disability

The DDA uses a very broad definition of impairment. A person has a disability if he or she has a mental or physical impairment, which has a substantial and / or long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The DDA definition of disability or impairment covers physical impairments, sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight, hearing, or learning.

This means that accessibility strategies will need to cover improvements for a broad range of children and young people. In general, those children and young people who are planned for through accessibility strategies will overlap closely with those considered as having special educational needs.

It is important to remember that not all impairments are readily identifiable. Some children and young people may have impairments as defined by the DDA, but these may be ‘hidden’, such as epilepsy or diabetes. Other children and young people with special educational needs will not be classed as disabled under the DDA, such as those with mild learning difficulties.

The DDA will apply to those children and young people who are temporarily substantially disabled, e.g. through accident or surgery.

**1.4 Roles and Responsibilities Governing Bodies in Maintained Schools**

In maintained schools in England, the Governing Body is ultimately responsible for the duty not to discriminate. Maintained schools must make their Accessibility Plans publicly available in their Governors’ Annual Report to Parents and on their own school website. This duty is placed on the Governing Body of a school, whether or not they currently have a disabled pupil on roll.

Schools are required not to discriminate against either existing or prospective students in their admission arrangements. They must ensure that they:

1. Do not treat children and young people less favourably for reasons relating to their disability
2. Take reasonable steps to ensure that disabled students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to those children and young people who are not disabled
3. Plan to increase access to education for disabled children and young people

Schools must prepare and implement Accessibility Plans which should be kept under review and revised as necessary. To develop an Accessibility Plan schools should:

* Consult with children and young people, parents / carers, support services and local organisations
* Review current provision for access
* Identify internal adjustments that could be made to increase access for disabled children and young people
* Develop short, medium and long-term plans and identify how they will be put into practice.

Whilst the Act imposes a distinct planning duty, schools are not required to undertake a separate planning process. Accessibility plans might be dovetailed with other plans, e.g. the School Improvement Plan.

**SECTION 2: THE MAIN PRORITIES**

* **Increasing access for disabled children and young people to the curriculum**
* **Improving access to the physical environment of school**
* Improving the delivery of written information to disabled children and young people

**SECTION 3: ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM**

The curriculum covers the wider curriculum of the school, including the outdoor environment, participation in before and after school clubs, leisure events, sporting and cultural activities, offsite activities and school holidays. Consequently, curriculum access should be considered at a whole school level. Indeed, many barriers to the 'curriculum' will be similar for many groups of children and it will be necessary to take a strategic approach to removing those barriers

**3.1 Local Authority Training, Guidance and Support**

The LA is committed to the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs.

The LA makes available a wide range of advice, training and resources to schools in respect of their responsibility to plan for increased accessibility in each individual school.

There are a number of key sources from which advice, training and resources can be obtained (either funded by the LA or as a traded service):

* Special Educational Needs Teaching and Support Service (SENTASS), including Sensory Impaired Service
* Educational Psychology Service (EPS)
* School Improvement Service SEN Advisory Team

**3.2 Health professionals**

Can also give advice, support and, in some cases, training. These include:

Community Team for Learning Disability Community Paediatricians School Health Advisers Community Nursing Service Children and Young People’s Service

Physiotherapy Service Occupational Therapy Service Speech and Language Therapy Service

**3.3 Specialist Educational Provision in Newcastle**

Special Schools can also provide general advice, training and guidance to mainstream schools in making appropriate provision for children and young people with a range of SEN and disability.

**3.3.1 Special Schools**

**Thomas Bewick**

A specialist school for children and young people aged between three and nineteen years with autism spectrum disorders whose needs are such that they require an autism specific provision.

**Trinity School**

A specialist school for children and young people aged 7 to 16 who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Trinity is located on two sites at Deneview and Oakfield.

**Sir Charles Parsons**

A specialist secondary school for young people between the ages of 11 to 19 years with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and associated physical disabilities.

**Hadrian School**

A specialist primary school for children aged 2 to 11 years with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and associated physical disabilities.

**3.3.2 Additionally Resourced Centres (ARCs) and Additionally Resourced Provision (ARPs)**

ARCs and ARPs for designated areas of need are attached to mainstream schools as indicated below:

**Pupils with Hearing Impairment**

Benton Park Primary School

Broadwood Primary School

Heaton Manor School

**Pupils with Visual Impairment**

Regent Farm First School

Gosforth Junior High Academy

Gosforth Academy

**Pupils with Physical Difficulties**

Kingston Park Primary School

Tyneview Primary School

Benfield School

**Pupils with Communication Difficulties**

Atkinson Road Primary Academy

Kenton Bar Primary School

Tyneview Primary School

Kenton School

Walbottle Campus

Benfield School

**Pupils with Speech and Language Difficulties**

Atkinson Road Primary Academy

Welbeck Academy

Kenton School

**Early Years Assessment Needs**

Cheviot Primary School

Bridgewater Primary School

**Pupils with Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties**

North Fawdon School (Nurture ARC for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2)

Cheviot Primary School

Hawthorn Primary School

West Walker Primary School

**School contact information is available in the Newcastle LA ‘Local Offer’ which can be found at** [**http://www.newcastlefis.org.uk/kb5/newcastle/fsd/localoffer.page;jsessionid=6DF90543B1445035580B84039756AB7E?familieschannel=3&sorttype=field&sortfield=title**](http://www.newcastlefis.org.uk/kb5/newcastle/fsd/localoffer.page;jsessionid=6DF90543B1445035580B84039756AB7E?familieschannel=3&sorttype=field&sortfield=title)**. Each school publishes a SEN Information Report on their own websites.**

**3.4 Schools’ Responsibilities**

Schools are responsible for providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all children and young people and have a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for disabled children and young people. They already make additional provision to enable children and young people with special educational needs to access the curriculum through the SEN framework and this will cover many disabled children and young people. In focusing on this part of the duty, schools should consider the needs of a range of disabled children and young people and prospective children and young people.

Schools need to

* Identify barriers to learning and ensure these are addressed
* Provide curriculum and written materials in alternative formats
* Make use of physical aids to enable disabled children and young people to access education

All schools must have an Access Plan. In order to comply with their duty to publish information about their Access Plan, governors are advised to include a section on accessibility planning in their annual report.

In considering this aspect of the Accessibility Plan schools should consider:

* Its approaches to teaching and learning
* How it delivers and develops the curriculum
* Timetabling
* Classroom organisation and grouping arrangements
* Peer support
* The accessibility of extra-curricular activities
* How it allocates and deploys auxiliary support
* How it uses ICT
* The methods used to assess children and young people (non-discriminatory)
* Staff training and information
* How children and young people are effectively supported through age phase transfers
* How children and young people are effectively supported through transition from Year 9

**SECTION 4: ACCESS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The long-term aim should be that all children and young people are able to access, when required and in safety, the external / internal areas and features of the school.

**4.1 School Buildings**

There is a range of ways which schools themselves can consider how to improve their physical environment. Schools will have to consider what they can do to improve the accessibility of the physical environment of the school within the resources available to them.

The physical environment includes:

Steps, stairways, kerbs, exterior surfaces and paving, parking areas, building entrances and exits, (including emergency escape routes), internal and external doors, gates, toilets and washing facilities, lighting, ventilation, floor coverings, décor, signage, furniture, etc.

Examples of the types of improvements that could be made to aid access to the education environment might include ramps and handrails, lifts, widened doorways and automatic doors, adapted toilet and medical facilities, adjustable lighting and blinds, induction loops and acoustic improvements to rooms.

Physical aids to accessing education might include ICT equipment, enlarged computer screens and keyboards, concept keyboards, enlarged texts, specialist desks and chairs, specialist scientific and writing equipment.

Improvements will need to be made to the physical environment of schools and pre-school provision to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the education and associated services provided by the school. Inevitably some schools have more barriers than others. In some cases, changes will be made in the course of regular maintenance and refurbishment. Other changes will need to be addressed more urgently, as they constitute a barrier to a disabled person.

The physical environment includes the accessibility of school buildings and outdoor facilities, such as boarding houses/residential facilities, playing fields and other external play areas. Therefore, the approach will be a broad one, looking to improve access outside as well as within schools in the most cost effective way.

**4.2 Schools’ Responsibilities**

Schools should consider opportunities for accessibility improvements when planning regular maintenance and refurbishment work.

In some cases, schools may need to consider organisational or management changes to the delivery of the curriculum to enable full access, as opposed to physical changes. Examples include:

* Re-arranging room space.
* Removing obstructions from walkways.
* Changing the layout of classrooms.
* Re-allocating rooms to particular subject specialisms / classes.
* Amending timetables.
* Using high contrast decoration in the physical environment

Schools should also have in place a policy on evacuation procedures for pupils with impairments and Personal Evacuation Plans to ensure that all staff are clear about procedures for these pupils.

Schools catering for pupils with hearing impairment should install visual alarm systems.

**SECTION 5: ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

**5.1 Duties**

This strand of the planning duty includes improvements to the delivery of information to disabled children and young people that is provided in writing for children and young people who are not disabled, within a reasonable time. Communication should be made in ways that are determined after taking account of their impairments and any preferences expressed by them or their parents/carers.

‘Within a reasonable time’ means that a delay is unwarranted if it increases the time and effort needed on the part of the pupil, increases the inconvenience, indignity or discomfort of the pupil, reduces opportunity or diminishes progress.

When deciding whether it is reasonable to meet children and young people’ or parents’/carers’ communication preferences, consideration should be given to the following:

* The time and effort needed to be expended by the pupil.
* The inconvenience, indignity or discomfort the pupil may suffer.
* The loss of opportunity or the diminished progress that the pupil may make in comparison with non-disabled peers.
* Health and safety requirements.
* The financial resources available.
* The cost implications of the action.
* The interests of the other children and young people.

**5.2 Local Authority Responsibilities**

The Local Authority will provide guidance to schools and LA staff on good practice in relation to providing information and communicating with disabled pupils and / or pupils with special educational needs and with their parents and with disabled parents.

Provide information on LA services in a variety of formats on request.

Clearly signpost any other information requested by parents or carers to the Local Offer.

**5.3 Schools’ Responsibilities**

Schools will be responsible for planning to improve the provision of written information to disabled children and young people. They should audit the number of children for whom alternative formats will be needed and the methods of appropriate communication required.

Information available for disabled children and young people and adults that is normally provided in writing for those who are not disabled should be made available in alternative forms for children and young people and parents/carers with visual impairments, hearing impairments and learning difficulties, and ensuring that children and young people can communicate their views and their work to staff.

The communication duty covers the delivery of school information normally provided to children and young people in writing. This ‘school information’ includes any information given to children and young people by the school, such as:

* letters
* handouts and worksheets
* textbooks
* timetables
* handbooks
* test and examination papers
* notices and notice boards
* information published on the school website
* posters around the school
* information about school events
* School lunch menus

‘In writing’ does not simply mean printed text and might include:

* Curriculum material, including handouts and worksheets that may include illustrations, diagrams and maps
* Materials presented on whiteboards and ICT systems
* Wall displays
* Timetables
* Information about school events, including newsletters
* Reports on progress
* Notices, including safety notices

Schools should:

* take steps to improve how these children and young people can give their views on any issue about which they have an interest, gather in those views and consider them.
* ensure that class work or homework is be given in an appropriate alternative form, and is understood by the pupil.
* consider how any homework, or other work children and young people do in alternative forms, can best be marked and commented on by school staff.
* consider children and young people’ communication with teaching and auxiliary staff as part of their learning.
* enable disabled children and young people to give their views or ask questions about non-curricular activities in the same way as their peers.
* enable disabled children and young people to communicate with other staff, children and young people or people working in a school, for example, in the dining room or in the school office.

Schools should ensure that any information that is important to enable children and young people to learn or to be able to participate in school activities can be provided in an alternative form if the pupil may have difficulty reading information provided in standard written form. This information should be provided within a reasonable time so that it does not place disabled children and young people at a disadvantage in relation to other children and young people. Demands should be anticipated in advance and school staff should make sure that any materials to be provided in alternative forms are provided for translation well in advance of the time when they will be needed. The form chosen should take into account the preferences of individual children and young people or their parents/carers.

Information should be made available, on request:

* in Braille
* in large print
* in audio format, e.g. iPod, iPad
* through sign language
* using a symbol system
* via electronic means

Schools have a duty to seek information about whether a child is disabled and to disseminate this information to all staff who may come into contact with the child. They should ensure that awareness is raised amongst all school staff, including non-teaching staff, about the difficulties some disabled children and young people may have in communicating with other people.

# SECTION 6: EVALUATION

The implementation and progress of the Accessibility Strategy and Implementation Plan will be reviewed annually by the Local Authority SEN Managers and reported to People Directorate Management Team.

This Accessibility Strategy is available through The Newcastle City Council website / Local Offer. Copies can be made available in writing and alternative formats / languages on request.

**SECTION 7: CONTACT DETAILS**

Education Division

Civic Centre

Barras Bridge

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE1 8QH

**Appendix 1**

**Disability Discrimination Act 2005**

This amends the DDA 1995 and requires a proactive approach towards disability equality. The implications: are as follows:

* It places a general duty on all public authorities, including schools and LAs, to take a pro-active approach to promote disability equality. This general duty will come into force on 5 December 2006. In addition to this, the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005 that came into force on 5 December 2005, places a duty on public authorities to prepare and publish a Disability Equality Scheme showing how it intends to fulfil the general duty, by the prescribed dates set out in the Regulations;
* This means the Authority and schools will have to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equal opportunities for people with a disability. They need to consider the elimination of harassment of disabled people, promotion of positive attitudes and the need to encourage the participation of people with a disability in public life;
* In relation to policy development and service delivery, the duty ensures that policy makers consider people with a disability and the impact upon them at the outset, i.e. that they “build in” for disability, and encourage better co-ordination across departments to ensure equal access for people with a disability.

**In relation to education**, the duty will:

* provide a framework to consolidate education provision for children with disabilities
* mesh with the existing development plans and performance improvement strategies of schools and post-16 institutions to take account of the particular barriers to achievement for children and young people and learners with disabilities
* help widen participation and retention in further and higher education;
* create an emphasis on equality for children and young people with disabilities and give a greater imperative to schools and Local Authorities to implement the planning duties which are imposed by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
* ensure effective transition for young people with disabilities in choosing routes of education
* lead to an increase in the representation of disabled people in the teaching profession and the retention of staff who become disabled
* help to avoid claims of unlawful disability discrimination
* encourage education institutions to think strategically about other disabled stakeholders, including parents and people using school premises, as well as promoting a greater knowledge and understanding of disability amongst all learners with benefits to society at large

**In relation to schools**, the general duty will build on existing responsibilities under disability legislation, especially the requirement to plan strategically to increase access to schools over time. In order for the general duty to be met effectively:

* schools should actively review their policies and procedures to remove barriers in all aspects of school life including educational outcomes for children and young people with disabilities, staff recruitment and retention, school policies and the involvement of parents and the wider community
* governing bodies and senior management teams will need to ensure the involvement of people with disabilities and consider the impact on outcomes for children and young people with disabilities when writing the school development plans and conducting the daily running of the school
* governing bodies, in their annual reports to parents, must explain their admission arrangements for children and young people with a disability, what help they will give for such children and young people to enable them to gain access and be treated fairly
* governors will need to ensure that procedures for candidates to stand for election and for parents to vote for candidates are accessible to people with disabilities, as the DDA covers the election of parent governors.