

Disability Discrimination Act: The New Accessibility Planning Duties

The SEN and Disability Act 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 by extending disability discrimination to schools, colleges, universities, adult education and youth services. All schools should have received information from the DfES and Disability Rights Commission about the new legislation. The relevant parts of the Act came into force on 1 September, 2002. A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

In this section there is a copy of an article which appeared in the December, 2002, edition of the Bulletin: 'New Rights in Education for the Disabled', which provides a summary of the new legislation. More detailed guidance is given in the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 Code of Practice for Schools and in the DfES publication "Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils". A summary of the latter publication which contains the statutory guidance, was sent directly to schools.

The Accessibility Planning Duties

The legislation introduced new **Planning Duties** for both LEAs and schools. The information and guidance that follows relate to these planning duties.

The Planning Duties are set out in detail in the DfES publication: "Accessible Schools : Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils".

a) LEA

The duty on LEAs is to develop an "Accessibility Strategy".

b) Schools

The duty on each school is to develop an "Accessibility Plan".

Each of these must be in place by April, 2003. Regulations require that initial strategies and plans must run for three years, until 31 March, 2006. LEAs and schools can plan for longer if they wish. The LEA's initial strategy will run for three years.

Developing the Accessibility Strategy and Plans

There are three strands to planning for increased accessibility for disabled pupils. Each strand must be included in the LEA's strategy and in schools' plans. These are:

- increasing access to the curriculum
- increasing access to the physical environment
- increasing access to information for disabled pupils

The LEA's accessibility strategy and schools' accessibility plans need not be stand alone plans and can be dovetailed with existing planning processes. Schools will, however, need to conduct an audit to consider how well they are currently addressing the needs of disabled pupils in each of the three areas in order to identify any barriers and to develop their accessibility plans.

It is important to remember that the Planning Duties, like the Disability Discrimination Duties, are anticipatory. In other words, they relate to future prospective pupils as well as existing ones. Schools should not wait until a disabled pupil arrived but should plan in advance to ensure that any future disabled pupils can access all aspects of the school.

To assist schools in carrying out their audits and developing their plans, extracts from the following publications are enclosed:

- "Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils", Annex D and Annex E;

- “Inclusion Now! A School Self-Evaluation Framework for Inclusion” (Curriculum section) (Draft); and
- “Accessibility Audit”; a planning tool.
- working to secure a multi-agency commitment to inclusive education and to secure co-ordinated support for all children at risk of social exclusion;
- refining the SEN funding arrangements to promote further the policy of early intervention.

1. Improving access to the curriculum

LEA strategy

The LEA’s strategy is to support schools in their efforts to increase the accessibility of the curriculum to disabled children through:

- “Inclusion Now! A School Self-Evaluation Framework for Inclusion”. This was piloted by a sample of volunteer schools during 2002-03 and then implemented on a four year cycle involving approximately 40 schools per year, beginning in September, 2003. This is the main vehicle through which schools will audit their own progress towards improving access and inclusion. The LEA will support this and will monitor schools’ progress.
- ensuring that INSET opportunities are targeted on improving the skills and awareness of teachers and support staff in relation to the needs of disabled children;
- further developing and clarifying the roles of specialist support services and having clear systems and procedures for making this support available to schools;
- developing an enhanced role for special schools which aims to make their expertise more readily available to support inclusion in mainstream schools and to promote mainstream experienced for their own pupils on roll;
- providing resource based provision in mainstream schools to facilitate curriculum access for children with specific types of SEN and disabilities;
- providing specialist equipment to help disabled pupils access the curriculum in mainstream schools through targeted use of Schools Access Initiative funding;
- establishing better mechanisms for collecting and disseminating good curriculum practice;

Action required by schools

Schools will need to consider how well their existing plans to raise pupil achievement promote increased access to the curriculum for disabled pupils. Schools’ Accessibility Plans can cross-reference to any existing plans but should also identify any immediate or longer term measures that may need to be taken, together with any future professional development needs.

2. Improving access to information for disabled pupils

LEA strategy

The LEA’s strategy is to guide and assist schools in improving access to information for disabled pupils through:

- further developing the specialist roles of staff within the Special Educational Needs Support Service, to provide advice, guidance and, where appropriate, a direct service to schools;
- developing the role of resource based provision in mainstream schools and of special schools so that they, too, can be a source of advice and guidance regarding the accessibility of information.

Action required by schools

Consider how well the school delivers materials in appropriate formats for disabled pupils. Areas which may need addressing should be identified and included in the school’s Accessibility Plan.

3. Improving access to the physical environment

LEA strategy

The LEA's strategy is to increase accessibility for specific individuals and groups of children and to support schools' own accessibility planning through:

- Targeted use of Schools Access Initiative (SAI) funding.

Increasing access to the physical environment is a shared responsibility. In any future modernisation, refurbishment or building plans, schools are required to place due importance on securing access for disabled pupils. Schools Access Initiative funding is made available annually by the Government. Since it is a fixed and limited amount, priorities have to be determined. The LEA's strategy for use of Schools Access Initiative funding, in priority order, is as follows:

1. To complete the development of specialist SEN resource bases in mainstream schools. This has been one of the key strands of the LEA's SEN policy to educate children within Wakefield and to promote inclusion. This work includes improvements and adaptations to buildings (including furniture and fittings) and the provision of specialist equipment.
2. To make specific adaptations to the physical environment of particular mainstream schools and to provide specialist equipment to facilitate the inclusion of identified children with special educational needs and disabilities. Responsibility for identifying and meeting children's equipment needs is delegated to specialist Advisory Teachers in SENSS.
3. To support schools' own accessibility plans.

Funding to support schools' own accessibility plans will always be subject to the total funding available and the amount of funding required to support Priority 1 and Priority 2, although a decrease in Priority 1 activity is anticipated as the LEA's specialist resource development nears completion. An internal LEA working party has recommended the following 'sub-strategy' for determining the allocation of Priority 3 funding, as it becomes available.

- a) all schools be requested to conduct an audit of their premises, indicating shortfalls and where these fit into their accessibility plans (short, medium or long-term) using guidelines provided by the LEA: "Accessibility Audit";
- b) to support the "Inclusion Now" strategy, priority to allocation of SAI funding be given to the schools involved in each successive year's cycle; and
- c) as demand will almost certainly exceed the amount of funding available, schools be asked to contribute to the cost of any significant adaptations.

Aided Schools

A further restriction to the SAI allocation for 2003-04 is that, for the first time, the DfES has indicated that a specified amount of the SAI funding be set aside for work in aided schools.

Under the regulations, 10% of the funding for capital projects must be provided by the Governing Bodies of aided schools. The LEA will consult diocesan representatives before any work is planned or considered. Specialist equipment to support access to the curriculum can be 100% funded from SAI money.

It is proposed that funding allocation for capital works in aided schools be subject to an identical set of priorities as the one for non-aided schools.

Action required by schools

1. *All schools should conduct an immediate "Access Audit" unless they have already done so. Additional guidance is enclosed to assist in this task: "Accessibility Audit Details of shortfall and place in Access Plan".*
2. *Schools are recommended to complete the Accessibility Audit proforma. This will act as an aide memoire and will provide initial information to help schools in developing their Accessibility Plans. The proforma is in seven parts. Each heading identified a different aspect of accessibility. In 2003-06 the LEA will*

consult with the schools in each year's "Inclusion Now!" initiative about their plans. The completed proformae will assist in the process of determining the LEA's priorities and the strategic use of SAI funding.

Summary of action required by schools

- ◆ Conduct a preliminary audit of curriculum accessibility for disabled pupils.
- ◆ Identify how information needs to be made more accessible for disabled pupils.
- ◆ Conduct an access audit of the physical environment to inform their own planning.
- ◆ Prepare an Accessibility Plan.

An example of an Accessibility Plan is enclosed. This is copied from Annex E of "Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils". You will see that the plan itself need not be very detailed but detailed plans will need to exist elsewhere to meet the targets identified.

New Rights in Education For the Disabled

September, 2002, saw the introduction of new legislation to give disabled pupils and students the right to an education free from discrimination.

The SEN and Disability Act 2001, amended Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by extending discrimination legislation to schools, colleges, universities, adult education and youth services. The Education Act 1996 has also been amended to include the new legislation. The new duties are far reaching and are anticipatory; in other words they cover both existing and future disabled pupils.

Facts about disability

- Disabled people are half as likely to go to college, twice as likely to end up with no qualifications and twice as likely to be out of work. Young people who miss out at nursery, school or college are more likely to face a whole life of exclusion.

What is meant by "disability"?

The Disability Discrimination Act defines who is a disabled person.

"A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

Physical or mental impairment includes sensory impairment, and hidden impairments such as mental illness or mental health problems, dyslexia and conditions such as diabetes or epilepsy.

Disability Rights Commission (DRC)

The DRC is the independent body set up by Act of Parliament in 2000 to enforce the rights of disabled people. Their remit now includes the rights of disabled people in education.

The DRC commissioned the NOP to conduct a survey of nearly 2,000 nationally representative people aged 15 and over. The results were made public in September, 2002, and showed that:

- 95% thought that disabled people should have the same educational opportunities as everyone else.

- 70% thought that perceptions of disabled people in society can be changed through integration in the classroom.
- 50% said that teachers should be trained to understand disability.

The new duties

- Disabled pupils and students must not be treated "less favourably" when applying for a place at school, college or university.
- Providers of education must ensure that they do not discriminate against pupils on the grounds of disability.
- Providers of education must make "reasonable adjustments" to ensure that disabled pupils and students are not substantially disadvantaged.

What this means for schools

This means that schools will need to examine everything they do because every aspect of school life is included in the new duties: from teaching and learning to after school clubs and school trips; from the way the school and its curriculum are organised to what happens in the dinner queue; from timetabling to the use of classroom support; from homework to anti-bullying policies; from admissions to exclusions.

Senior staff, teachers, classroom assistants, administrative and clerical staff, lunchtime assistants and caretakers and anyone else who works in the school all need to consider how they can ensure that disabled pupils are

not substantially disadvantaged or treated less favourably than non-disabled pupils.

Schools have a duty to make **reasonable adjustments** (changes) to overcome problems and barriers to inclusion, participation and educational opportunity. This may require:

- amending any policies, procedures or practices that might, perhaps inadvertently, discriminate;
- ensuring that staff are aware of the issues and are adequately trained;
- ensuring that facilities are in place.

The Planning Duties

The new legislation includes a new **Planning Duty** for schools and LEAs.

By April, 2003, each school must have in place an “**Accessibility Plan**” which outlines how it intends to improve access for disabled pupils over the following three years. By the same date, the LEA must have in place an “**Accessibility Strategy**” which sets out how it will support schools over the same period.

“Improving Accessibility” includes three elements:

- increasing access to the curriculum for disabled pupils;
- improving the physical environment;
- improving the delivery of information to disabled pupils.

Schools will therefore have to consider the steps it will take to increase access in each of these three areas.

The LEA will be consulting schools about the Planning Duties during the Autumn Term, 2002, and Spring Term, 2003.

What if a disabled pupil feels discriminated against?

The law gives the parents of disabled pupils the right to make formal complaints if they feel that their child is being discriminated against.

The first formal step a parent is likely to take is to make a direct complaint to the responsible body. In administering their complaints procedures, schools will therefore need to ensure that all involved are familiar with the new law.

The DRC has set up a new **Education Conciliation Service**. In the event of parents and schools being unable to resolve matters through direct contact they might use this new service in an attempt to settle their differences using an independent conciliator.

As a final resort, a parent can make a claim for discrimination against a school or an LEA to the revised SEN and Disability Tribunal. Decisions made by this body are binding.

Who is the responsible body?

The inter-linking of various laws and regulations could prove to make this quite complicated when an individual case is considered but the following table, taken from the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 Code of Practice, shows the general legal position of the various bodies.

Type of School	Responsible Body
Maintained School	The Governing Body in general, but see below*
Pupil Referral Unit	The Local Education Authority
Maintained Nursery School	The Local Education Authority

- The responsible body in maintained schools varies according to who has the general responsibility for that function in education, that is, admissions, ‘education and associated services’, or exclusions. The Governing Body will generally be the responsible body for a maintained school, except for governance of maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units and admissions to community schools, where the LEA has responsibility.

In the case of a school, the Governing Body must therefore take steps to ensure that all people working in the school do not pursue policies or act in such a way as to render them (the Governing Body) liable to a claim of discrimination.

Further Information

Full information about the Disability Discrimination duties and Accessibility duties is contained in two publications which have been distributed to all schools and LEAs. These are:

- The Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 Code of Practice, issued by the Disability Rights Commission;
- “Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils”, issued by the DfES;
- Literature and advice for parents and anyone involved in the education system is also available free from the DRC Helpline on 0845 762 2633; Textphone 0845 762 2644; Fax: 0845 777 8878; E-mail: enquiry@drc-gb.org; or downloadable from the DRC's website: www.drc-gb.org

“Accessible Schools : Planning to
Increase Access
to Schools for Disabled Pupils”

(Annex D and Annex E)

Annex D

Identifying Barriers to Access: A Checklist

This list should help you identify barriers to access that exist in schools. The list is not exhaustive. It is designed to encourage a flexible approach to the further questioning of the accessibility of your school.

Section 1 How does your school deliver the curriculum?

Question	Yes	No
Do you ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have the necessary training to teach and support disabled pupils?		
Are your classrooms optimally organised for disabled pupils?		
Do lessons provide opportunities for all pupils to achieve?		
Are lessons responsive to pupil diversity?		
Do lessons involve work to be done by individuals, pairs, groups and the whole class?		
Are all pupils encouraged to take part in music, drama and physical activities?		
Do staff recognise and allow for the mental effort expended by some disabled pupils, for example using lip reading?		
Do staff recognise and allow for the additional time required by some disabled pupils to use equipment in practical work?		
Do staff provide alternative ways of giving access to experience or understanding for disabled pupils who cannot engage in particular activities, for example some forms of exercise in physical education?		
Do you provide access to computer technology appropriate for students with disabilities?		
Are school visits, including overseas visits, made accessible to all pupils irrespective of attainment or impairment?		
Are there high expectations of all pupils?		
Do staff seek to remove all barriers to learning and participation?		

Section 2 Is your school designed to meet the needs of all pupils?

Question	Yes	No
Does the size and layout of areas - including all academic, sporting, play, social facilities; classrooms, the assembly hall, canteen, library, gymnasium and outdoor sporting facilities, playgrounds and common rooms - allow access for all pupils?		
Can pupils who use wheelchairs move around the school without experiencing barriers to access such as those caused by doorways, steps and stairs, toilet facilities and showers?		
Are pathways of travel around the school site and parking arrangements safe, routes logical and well-signed?		
Are emergency and evacuation systems set up to inform ALL pupils, including pupils with SEN and disabilities; including alarms with both visual and auditory components?		
Are non-visual guides used to assist people to use buildings, including lifts with tactile buttons?		
Could any of the décor or signage be considered to be confusing or disorientating for disabled pupils with visual impairment, autism or epilepsy?		
Are areas to which pupils should have access well lit?		
Are steps made to reduce background noise for hearing impaired pupils such as considering a room's acoustics and noisy equipment?		
Is furniture and equipment selected, adjusted and located appropriately?		

Section 3: How does your school deliver materials in other formats?

Question	Yes	No
Do you provide information in simple language, symbols, large print, on audiotape or in Braille for pupils and prospective pupils who may have difficulty with standard forms of printed information?		
Do you ensure that information is presented to groups in a way which is user friendly for people with disabilities, e.g., by reading aloud overhead projections and describing diagrams?		
Do you have the facilities such as ICT to produce written information in different formats?		
Do you ensure that staff are familiar with technology and practices developed to assist people with disabilities?		

Annex E

Creating an Accessibility Plan

This is an example of a plan that a school might produce after reviewing existing plans (in particular refurbishments and arrangements and SEN policy), looking at options for improving accessibility within existing arrangements and an audit of the school site for accessibility. The school should monitor the implementation of the plan and to keep under review the access needs of the school.

	Targets	Strategies	Outcome	Timeframe	Goals achieved
Short Term	Availability of written material in alternative formats.	The school makes itself aware of the services available through its LEA for converting written information into alternative formats.	If needed the school can provide written information in alternative formats.	Term 3 2002/03	Delivery of information to disabled pupils improved.
Medium Term	Incorporation of appropriate colour schemes when refurbishing to benefit pupils with visual impairments and install window blinds.	Seek advice from LEA sensory support service on appropriate colour schemes and blinds.	Several classrooms are made more accessible to visually impaired children.	Term 1 2003/04	Physical accessibility of school increased.
	Training for teachers on differentiating the curriculum.	After an audit the school decides that some teachers would benefit from training on differentiating the curriculum.	Teachers are able to more fully meet the requirements of disabled children's needs with regards to accessing the curriculum.	Term 2 2003/04	Increase in access to the National Curriculum.
Long Term	School plans to improve access to designated areas over successive financial years. The school decides which of its entrances and exits have priority, and plans to fit ramps and handrails to all of these.	Planned use of minor capital delegated resources and discuss with the LEA using Schools Access Initiative funding.	Having secured capital resources from the LEA, over a three year period the school's entry areas, will be fully accessible.	Term 3 2004/05	Physical accessibility of school increased.

**“Inclusion Now!
A School Self Evaluation Framework
for Inclusion”

(Curriculum Section)**

Inclusion Now!

A School Self Evaluation Framework for Inclusion

Aims

- To aid schools in raising the achievement and attainment of pupils who are at risk of underachievement or marginalisation in schools, including pupils with Special Educational Needs;
- To promote inclusion as a key area for development, linking to the Education Development Plan.

Objectives

- To identify and disseminate good practice;
- To put in place a robust monitoring and evaluation programme of inclusion in schools;
- To provide the authority with an evidenced view of the effectiveness of provision;
- To produce an annual report addressing aspects of the framework;
- To develop appropriate comparative data for schools to use in developing school self-evaluation;
- To recognise schools with good practice in including a wide range of pupils.

Guidance on using *Inclusion Now!*

The self-evaluation framework for inclusion has been jointly developed by Wakefield and Barnsley central services to aid schools formulating judgements about current good practice, and to identify areas in which the school intends to move forward. As such, it is a tool for the school to use alongside current self-evaluation processes. The status of the document is currently 'work in progress' and the feedback from the pilot schools will be used to agree a final format. It is intended for use in a variety of ways. Schools should incorporate *Inclusion Now!* into the existing cycle of school improvement with reference to it in the School Improvement or Development Plan (SIP/SDP). In addition, schools may wish to include some

key areas within the school Accessibility Plan. Schools may wish to use the document first as an audit, in order to identify what the school already has in place and where the areas for development are. The following are suggestions to its use:

- As an overall audit tool, to identify areas for insertion into the SIP/SDP or school Accessibility Plan;
- As an audit tool to examine one or two specific areas, e.g., leadership and management, moving onto other sections as appropriate;
- As a mechanism to examine a particular aspect of school such as the culture or policy statements.

There may be other uses that schools wish to employ. We enclose **a sample** of the framework for schools to consider; the complete framework will be available to schools from **September, 2003**.

The school will need to have a realistic time span for completion. Some schools may already use a range of strategies to develop inclusion; others will be nearer the beginning of the process. Some schools will have a specific target relating directly to inclusion and will want to work towards this. For other schools, there may be more general processes that need to be incorporated into the school ethos, so the school will plan to this end. Each school is individual and will choose to use *Inclusion Now!* in an individualised way.

It is envisaged that the link adviser will play a significant part in the process, and will help to review the school's work on the framework annually. For a selection of schools each year there will also be the opportunity to review inclusion in more depth, using central LEA staff to perform an inclusion review. It is currently envisaged that an inclusion review would take place once every four years for an individual school, and may be linked to an inclusion chartermark.

Sample: How good are the Curricular and Other Opportunities Offered to Pupils and Students?

The key areas are:

- The effectiveness of teaching of key and basic skills;
- The range of opportunities available to pupils;
- The range of opportunities accessed by pupils.

To complete this section of the framework, the school must demonstrate:

- How the needs of all pupil groups and individuals are met through the range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities;
- The teaching of key and basis skills raises standards;
- A wide range of pupils are able to access the curricular and extra-curricular opportunities within the school.

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students?

Does the school provide a broad range of worthwhile opportunities which meet the interest, aptitudes, and particular needs of pupils, including those having special educational needs?	Evidence	
Culture	<p>The school values a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum.</p> <p>The school adopts a flexible approach to curriculum planning.</p> <p>The curriculum is enhanced through inclusive learning and enrichment activities, which counteract disadvantage and disaffection.</p>	
Policy	<p>The school curriculum policy defines the requirement for a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum with regard to the inclusion statements in Curriculum 2000.</p> <p>Subject and department policies reflect the school's overall curriculum policy.</p> <p>Curricular opportunities reflect the diverse population of the school.</p>	
Practice	<p>Curricular and extra-curricular provision meet the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of pupils.</p> <p>Senior managers monitor and review curricular and extra-curricular provision to ensure that the inclusion statements in Curriculum 2000 are met.</p> <p>The school seeks the views of pupils and parents or carers on the range of opportunities offered.</p> <p>Timetabling ensures maximum access to the curriculum for all pupils.</p> <p>After school and lunchtime study facilities are available to pupils who have limited opportunities for studying at home.</p>	
Impact	<p>Pupils participate fully in curricular and extra-curricular activities.</p> <p>Extra-curricular activities broaden the experience of pupils who are socially or culturally isolated.</p>	

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students

Is the curriculum inclusive by ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all pupils?		Evidence
Culture	<p>The school actively seeks to ensure full access to the curriculum for all pupils.</p> <p>The school is flexible in planning its curriculum so that it includes all learners.</p>	
Policy	<p>The curriculum policy describes how the curriculum is designed to ensure equality of access and opportunity.</p> <p>SEN, race equality, English as an additional language, behaviour and gifted and talented policies identify systems and procedures to ensure that the needs of individuals are met.</p>	
Practice	<p>The school plans efficiently to meet the needs of groups of pupils and individuals.</p> <p>the school ensures that in meeting individuals' needs the balance of their curriculum is maintained.</p> <p>The school ensures that specialist provision is seen to be of high status by pupils and staff.</p>	
Impact	<p>All pupils experience broad balanced and relevant curricular provision.</p> <p>Pupils are enabled to make appropriate choices about courses, ensuring that a diversity of career opportunities is available.</p> <p>Groups and individuals participate fully in the curriculum through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overcoming barriers to learning and participation; • additional and alternative provision. 	

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students?

Does the school have effective strategies for teaching the skills of literacy and numeracy, ICT, oracy and other key learning skills		Evidence
Culture	<p>The school recognises the importance of literacy, oracy, numeracy and ICT as the foundation for learning.</p> <p>All teachers take responsibility for developing these skills.</p>	
Policy	<p>The school has a clear policy on the development of basic and key skills across the curriculum that reflect the National Strategy frameworks and local issues. These are reflected in subject and departmental policies.</p> <p>Assessment policies require departments to identify where a pupil's basic and key skills are a barrier to achievement.</p>	
Practice	<p>Teachers plan for, and teach, basic and key skills appropriate to the subject and pupil group.</p> <p>The school has flexible arrangements to meet the needs of pupils where basic and key skills limit their access to the curriculum.</p> <p>All schemes of work identify opportunities for the teaching of basic and key skills.</p> <p>Subject areas and departments assess and set targets for basic and key skills.</p>	
Impact	<p>Pupils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make measurable progress in acquiring basic and key skills; • are able to access all areas of the curriculum. 	

**How good are the curricular and other opportunities
offered to pupils and students?**

Strengths of the school:

Areas for development:

Accessibility Audit

(Guidance and checklists)

Accessibility Audit

Details of shortfall and place in Access Plan

The audit will identify how well school premises are accessible to pupils.

The audit is set against children categorised in the following groups:

- Visually Impaired (VI);
- Hearing Impaired (HI);
- Physical Difficulties ambulant;
- Physical Difficulties Wheelchair users;
- Autistic;
- Learning Difficulties;
- Epileptic.

The purpose of the audit is to point the way forward to solutions to access problems.

Necessary work can be judged as to its priority and thereby its place in the school Access Plan.

- Firstly can any aspects indicated by the Audit be initially addressed by the school making reasonable adjustments to procedures or working practice;
- Relatively minor adjustments;
- Work that be undertaken as a part of on-going maintenance;
- Significant capital items.

Guidance is available from SENSS when considering children with specific difficulties, i.e.

- Visual Impairments;
- Hearing Impairments;
- Physical Difficulties/Epileptic;
- Learning Difficulties.

For all rooms and areas of a school the following need to be considered:

- Size of areas and layout;
- Lighting of areas;
- Floor surfaces;
- Doors;
- Entrances and exists;
- Noise levels;
- Emergency and evacuation systems.

Three other areas just require prompts:

- stairways;
- pathways of travel around school;
- parking.

For each category prompts are included as to factors to consider.

Size and layout

Furniture, equipment, fixtures and fittings, décor, blinds.

Lighting of areas

Consider décor, blinds, light sources, curtains, forms of lighting.

Floor surfaces

Type, visible, slip resistant.

Doors

Handle heights, weight, handles highlighted, door clear.

Entrances and exits

Steps, ramps, handrails, lifts, widened doorways, signs, electromagnetic doors, way finding systems, non-visual guides, labels, free from obstructions.

Noise

Ventilation, induction loops, acoustics.

Emergency and evacuation

Non-visual guides, alarms, auditory, visual, signs, refuges, floor surfaces, handrails.

Stairways

Free from obstructions.

Pathways of travel

Kerbs.

For all pupils including those with Learning Difficulties

Consider visual signage for pupils with reading difficulties, second language users, deaf BSL users.

Regular practice of fire safety routines

Overlearning for the practice of safety drills where appropriate.

Pupils with Physical Difficulties

When considering pupils with physical difficulties both ambulant and wheelchair users

Size of areas and layout

- Clear pathways for walking and for wheelchair use;
- Adequate turning circle for wheelchairs, which may require moving furniture;
- Clear pathways within wheelchair turning circle at entrance/exit point.

Doorways

- Be aware that doorway lips and mat wells can present an obstruction;
- door handles are at the correct height;
- Door handles can be easily turned;
- Wheelchair users can be seen through glass panels in doors;
- Special consideration will need to be given for independent use with an electric wheelchair.

Floor surfaces

- Inside and out these need to be even and well made;
- Inside should be non-slip and fixed;
- Carpet tiles and joins to carpet should be avoided for wheelchair users. Outside - need to be aware of gullies and drain covers, and that areas drain properly, not leaving puddles as obstacles.

Entrances and exits, stairways and pathways of travel

In addition to considering doorways

- All fire exits and emergency exits to be ramped and signed with 1 in 12 for gradual sloping of ramps and continuous rails to go alongside ramps;
- Handrails on both sides of stairs and on steps and a handrail along corridors;
- Open flight stairs to have painted edges;
- Pupils at a high level of risk of an epilepsy attack might need to be supported on the stairs or to avoid using them;
- Intercom systems are appropriate for use, e.g., the placing of entry/exit buzzer for PD wheelchair user/push button pad system only to gain entrance;
- Electronic gates which are now used in some secondary school libraries.

Lighting

Where switches are placed, e.g., in toilet area.

Ramping is well lit.

Avoid dark areas in corridors and 'dark' decoration.

Deaf and Hearing Impaired Pupils, Parents and Visitors

Consider the following

1 in 5 primary children will have some sort of hearing loss probably due to glue ear, a conductive hearing loss.

Hearing children get 95% of speech at 6 feet away, 71% at 12 feet and only 60% at 24 feet.

Children with glue ear lose 25-40% of speech and 40-50% of classroom discussion.

Children need speech at 16dB above the background noise.

Does the size of areas and layout allow access for all pupils?

For deaf and hearing impaired children a horseshoe or semi-circle is the best seating arrangement, as it is important that the child can see the teacher and all the pupils. If desks are in rows wherever the child sits they will have difficulties seeing other pupils.

Does the lighting of areas allow access for all pupils and visitors?

Deaf and hearing impaired children need all the clues they can get to aid the use of their residual (useful) hearing. Lip reading will be necessary for these children. It is impossible to lip read if there is not sufficient light. It is also important where people are in relation to the light source; it is impossible to lip read if the light is behind a person as this puts the face in shadow. Glass also reflects light; make sure that at reception areas glass windows can be opened. The use of blinds or curtains cuts out strong sunlight.

Some strip lights give out white noise, our ears do not pick up this sound but hearing aids do. If you are lighting a new building take this into consideration.

Do floor surfaces allow access for all pupils?

Sound reverberates (bounces off surfaces) around rooms; a good example is the 'echo' sound you experience in a church. As the sound reverberates it loses power. Hard surfaces such as glass, wooden floors, high ceilings cause more reverberation. The ideal room

would have carpet, curtains or blinds and low ceilings with acoustic tiles on the walls. Often it is unrealistic to expect the ideal but something as simple as carpet under and around desks and tables can help.

Do the entrances and exits of areas allow access for all pupils and visitors?

Deaf and hearing impaired people will have problems with intercoms as they will not hear the reply once they have pressed the button. Make alternative arrangements and make sure that you have a sign explaining these.

Does the noise level of areas allow access for all pupils?

Make sure that you eliminate background noise by closing doors and windows, turning off fans and OHPs when they are not needed.

Try and improve the acoustics in the classroom by covering hard surfaces with cloth, have wall displays to cover large flat surfaces, use carpeting, add rubber tips to chairs and tables and establish a quiet area for one to one work.

For hearing aid wearers provide loop systems at reception areas and at the library desk.

Does the emergency and evacuation systems of areas allow access for all pupils and visitors?

Because of the frequency of some fire alarms, irrespective of how loud they are, often deaf and hearing impaired people cannot hear them. There are various other alerting systems available using flashing lights or pagers. Because it is impractical for deaf people to always be escorted, it is important that your evacuation plans include procedures, for example, a fire steward would need to physically check every room, not rely on shouting "is anyone there" when they are clearing a building.

Once deaf people have been alerted to the fact that there is an evacuation, make sure

that they understand the instructions as these are often given when everyone is moving out of a room or over a tannoy outside.

Access to information

How are deaf parents going to contact school? Have a text phone available or make sure that you are familiar with Type talk, a relay system for text to voice, voice to text phones.

For 55,000 deaf people, English is their second language. Make sure that letters home, school-home books, etc, are accessible.

Do deaf children and adults have access to drama productions, harvest festivals, carol concerts and parents evenings? Interpreters are difficult to find and will make a charge; make sure that you book well ahead.

Wakefield Service for Visually Impaired Children

Accessibility Audit

Well lit areas:

- High or low levels of illumination will be required, depending on the nature of the child's visual impairment;
- Additional lighting may also be required, e.g., using a desk lamp to increase the contrast on the work surface;
- Make sure that all stairwells, slopes, corridors, locker areas, toilets and exists are well lit and glare free;
- Outdoor areas, e.g., entrances, steps, ramps, designated walkways and paths should also have sufficient lighting (to aid travel in winter months).

A glare free environment:

- Reduce glare in the classroom (and other areas) by using anti-glare curtains or blinds;
- If possible, choose storage furniture and desks with a matt surface, otherwise cover with matt paper/film.

A clutter free environment:

- Avoid using the busy areas in schools to store furniture that is no longer used;
- Try to keep changes to physical arrangements of the furniture to a minimum;
- Make sure that sufficient storage is provided for all equipment, coats, bags, etc., to avoid any tripping hazards.

Floor surface and colour:

Try to clearly define any changes in floor surface and colour:

- Indoors provide non-slip flooring, either lino or carpet if possible, and keep a clear contrast to the walls and doors;
- Make sure tiles have a matt appearance to reduce glare;
- If possible, provide different colour flooring for each corridor;
- If there is a change in surface, e.g., from carpet to lino, place a secure metal or rubber divider over the join;

- Around doors, place a mat or other textured covering, such as tactile flooring;
- Outdoors, make sure that all paving stones are well maintained with no rises or cracks which cause tripping hazards.

Walls:

- Clearly define any changes in wall surface, e.g., a narrow storage unit jutting out or a protruding wall, by using different colour paints or placing brightly coloured tape along the edges to increase contrast and visibility;
- Keep any new storage furniture on the floor along the wall surface rather than securing to the walls at upper body/head height.

Ceilings:

- If ceilings are low, paint in a contrasting colour to the doors, walls and floors (pale yellow and orange are good colours for mobility travel in corridors without the benefit of natural light sources).

Doors

- Paint doors in clear contrast with the walls and floors;
- Mark with tactile and distinctive covering that easily distinguishes one floor from another within the same corridor or area;
- If glass doors exist, place brightly coloured tape across the glass in and cross position;
- If possible, place plastic protection covers along the inner hinge side of the door to avoid trapped fingers;
- Make sure that push/pull doors have a metal handle on the push side and a metal push panel on the pull side.

Light switches, plugs and shelving:

- Either provide contrasting brightly coloured switches, plugs and sockets or place brightly coloured adhesive tape around to highlight their position within the room or area;
- Provide brightly coloured contrasting storage/shelving or mark the corners with white paint or tape.

Signs

- Provide clear large print and/or Braille signs around the school environment giving clear directions;
- Provide clear large print and/or Braille signs on doors around the school.

Steps and stairs

- Make sure they are well lit and glare free;
- Whether indoors or outdoors, paint the edges with yellow or white paint;
- Provide handrails if possible in a contrasting colour to the walls.

Slopes/ramps

- Provide handrails at the correct height.

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (1)

Does the **size of areas and layout** allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (2)

Does the **lighting** of areas allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (3)

Do the **floor** surfaces allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (4)

Do the **doors** of areas allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (5)

Do the **entrances and exits** of areas allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (6)

Do the **noise levels** of areas allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT (7)

Do the **emergency and evacuation systems** of areas allow access for all pupils?

	Yes	No	N/A	If No Give details of shortfall and its place in Access Plan
Academic/Sporting				
Classrooms				
Library				
ICT Suite				
Offices/Reception				
Workshops/CDT				
Science labs				
Halls				
Gymnasium				
Changing rooms>Showers				
Other				
Social/Play				
Dining room				
Playground				
Corridors				
Pathways				
Toilets (including disabled)				
Washing facilities				
Cloakrooms				
Other				