



# **Accessibility Strategy**

## **March 2015**

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## Introduction

Lancashire County Council strives to provide all children with the opportunity to maximise their potential and be included in their community. The Local Authority (LA) recognises that to do so means providing a wide range of individual and often complex services to meet their needs. Avoiding discrimination and promoting equality supports the agenda of improving attainment and progression for all pupils.

The Authority will keep in mind a range of key principles, including:

- inclusion is a process by which schools, Local Authorities and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include pupils;
- an inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and incorporates the views of parents and children;
- the interests of all pupils must be safeguarded; and schools, Local Authorities and others should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation.

The Authority believes that educational inclusion is about equal opportunities for all children, whatever their age, disability, gender, ethnicity, attainment or background. It subscribes to Ofsted's view that:

*'An educationally inclusive school is one in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and wellbeing of every young person matter. Effective schools are educationally inclusive schools. This shows not only in their performance, but also in their ethos and their willingness to offer new opportunities to pupils who may have experienced previous difficulties. This does not mean treating all pupils in the same way. Rather it involves taking account of pupils' varied life experiences and needs.*

## Remit and Scope of the Accessibility Strategy

This document has been written in accordance with the LA's duty under equality legislation to prepare an accessibility strategy, describing how the LA will work with schools to:

- Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums;
- Improve the physical environment of schools;
- Improve the delivery of information to disabled pupils.

This document is focussed solely on the parts of the Equality Act 2010 relating to disabled children and young people and their access to schools maintained by Lancashire County Council and to Academies within the Authority.

The Accessibility Strategy complements existing LA plans and strategies, and should not be used in isolation without reference to local and national context and initiatives, including information published by schools to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Guidance for schools on the Public Sector Equality Duty was published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in November 2012

### **Resourcing the Strategy**

To deliver the outcomes identified in this Strategy, existing funding streams will be directed toward the priorities identified. The LA will continue to look at ways to improve its efficiency and effectiveness to deliver the same quality and range of services for less money, or to deliver more for the same level of expenditure. Wherever possible, the LA will seek to develop services and projects in conjunction with key partners in the delivery of services for children and young people such as Health.

### **Monitoring and Review Arrangements**

The Accessibility Strategy will be kept under review and amended as necessary to reflect newly published legislation and statutory guidance, developments in local resources and service delivery, and progress against the action plans.

## The Legal Framework

### The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 brings together and simplifies many different pre-existing equality laws, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001). All schools in England, Wales and Scotland, irrespective of how they are funded or managed, have obligations under the Equality Act 2010, but as this Act harmonises previous equality legislation, much of what is required of schools is already being carried out by them.

### Enforcement of the Act

Claims of discrimination or harassment against a pupil by a school will be made by the parent of the pupil to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) (previously known as SENDIST) of the Health, Education and Social Care (HESC) Chamber. Appeals against the panel's decisions now go to the Upper Tribunal instead of to the High Court. Claims have to be brought within 6 months of the act to which the claim relates, but the panel has the power to consider claims after that time has passed if it considers it just and equitable to do so.

There is a new procedure for complainants to ask questions in respect of a contravention of the Act before a formal case is taken to the Tribunal. This means that if a pupil believes that he/she has been discriminated against or harassed by their school then, before deciding whether to bring a case, they can ask questions of the school about their treatment. Special forms and guidance have been developed for this purpose, but are not compulsory. Questions asked by a pupil (either on the prescribed forms or otherwise) and the answer by the school can be used as part of evidence in any subsequent court or tribunal case.

### Accessibility Planning

Schools must develop and implement integrated accessibility plans which are aimed at:

- increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum;
- improving the physical environment of schools to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services provided; and
- improving the availability of accessible information to disabled pupils.

This is known as 'The Planning Duty'. Schools must also have regard to the need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must regularly review them. An accessibility plan may be a freestanding document or may be published as part of another document such as the school development plan. Schools also have

additional duties under the Equality Act to publish information e.g. to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Local Authorities must prepare accessibility strategies based on the same principles as the access plans for schools. LAs, in relation to their education functions, are under the same duty as schools - to have accessibility strategies, to provide reasonable adjustments for school pupils, with the aim of avoiding disadvantage, and to provide auxiliary aids and services.

### **Disability Toolkit 2010**

The University of Bath conducted research in 2010 to pilot tools to support schools in identifying and collecting disability data. This work with volunteer schools has informed the development of a toolkit schools may find helpful in identifying and collecting information on all their disabled pupils.

The research found that collecting robust and consistent disability information can help schools better identify and respond to the needs of their disabled pupils, in addition to supporting schools in meeting their duties under equality legislation.

The toolkit comprises a

- questionnaire that can be distributed to parents to help schools identify disabled pupils and their individual needs
- range of flexible tools for schools to use with pupils, which can be matched to meeting the individual needs of disabled pupils.

Full details and links to resources are available on the DfE website:

[www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/sen/a0065985/disability-toolkit](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/sen/a0065985/disability-toolkit)

### **Further Guidance**

Guidance on the planning duties, which offers advice to schools and LAs on how to develop plans and strategies and gives examples on approach, can be found in 'Accessible Schools:

Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils' which was published in 2002 but remains the Department for Education's recommended text.

Further guidance on this and all other areas of disability in schools is available in the "Implementing Disability Discrimination Act in Schools and Early Years Settings" pack, which although it refers to the repealed DDA, contains helpful advice for schools in the area of disability.

The most recent information on what schools and LAs must do to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 can be found in guidance written by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and in non-statutory advice published by the Department for Education.

## Increasing Participation in the School Curriculum

Schools are responsible for providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and have a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for disabled pupils. The curriculum covers not only teaching and learning but the wider curriculum of the school such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities or school visits. The curriculum should provide relevant and challenging learning to all children. It should follow the three principles set out in the National Curriculum inclusion statement:

- setting suitable learning challenges
- responding to pupils' diverse learning needs
- overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

Schools should consider the needs of a range of disabled pupils and prospective pupils, but they are not obliged to anticipate every imaginable disability and need only consider general reasonable adjustments for pupils that might attend in the future - e.g. being prepared to produce large font papers for pupils with a visual impairment even though there are no such pupils currently admitted to the school.

Additional provision to enable pupils with learning difficulties to access the curriculum is already delivered through the SEN framework and this will cover the needs of many disabled children, but the LA recognises that schools are likely to require external support to maximise their ability to respond to diverse needs. Information provided by a school such as **Provision maps** for individual pupils should provide clear information about targets and progress and help children and young people and their parents understand what is happening in school.

### External Resources Available to Schools

Through various specialist teams and services, the LA promotes the inclusion and attainment of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), building capacity within schools and settings, supporting staff development and the implementation of effective policies and practices, so that children and young people with additional needs are included in all aspects of school/setting life and make good progress.

Specialist practitioners within the Inclusion and Disability Support Service or at special schools and with Learning Excellence provide support to all schools across the county, sharing their expertise and their links to other agencies and advising on strategies and resources to meet the needs of pupils, improve outcomes and increase inclusion in school life and the wider community.

The programme of training for school-based staff, to develop the capacity of schools to increase access to the curriculum, is well established. Inclusion and Disability

Support Services staff continuously update and develop the content of training materials and explore new areas of research in the field. Partnership working with colleagues from Health and the private sector has allowed an extended range of courses relating to Health Care Needs to be made available, including diabetes awareness, epilepsy awareness and emergency medication, enteral feeding (gastrostomy tubes & naso-gastric tubes), tracheostomy care, use of inhalers and nebulisers, and administering and storing medication.

The LA has a statutory obligation to identify, assess and make provision for those children and young people with the most complex and long-term SEN. Assessments are completed and the resulting documents and provision maintained, monitored and reviewed in line with legislation. The LAs range of specialist provision is reviewed and developed to correspond with increasing or changing patterns of demand for services for children and young people with additional needs using information provided by such documents as the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis.

Additional funding is available to mainstream settings across the LA to improve access to the curriculum. Funding mechanisms for SEN, and various specialist high cost equipment budgets assist schools in providing targeted support, resources and equipment for children and young people with the most complex needs

## Improving the Physical Environment of Schools

This strand of the planning duty includes improvements to the physical environment of the school and physical aids to access education. 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, heating, ventilation, lifts, signs, interior surfaces, floor coverings, room décor and furniture. Improvements to physical access might include - ramps, handrails, lifts, widened doorways, electromagnetic doors, adapted toilets and washing facilities, adjustable lighting, blinds, induction loops, well designed room acoustics and way-finding systems.

All new school buildings have to comply with the Building Regulations and The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 and should be physically accessible to disabled pupils. However, much of the work in this area will involve improving access to existing buildings.

Improved access to the physical environment can be achieved by rearranging room space, removing obstructions from walkways, changing the layout of classrooms and designated storage space or by reallocating rooms to particular subject specialisms. When planning to improve the physical environment, schools should consider the needs of individual pupils or groups of pupils including:

- Pupils with complex physical impairments who may use a wheelchair to move around school.
- Pupils with less complex physical impairments, who are ambulant, but still require some adaptations, special considerations or adjustments to the school environment.
- Pupils with a sensory impairment or other difficulty requiring adaptations to the school environment or the presentation of information in appropriate formats.
- Pupils who, for a variety of reasons, require specialist toilet and changing facilities.

In addition to having a duty to consider reasonable adjustments for particular individual disabled pupils, schools also have to consider potential adjustments which may be needed for disabled pupils generally as it is likely that any school will have a disabled pupil at some point. However, schools are not obliged to anticipate and make adjustments for every imaginable disability and need only consider general reasonable adjustments. The LA is committed to developing the range of provision available across the county with the aim that children are able to access an adapted school within their local area, and recognises that schools are likely to require external support when looking to make improvements of this nature.

## External Resources Available to Schools

Through various specialist teams and services, the LA provides advice to schools about, for example, improving the acoustic environment for pupils with hearing impairment, the reduction of glare and the improvement of signage for pupils with visual impairment, and reasonable adjustments to the physical environment for pupils with mobility difficulties.

Physiotherapists can advise a school about an individual pupil's mobility and physical development. This might include things like co-ordination and ability to sit, stand and walk. They can advise the school on how best to help the child develop physically, to keep the child as mobile as possible and on any appropriate specialist equipment or adaptations to the environment.

Occupational Therapists can advise a school about using activity-based therapies to help raise an individual pupil's self-esteem and to encourage them to be as independent as possible. They will also advise on any appropriate specialist equipment or adaptations to the school environment if required.

The LA also manages a variety of capital projects across the county including the rebuilding, remodelling and refurbishing of primary, secondary and special schools.

Additional funding is available to schools for:

- minor adaptations to the physical environment such as ramps for wheelchair users.
- items of specialist equipment such as hoists and changing tables for pupils with toileting and other personal care needs.

## Improving the Delivery of Information

This part of the duty covers planning to make written information normally provided by a school to its pupils available to disabled pupils. The information should take account of pupils' disabilities, pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame. The information might include handouts, timetables, and information about school events. Schools might consider providing the information in alternative formats (such as large print and audio tape) using ICT, or providing the information orally.

The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 specifies the minimum requirements for information which must be provided on school websites and reproduced as a paper copy without charge for any parent who asks for it. School websites must be reviewed annually and include:

- The name, postal address and telephone number of the school, and the name of a person to whom enquiries should be addressed;
- The admission arrangements for the school, including any selection or oversubscription criteria, or guidance on how to access such information on the LA's website;
- Information as to where and by what means parents may access the most recent report about the school published by her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills.
- The school's most recent key stage 2 and key stage 4 results as published by the Secretary of State in the School Performance Tables published on the Department for Education's website
- Information as to where and by what means parents may access the School Performance Tables published by the Secretary of State on the Department for Education's website.
- Information about the school curriculum including the content of the curriculum followed by the school for each subject and details as to how additional information relating to the curriculum may be obtained; the names of any phonics or reading schemes in operation; a list of the courses offered at key stage 4 which lead to a GCSE qualification; and a list of other courses offered at key stage 4 and the qualifications that may be acquired.
- The School's behaviour policy
- The amount of the school's allocation from the Pupil Premium grant in respect of the current academic year; details of how it is intended that the allocation will be spent; details of how the previous academic year's allocation was

spent, and the effect of this expenditure on the educational attainment of those pupils at the school in respect of whom grant funding was allocated.

- The School's policy for pupils with special educational needs

The LA aims to provide a comprehensive on-line information resource about the Council and its services, providing web pages that meet the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) 'Web Accessibility Initiative's Double-A' standard, and encourages schools to follow the same standards and guidelines to ensure that their sites can be used as easily as possible by everyone.

Through various specialist teams and services, the LA supports schools to improve the delivery of information to children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families in a range of ways including:

- Advice on appropriate communication strategies, for example the use of British Sign Language and Visual Aids;
- Advice on other strategies and resources;
- Training on the presentation of written materials and differentiated information
- Support groups for families

### ***The 'Local Offer'***

The SEND reforms require every authority to produce a web based 'Local Offer'. The **local offer** brings together information for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. In Lancashire we are rightly proud of the work that has been done by Parents/carers ourselves and other stakeholders to develop our local offer which is a growing body of information.

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities.aspx>

### **The Family Information Network Directory (FIND)**

The FIND database provides a directory of local and national services including voluntary organisations and support groups.

Families are also invited to submit details about their disabled child to the database, which is used to develop an overview of the needs of disabled children across the county to assist with planning services. The FIND service is strictly confidential - no individual information about any children or their families is shared with anyone.

Every family recorded on the FIND database receives a quarterly newsletter free of charge to help them keep informed about services and support which may be relevant.

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/help-for-parents-and-carers/family-information-network-directory.aspx>

### **Information Advice and Support (IAS).**

This dedicated service is for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. Young people can also access the service independently from their parents. The service is impartial, confidential, and free. It is built on the existing support from the Parent Partnership Service, parent/carer liaison officers, Lancashire and District Parent Carer Forums and other local services for young people.

They can provide support around:

- Local policy and practice
- The local offer
- Personalisation and personal budgets
- Education law on SEN and related law on disability, health and social care

They also provide advice through parent carer support groups, local SEN youth forums or local disability groups and training events.

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/help-for-parents-and-carers/information-advice-and-support.aspx>

Other useful information that can be found within the local offer includes:

- Key roles within children's health services  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/health/key-roles-within-childrens-health-services.aspx>
- NHS Trusts  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/health/nhs-trusts.aspx>
- Child Development Centres  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/health/child-development-centres.aspx>
- Portage  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/early-years/portage.aspx>

- Health Visitors  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/health/key-roles-within-childrens-health-services.aspx#visitors>
- Grants and Funding  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/finance/grants.aspx>
- Benefits Advice  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/benefits-and-grants/benefits-advice.aspx>
- Lancashire Break Time  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/activities-and-transport/short-breaks.aspx>
- Community Transport Services  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-travel/public-transport/community-transport-services.aspx>
- Moving into Further Education  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/education/moving-into-further-education.aspx>
- School and post 16 Transport  
<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/schools/help-with-school-costs/free-travel-to-and-from-school/special-educational-needs-transport.aspx>