

# **Staffordshire Accessibility Strategy 2021 - 2024**

## **Supporting Accessibility in Staffordshire Schools for Pupils with a Disability**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In Staffordshire our ambition is that all children with special educational needs and disabilities ('SEND') believe that they can reach their potential. They

receive the right support at the right time from their parents/carers, the community and the professionals that work with them to make this happen'. (Draft SEND Strategy).

- 1.2 Staffordshire County Council ('SCC') believe all children and young people, irrespective of background or needs, are entitled to a good education that enables them to fulfil their potential. Improving access to education, participation in the school curriculum and educational achievement for pupils with disabilities is vital to ensure equality of opportunity, to support pupils to reach their educational potential and improve their future outcomes.
- 1.3 The [Equality Act 2010](#) ('the Act') requires all providers to make reasonable adjustments to avoid disadvantaging pupils with disabilities. However, schools have an additional duty to plan for better access for disabled pupils. This planning duty does not apply to Early Years and Further / Higher Education providers.

## 2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 The strategy sets out the approach that SCC are taking to increase access to education for children and young people with SEND, so that they can benefit from educational provision to the same extent as all children can.
- 2.2 The strategy is for all schools for which SCC has responsibility, including those not located in Staffordshire, but where Staffordshire resident children attend.
- 2.3 It complies with the requirement within the Equality Act 2010 (Schedule 10) that all local authorities must, in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body, prepare and publish an **accessibility strategy**.
- 2.4 Schools are required to develop and publish an **accessibility plan** that outlines how they will improve the access to education for pupils with disabilities over time. There should be a link between the school's SEN information report and their accessibility plan. See Appendix 1 for a sample framework/template to help schools in their plans' development.

- 2.5 Under the Act, a person is defined as disabled if they have ‘a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities’. This definition includes learning difficulties, mental health needs, sensory impairments, and long-term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy and cancer.
- 2.6 The SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years (2014) states ‘Children and young people with these conditions do not necessarily have special educational needs, but there is a significant overlap between children, and those with SEN. Where a disabled child or young person requires special educational provision to be made, they will also be covered by the SEN definition.’

### 3. Our Duties

- 3.1 In addition to meeting the specific requirement set out in Schedule 10, the strategy contributes to the requirements to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (‘PSED’) with specific regard to pupils with a disability.
- 3.2 The PSED consists of a general (equality) duty which requires those schools for which SCC are responsible for to:
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act.
  - Eliminate harassment of disabled pupils, related to their disability.
  - Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and others.
  - Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.
  - Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.
  - Take steps to take account of people’s disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.
- 3.3 The Act requires schools and SCC to make **reasonable adjustments** to ensure that pupils with disabilities are not at a substantial disadvantage and are enabled to participate in education and associated services. Failure to make a reasonable adjustment is a form of discrimination under the Act.
- 3.4 Schedule 10 states that an accessibility strategy should be for a prescribed period:

- (a) Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums.
- (b) Improving the physical environment of schools and increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools.
- (c) Improving the delivery of information to pupils and their parents/carers.

**NB: Medical Needs:**

The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on maintained schools and academies to support pupils with medical conditions. Individual healthcare plans will normally specify the type and level of support required to meet the medical needs of such pupils. Where children and young people also have SEN, their provision should be planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way with the healthcare plan. Schools are required to have regard to statutory guidance 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions'.

**4. Local Context**

4.1 Staffordshire is a large county with over 400 schools and academies providing education for around 120,000 primary, middle and secondary school pupils. Approximately 2,500 pupils attend 23 special schools and six Pupils Referral Units. At the end of September 2020, there are 6048 pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and we currently support 12,758 pupils with SEND in mainstream settings.

4.2 There is a strong relationship between SCC and its community of schools and academies. A full list of all schools, including those that are accessible for children and young people with disabilities, is found on Staffordshire's [SEND Local Offer](#)

**What children, parents and carers tell us...**

Parents tell us that it's 'important that all staff in schools, not just teachers, understand the needs of children with SEND in general and their child's individual needs.

In some schools, and for some children, this is working well, but in other schools and for other children, this could work better'.

**5. Our Principles and Priorities**

- 5.1 Staffordshire County Council and its partners continue to work together as part of the SEND Inclusion and Partnership Board to reflect on local practice and to evaluate what has worked well and what needs to improve to ensure effective services for children and young people with special educational needs.
- 5.2 This is set out in our joint **SEND self-evaluation** (SEF) which represents an assessment of the Staffordshire local area and its response to support children with SEND. The completed SEF feeds into the draft SEND Strategy (2020-25) which focusses on collaborative working between schools, parents/carers, partner agencies and the Local Authority.
- 5.3 Our [Whole Life Disability Strategy 2018-23](#) sets out the vision for how we want ‘all people who have a disability to be able to live their lives, ensuring we respond to their individual circumstances, their support networks and the communities in which they live’.

#### **Our Principles:**

- 5.4 ‘Individuals with a disability will be able to access and participate fully in family and community life to meet their needs’. (Draft SEND Strategy 2020-25)
- 5.5 All children and young people have a right to have their needs met; which will normally be within their local mainstream school within their community.
- 5.6 Children and young people feel included in their education setting and be able to access and participate.
- 5.7 SCC, its schools and other partners will work together to support the needs of pupils with disabilities within education.

#### **What children, parents and carers tell us...**

‘We need to be more aspirational for our children with SEND and focus on what they can do and ensure we are always building their independence.

(SEND Strategy Engagement Oct 2020)

- 5.8 Staffordshire County Council will engage with children and young people, and with parents/carers and will capture their views to inform service development and working practices to support pupils with disabilities.

## 6. Implementing the Strategy

Through the work detailed in this strategy, SCC will support those schools it is responsible for to:

1. Increase access to the curriculum for disabled pupils.
2. Improve the physical environment to increase access for disabled pupils.
3. Make written information more accessible to disabled pupils.

- 1. Increasing access to the school curriculum** – ‘schools must use their best endeavours to provide high quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised to meet the individual needs of children and young people’.

To achieve this, **Schools** will:

- Make SEND a priority by ensuring there is a member of the Governing Body, or a sub-committee, with specific oversight for SEND.
- Write an Accessibility Plan in partnership with stakeholders, outlining how it will provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all its pupils.
- Use a range of inclusive teaching strategies.
- Ensure effective support for the transition of pupils with SEND.
- Recognise the potential of pupils with SEND, reduce barriers to their achievement and inclusion, and develop a strong culture for success.
- Use a graduated response when meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND, using the ‘assess, plan, do, review’ cycle to inform this.
- Provide staff with the opportunity for regular training on SEND.
- Use auxiliary aids to ensure children can be included in the curriculum.
- Ensure children with SEND are included in social activities and trips.
- Involve children and their parents/carers in the review of individual plans regarding curriculum access.
- Ensure all children with SEND have a voice, and are listened to

- Help children and young people to access exams and assessments - <https://www.staffordshireconnects.info/kb5/staffordshire/directory/advice.page?id=mNJYEQNW9LA>
- Ensure medical and physical needs' support for schools.

**Staffordshire County Council will:**

- Provide the right help for children and families, at the right time, helping to empower families and build resilience.
- Work in partnership with schools, colleges, early years' settings and providers, to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people in the County, ensuring that every child does well from the earliest years, until they enter employment.
- Promote the inclusion of children and young people with SEND within schools and early help settings.
- Listen to the views of children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners in the review and development of services for pupils with SEND

**Support** to achieve this will be available from:

- **Graduated Response:**

Schools will provide special educational needs (SEN) support for a child if their educational needs mean that they require additional or different support that is generally given to most children of the same age. This is referred to as the graduated response.

SEN support has a clear cycle of assessment of progress, planning and putting in place the appropriate support; then reviewing a child's progress - this is known as 'Assess, Plan, Do, Review'.

For a small number of children, they may require a higher level of specialist resourcing, additional to that which is usually provided in school and which may require the completion of an EHC Assessment in order to determine whether it is necessary for provision to be made through an EHC Plan.

- **Specialist Support Service:**

The **Hearing and Visual Impairment Teams** support children and young people with a hearing or visual impairment aged 0-25 years at home, in early years settings, and in mainstream and special schools.

**ASSIST** provides support for people over 16 years who have hearing or vision loss, are deafblind, or who have an autism spectrum condition.

- **Educational Psychology Service:**

The **Educational Psychology Service** supports schools, other educational settings and SCC in meeting the needs of children and young people, with severe and complex special educational needs and disabilities.

**What parents and carers tell us...**

Parents value support from specialists such as H&VI services, speech and language, EPS and autism outreach, and would like increased access to these services. (SEND SEF 2020)

- **Early Years' Forum:**

The early years forums are monthly multi-agency meetings that monitors whether the right services are involved to support pre-school children. Those attending represent the services that may help, including:

- SEND assessment and planning service
- Specialist health visitors
- Early years area special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs)
- Community paediatricians
- Educational psychologists
- Early Help practitioners
- Speech and language therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Child development social workers, and
- Specialist teachers.

- **Speech and Language Service – Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust:**

The Children's Speech and Language Therapy service is provided across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent and works with babies, children and young people who have speech, language, communication and eating/drinking needs. Its teams include speech and language therapists who work in the community in a wide range of settings including family homes, schools, hospitals and children's centres.

- **Autism Outreach:**

Autism Outreach work with children and young people up to 18 years with a diagnosis or working diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition. Working with parents/carers, the service offers advice and training to mainstream settings who are supporting pupils with an autism spectrum condition.

- **Outreach Provision:**

Provide specialist training, development and support for staff in mainstream schools so that they are better equipped to help children and young people with SEND. The service is available to mainstream schools and settings with children whose needs can complex and where a school or setting would benefit from specialist advice.

- **SEND Hubs:**

SEND Hubs support school staff in their district to provide the right support to children and young people at the right time. The hubs are a group of professionals which includes headteachers and heads of support services. Meeting every half term, they discuss children and young people, going through the graduated approach who need additional advice and support, putting into place agreed actions and strategies to support them.

## **2. Improving the physical environment of schools to increase access for disabled pupils.**

To achieve this, **Schools** will:

- Ensure schools and settings are accessible, including buildings and the use of physical space, to reduce noise and distractions, lighting, quiet spaces for time out/sensory room, auxiliary aids, braille, visual timetables.
- Make use of the Disability Access Fund in its early years' settings.

**Staffordshire County Council** will:

- Plan new buildings and/or adaptations that comply with accessibility requirements
- Review provision of buildings (other than schools) that SCC is responsible for, to ensure they comply with the latest accessibility legislation and requirements
- Facilitate the access of individual pupils with physical or sensory impairments, or complex medical conditions, where required
- Work with School Admissions to assist with issues regarding individual placements
- Ensure EHC Plans are specific about the adaptations required to make the school environment more accessible for individual pupils with a disability
- Work collaboratively with schools to ensure smooth transition arrangements for children coming into schools for the first time and those moving to other schools/colleges.
- In 2018-19 Special Provision Capital funding SCC received from the Department of Education was used to develop support for children with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH)

In 2020/21, the Funding will be used to develop resource bases at mainstream schools for children with an EHC Plan and Social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and/or with ASC.

### **3. Make written information more accessible to disabled pupils by providing information in a range of different ways.**

To achieve this, **Schools** will:

- Write an Accessibility Plan, and publish it on their school website
- Have a SEND Information Report, published on their school website
- Have a link to the [SEND Local Offer](#) on their school website
- Provide accessible information for disabled pupils and their parents/carers
- Use alternative forms of communication with individual pupils where required
- Provide interpreters, including sign language interpreters, where required
- Use the Graduated Response when meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND, using the 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle to inform this.

**Staffordshire County Council** will:

- Ensure that information about services available for children and young people with SEN/disabilities aged 0-25 and their parents/carers, is up to date and easily accessible on our [SEND Local Offer](#).
- Continue to develop and regularly review the SEND Local Offer, involving parents/carers, children, young people and practitioners.
- Provide advice and support to parents, children and young people through the [SEND Information Advice and Support Service](#).
- Provide information via [Staffordshire Connects](#) including the Family Information Service.
- Provide guidance for schools in meeting the needs of children with SEND through the [Graduated Response Toolkit](#). A graduated response toolkit is also available for early years settings and one is under development for post 16 settings.
- Consult with children, young people and parents/carers in the development and review of local strategies.

- Provide accessible information for pupils with disabilities and their parents/carer; where necessary providing interpreters, including sign language interpreters.
- Provide free internet access in Staffordshire Libraries and ICT champions who can support parents/carers to access the SEND Local Offer and other information.

## **7. Monitoring and Review**

- 7.1 It is the duty of all those working in the Local Authority's maintained schools and those working for Staffordshire County Council, on areas associated with accessibility, to ensure that this strategy is implemented and adhered to.
- 7.2 Staffordshire County Council will support schools in implementing the strategy and will continue to 'work with' parents/carers and our key partners in the context of our overall SEND Strategy (2020-25).
- 7.3 The SEND Strategic Management Group/SEND Inclusion and Partnership Group will oversee the delivery of the strategy as part of their overall strategic role and review the document annually. This group has representation from education, social care, health, the voluntary sector and parents/carers.
- 7.4 All schools and academies must publish an accessibility plan on their website which must comply with the statutory duties as detailed in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. To support schools, SCC has produced an accessibility plan template that can be adapted and by governing bodies for this purpose. (See Appendix 1).
- 7.5 Staffordshire County Council will monitor information published on the Local Offer to ensure accessibility plans are published on school's websites as a statutory duty. The Local Authority will monitor this and liaise with services and with partner agencies and providers to ensure links are current and in place.

## Appendix 1 – Accessibility Plan Template

All schools are required to have an accessibility plan and this checklist is designed to help when writing and reviewing them.

What to cover	Tips
<p>Accessibility plans must set out how the school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim to increase the extent to which pupils with disabilities can participate in the curriculum</li> <li>• Improve its physical environment to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of the education, benefits, facilities and services provided</li> <li>• Improve the availability of accessible information for disabled pupils</li> </ul>	<p>An audit (see Appendix 2 – School checklist) could help you to identify potential barriers to access and what you could do about them. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are all the shelves in the library accessible to all?</li> <li>▪ Is there adequate lighting in all areas?</li> <li>▪ Is information provided in large print, Braille, etc.?</li> <li>▪ Do the curriculum and resources include examples of people with disabilities?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do teachers consider the individual needs of pupils in their lessons?</li> </ul>
<p>Details of <b>how</b> you will make the school's curriculum, physical environment and information more accessible for people with disabilities</p>	<p>This section could include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Targets</li> <li>▪ The actions that will be put in place to meet these targets</li> <li>▪ Timescales</li> <li>▪ Who is responsible for particular targets/actions?</li> <li>▪ Success criteria.</li> </ul>
<p>Monitoring and evaluating the plan</p>	<p>When was the plan approved? When will it be reviewed? By who?</p>

## **Appendix 2 – School Checklist – To assist schools identify barriers to accessibility.**

### **Access to site**

- Disabled parking signposted at car park entrance and disabled parking space(s)
- Dropped kerb to pavement with appropriate textured paving
- High contrast signage to the entrance
- Adequate lighting along pathway
- Walkways are evenly paved and in good condition
- Clear of overhanging trees or windows opening onto the pathways
- All stepped areas are accessible by ramp with tactile surface at top and bottom
- Appropriate handrails starting before the first step and finishing after the last.
- Edges of steps/stairs are highlighted

### **Entrance**

- Height of entrance bell clearly visible and contrasting with surrounding areas
- Entrance mats are flush with floor, no tripping hazard
- Area well lit and has clear signage.

### **Reception**

- Provision of a Lighting Transition Zone out of the main traffic area where a visually impaired person can adjust to the different light levels when entering a building
- Clear of obstacles or clutter
- Glazing is clearly marked by banding or frosting to indicate its presence

### **Corridors**

- Plain non-glare, non-slippery flooring
- Adequate lighting, not pooling
- Corridors are free of clutter, both floors and walls
- Doors are painted in a colour that contrasts with their frame and surroundings
- Clear and tactile signage to classrooms are fitted to the outside wall, not the door
- Displays are at eye level, tactile if possible.
- Raised areas/steps, which protrude into an open space are highlighted.

### **Cloakrooms**

- Coat hooks a good size and contrasting colour.