

Staffordshire Accessibility Strategy 2021-2024

Supporting Accessibility in Staffordshire Schools

February 2022



1. Introduction

- 1.1 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 and participation in the school curriculum for children and young people with disabilities is vital, to ensure equality of opportunity, to support children and young people to reach their educational potential and improve their future outcomes.
- 1.2 Our ambition is that "All children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities ('SEND') SEND are given the opportunity to achieve everything that they can. They engage with the right support at the right time from their parents/carers, the community and the professionals that work with them to make this happen." (SEND Strategy 2021-26)
- 1.3 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'.
- 1.4 The [Equality Act 2010](#) ('the Act') requires all providers to make reasonable adjustments to avoid disadvantaging children and young people with disabilities. Schools have an additional duty to plan for better access for children and young people with disabilities. This planning duty does not apply to settings which provide only Early Years provision and are not maintained nurseries, or which provide only Further / Higher Education provision.

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 The strategy sets out the approach SCC are taking to increase access to education for children and young people with disabilities, so they can benefit from educational provision to the same extent as all children can.

- 2.2 The strategy is for all Staffordshire schools for which SCC has responsibility.
- 2.3 It complies with the requirement in 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 All schools and academies must develop and publish an **Accessibility Plan** on their website which must comply with the statutory duties as detailed in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.5 The school Accessibility Plan should be based on the same principles as local authority Accessibility Strategy and outline how the school will improve access to education for children and young people with disabilities over time. There should be a link between the school's SEN Information Report and their Accessibility Plan.
- 2.6 To support schools in the production of an Accessibility Plan, SCC has produced an Accessibility Plan template (See Appendix 1).
- 2.7 Under the Act, a person is defined as disabled if they have 'a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term substantially 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.
- 2.8 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 disabled children and young people, 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 Accessibility Strategy contributes to the requirements under section 149 of the Act to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty ('PSED') with specific regard to children and young people with a disability.
- 3.2 The PSED consists of a general (equality) duty which requires public bodies, in exercising of its functions, including SCC and schools for which SCC are responsible for to:
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 3.3 The Act requires schools and SCC to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that children and young people 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 An Accessibility Strategy should be over a prescribed period:
- (a) Increasing the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can participate in the schools' curriculums.
 - (b) Improving the physical environment of schools and increasing the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools.
 - (c) Improving the delivery of information to children and young people with disabilities and their parents/carers.

NB: Medical Needs:

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

[`Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school - GOV.UK](#)

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 children and young people. Approximately 2,500 children and young people attend 23 special schools and six Pupil Referral Units. At July 2021, there were 6,048 children and young people with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), with 12,758 children and young people with SEND attending 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, can be found on Staffordshire's [SEND Local Offer](#)

5. Our Priorities and Principles

- 5.1 The SEND Strategy (2021-26) sets out the local area's priorities for children and young people with SEND and their families.
1. We communicate well with each other.
 2. We work in partnership to meet the needs of children and young people.
 3. We ensure that the right support is available at the right time.
 4. We encourage communities to be inclusive.

Our Principles:

- 5.2 All children and young people have a right to have their needs met, which will normally be within their local mainstream school, in their community.
- 5.3 Children and young people can access their education setting, participate within it and feel included.
- 5.4 Children and young people with a disability can access and participate fully in family and community life to meet their needs.
- 5.5 SCC, its schools, other partners and stakeholders will work together to support the needs of children and young people with a disability within education.
- 5.6 SCC will engage with children and young people with disabilities, and their parents/carers to capture their views to inform service development and working practices.

6. Implementing the Strategy

Through the work detailed in this strategy, SCC will support those schools it is responsible for to ensure that the following key priorities are met:

1. Increase access to the curriculum for children and young people with disabilities.
2. Improve the physical environment to increase access for children and young people with disabilities.
3. Make information more accessible to children and young people with disabilities.

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 sub-committee, with oversight for SEND.
- Write an Accessibility Plan in partnership with stakeholders, outlining how it will provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all its children and young people.
- Use a range of inclusive teaching strategies.
- Ensure effective support for the transition of children and young people with SEND.
- Recognise the potential of children and young people with SEND, reduce barriers to their achievement and inclusion, and develop a strong culture for success.
- Use a graduated response when meeting children and young people’s needs using the ‘assess, plan, do, review’ cycle to inform this.
- Provide staff with the opportunity for regular training on SEND.
- Use a range of resources and auxiliary aids to ensure children can be included in the curriculum.
- Ensure children with SEND are included in social activities.
- Involve children and young people and their parents/carers in the review of individual plans regarding curriculum access.
- Ensure all children and young people with SEND have a voice and are listened to.
- Help children and young people to [access exams and assessments](#) -
- Work with relevant professionals to ensure a children and young people’s medical and physical needs’ are met.

Staffordshire County Council will:

- Provide the right help for children, young people and their parents/carers, 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/young person does well from the earliest years, until they enter employment.
- Promote the inclusion of children and young people with SEND within schools and early years settings.
- Listen to the views of children and young people with SEND, parents/carers and practitioners in the review and development of services for children and young people with SEND.
- Provide access to NASEN Whole-School SEND Review training for schools.
- Provide specialist services (as outlined below) to support children and young people, schools and staff.

Support to achieve this will be available from:

- **Graduated Response:**

Schools will provide special educational needs (SEN) support for a child /young person if their educational needs mean that they require additional or different support to that generally given to most children and young people 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/young person's progress - this is known as 'Assess, Plan, Do, Review'.

For a small number of children and young people, 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 Education, Health and Care (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 impairment (HI) or visual impairment (VI) aged 0-25 years at home, in early years settings, and in mainstream and special schools.

ASSIST can provide support for young people over 16 years who have HI or VI, are deafblind, or who have an autism spectrum condition.

The **Autism Outreach Team (AOT)** work with children and young people up to 25 years with a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition, the team includes a further education specialist. The service offers advice and training to mainstream settings who are supporting children and young people with an autism spectrum condition.

When a child is referred to the AOT and HI/VI Teams an environmental audit is completed of the education settings. The audit provides recommendations to the setting, based around a child's access needs.

- **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.

- **Early Years' Forum:**

The **Early Years** Forums are monthly multi-agency meetings that monitor whether the right services are involved to support pre-school children. Those attending represent a the range of services that provide help and support to children and early years settings.

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

The **Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service** works with babies, children and young people who have speech, language, communication, and eating/drinking needs. The team includes speech and language therapists who work in the community in a wide range of settings including family homes, schools, hospitals, and children's centres.

- **SEND Hub Locality Model:**

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 including headteachers, health and social care professionals and support services. Meeting every half term, they discuss children and young people going through the graduated approach, who need additional support, and put agreed actions into place to support them.

As part of the hubs, a Specialist Outreach Service is being developed. This will involve specialist providers delivering training and support to staff in mainstream schools so that they are better able to help children and young people with SEND.

2. Improving the physical environment of schools to increase access for children and young people with a disability

Education providers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure children and young people with disabilities are not discriminated against (Equality Act, 2010).

To achieve this, **Schools** will:

- Ensure the physical environment is accessible. This includes the use of physical space to reduce noise and distractions, ensuring lighting is appropriate and providing quiet spaces for time out.
- Use suitable resources to meet a child/young person's individual needs. This may include auxiliary aids, braille and visual timetables.
- Make use of the Disability Access Fund in early years' settings.
- Facilitate the access of children and young people with sensory impairments, where required.
- Follow the pathway for accessing funding for specialist equipment.

Staffordshire County Council will:

- Ensure all new build/extension projects completed on schools are designed and built in accordance with DfE guidance/standards and Building Regulations (Part M), regarding accessibility.
 - While SCC will do its best to support all children and young people with SEND, it does not receive any funding to pay for adaptations/improvements that may be required to make buildings accessible. This responsibility lies with the school.
- Provide schools with information on supporting the needs of [children and young people with physical disabilities](#).
- Support schools and educational settings to meet the needs of children and young people with sensory impairments.
- Work with schools to assist with issues regarding individual placements.
- Ensure EHC Plans are specific about the accessibility needs of children and young people, assisted through the implementation of joint multi-agency standards for both EHC Plans and annual reviews.
- Work collaboratively with schools to ensure smooth transition arrangements for children and young people starting schools for the first time and those moving to other schools/colleges.

3. Make information more accessible to children and young people with disabilities 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 children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers, to meet their individual needs, including braille and large font, where required.
- Use alternative forms of communication with individual children and young people, 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:

- Provide information via [Staffordshire Connects](#) including the Family Information Service (FIS).
- Ensure information about services available for children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 and their parents/carers, is up to date and easily accessible on the [SEND Local Offer](#)
- Continue to develop and regularly review the SEND Local Offer, involving children and young people with SEND, their parents/carers and practitioners.
- Provide advice and support to parents, children and young people through the [SEND Information Advice and Support Service](#).
- Provide guidance for schools in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND through the [Graduated Response Toolkit](#).
- Involve children, young people and parents/carers in the development and review of local strategies.

- Provide accessible information for children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers; where necessary providing interpreters, including sign language interpreters, and information in other formats including braille and large font.
- Provide free internet access in Staffordshire Libraries with SEND champions to support children and young people and parents/carers to access the SEND Local Offer and other information.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 It is the duty of SCC, all those working in Staffordshire schools and academies and specialist services supporting schools, to promote accessibility and to ensure this strategy is implemented and adhered to.
- 7.2 SCC will support schools in implementing the strategy and will continue to work with children and young people and parents/carers and our key partners in the context of our overall SEND Strategy (2021-26).
- 7.3 The 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 includes representation from education, social care, health, the voluntary sector and parents/carers.

Appendix 1 – Accessibility Plan Template

All schools are required to have an Accessibility Plan and this checklist is designed to provide guidance 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"> • Aim to increase the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can participate in the curriculum • Improve its physical environment to enable children and young people with disabilities to take better advantage of the education, benefits, facilities and services provided • Improve the availability of accessible information for children and young people with disabilities. 	<p>An audit 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"> ▪ Are all the shelves in the library accessible to all? ▪ Is there adequate lighting in all areas? ▪ Is information provided in large print, Braille, etc.? ▪ Do the curriculum and resources include examples of children and young people with disabilities? ▪ To what extent do teachers consider the individual needs of children and young people in their lessons? ▪ Consider involving children and young people with disabilities in the development of this Plan to gain their feedback and identify areas for action.
<p>Details of how you will make the school’s curriculum, physical environment and information more accessible for children and young people with disabilities</p>	<p>This section could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targets and Success criteria ▪ Actions to meet these targets ▪ Timescales ▪ Who is responsible for targets and actions?

Monitoring and evaluating the plan	Date the Plan approved? When it will be reviewed? By whom?
------------------------------------	---

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

Accessibility

- 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
- Toilet/changing areas are accessible
- School assemblies are accessible

Entrance

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

Reception

- Provision of a Lighting Transition Zone out of the main traffic area
- Clear of obstacles or clutter/appropriate seating
- 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.