

## **ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2003-2006 - VISION**

"Our vision is that over time every school will be able to offer a more inclusive learning environment which gives children with different needs the opportunity to learn together.

### **1.0 Introduction**

This document is the Authority's Accessibility Strategy. It gives an overview of the legislation and guidance which underpins the strategy. It sets out the context and data on schools' accessibility, goals to be achieved and targets. It goes on to describe how the Authority plans to increase access for disabled pupils over the next 3 years.

Our vision is that that over time every school will be able to offer an inclusive learning environment which is equally accessible to all children.

### **2.0 Definitions**

#### **2.1 Definition of Disability**

The SEN and Disability Act 2001 defines disability as;

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

#### **2.2 Definition of an Accessible School**

An accessible school is one in which disabled pupils are able to participate fully in the school curriculum. It is also one where the physical environment does not limit pupils' ability to take advantage of the education (and other) opportunities on offer.

### **3.0 Statutory Responsibilities**

#### **3.1 The SEN and Disability Act 2001 (S.E.N.D.A.)**

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), as amended by the SEN and Disability Act (2001), places a duty on all schools and Authorities to plan to increase accessibility in schools. Authorities have the duty to prepare accessibility strategies covering all maintained schools and schools are required to produce their own accessibility plans. Accessibility strategies and plans must be in writing. The nature and content of plans will depend on the size of school and the resources available.

The DfES encourages Authorities and schools to share information about their plans so that accessibility strategy and individual schools' accessibility plans inform each other.

The planning duty came into force in September 2002. Authorities and schools should have the first written plans and strategies in place by April 2003. They will run for a period of 3 years from April 2003 to March 2006 though schools and Authorities can also plan beyond March 2006 if they wish to do so. Authorities and schools are under a duty to implement, review and revise if necessary, their strategies and plans over this 3-year period.

#### **3.2 Authorities and schools are required to plan for:**

**1.** Improving access to the physical environment of schools. This covers improvements to the physical environment of the school and physical aids to access education.

**11.** Increasing access for disabled pupils to the school curriculum. This covers teaching and learning and the wider curriculum of the school such as participation in after-school clubs, leisure and cultural activities or school visits.

**111** Improving the delivery of written information to disabled pupils. This will include planning

to make written information that is normally provided by the school to its pupils available to disabled pupils. Examples might include handouts, timetables, textbooks and information about school events. The information should take account of pupils' disabilities and pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame.

#### **4.0 The Wirral Context**

The Authority has been increasing physical access to schools over a number of years. In the main, funding for this has come through the Schools Access Initiative and the planning has been predominantly needs-led. In addition, adaptations have been incorporated within larger capital projects. The Authority has also established and developed "Designated" mainstream provision in the form of 8 primary and 3 secondary schools. These schools have been able to offer accessible learning environments since 1999. Wherever possible children have been enabled to attend their local school; the designated schools are available as part of the continuum of provision.

#### **4.1 The Authority's Policy for "The Education of Pupils with Physical and Medical Needs".**

The Authority's policy "The Education of Pupils with Physical and Medical Needs" describes the Authority's commitment to providing children with physical and medical needs an education of the highest possible quality. It is based upon the principle that whenever possible children should attend their local mainstream school, unless this is against their parent's wishes or incompatible with the efficient education of other children or the efficient use of resources.

**4.2** The number of pupils with physical and medical needs educated in inclusive educational environments has risen progressively, numbers increasing from 68 in 1998 to over 240 in 2002. Provision for children with physical and medical needs is co-ordinated by a specialist teacher who works the Special Education Support Service.

#### **4.3 Accessible schools**

##### **I. Nursery Schools and Classes**

The Authority maintains 3 nursery schools and 47 nursery classes which it sees as a key to inclusive practice. Some of these settings do not have accessible environments, e.g no ramping and inappropriate changing/toilet facilities. The strategy addresses these needs.

##### **II. Primary Schools**

The Authority has 107 primary schools, 43 of the mainstream schools are currently accessible and many of the others require only minor adaptations; all the primary special schools are accessible.

##### **III. Secondary Schools**

The Authority has 26 secondary schools. Six of the mainstream schools are currently accessible and this will rise to 14 by 2004. Eight secondary schools are part of Private Finance Initiative (PFI). One site is undergoing complete re-build whilst the others will involve extensive refurbishment. It is a primary brief at all sites to consider accessibility in the schools and all the work completed will comply with the Merseyside Code of Practice on Access and Mobility. All PFI schools will be able to offer accessible learning environments. Three of the special schools are accessible. The Hospitals' School is not fully accessible.

##### **IV. Designated Schools**

- There are 8 Designated primary schools situated strategically throughout the borough.
- There are 3 Designated secondary schools situated strategically throughout the borough.

These are listed below:

### **Primary Schools**

Greenleas Primary – Wallasey  
Heswall Primary – Heswall  
Millfields Primary – Eastham  
Overchurch Infants – Upton  
Overchurch Juniors – Upton  
Pensby Park – Pensby  
St Joseph’s Catholic Primary – Upton  
Woodlands – Birkenhead

### **Secondary Schools**

Bebington High School – Bebington  
St Mary’s Catholic College – Wallasey  
Woodchurch High School – Woodchurch

## **5.0 Wirral’s Access Strategy 2003 – 2006**

Three strands are required of the strategy and it is suggested that the Authority should add a fourth, to monitor and evaluate the impact of the strategy in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding of parents, staff and pupils.

How the Authority plans to address the four strands

### **I. Improving the Physical environment of Schools (Aims 1a – 1f)**

- The main objective in this part of the Strategy is to increase the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and associated services provided or offered by schools, which are close to the pupil’s home.
- A second objective is to help schools to identify their own needs in terms of access and set up a system whereby school plans can dovetail into the Authority’s overall strategy. This will involve a programme of training for schools.
- The Authority will improve the accessibility of its buildings over time. It will design its new buildings to make them fully accessible and all refurbishment work (including schools in the Private Finance Initiative) will be undertaken with accessibility as a key objective. Ultimately the aim will be to ensure that there is good accessibility in all schools (including the Pupil Referral Unit and nursery schools).
- The Strategy recognises that in some instances it may not be possible to make part of or whole school buildings accessible. In these cases reasonable adjustments to policies and practices will be called for. In a very few cases this may involve a pupil attending the nearest accessible school in the area.
- The Authority also intends to address the principles outlined in the Green Paper on extending opportunities and raising standards for the cohort 14-19 phase education and training. This aspect of improving existing provision will be addressed in our overall training plan.
- The Authority intends to develop a systematic and cohesive training programme which will enable school staff to deal with pupils with more diverse needs.

Over the next 3 years the Authority plans to –

### **Nursery Schools and Classes**

- Establish a consistent baseline of current accessibility focusing on ramps and changing facilities.
- Increase the number of settings which have ramps, where appropriate, and changing/toilet facilities. (See Aim 1a).

## **Primary Schools**

- Continue to adapt primary schools on a needs-led basis (dovetailing into and being informed by the schools' access plans) (see Aim 1b).

## **Designated Primary and Secondary Schools**

- Complete a full accessibility audit of all Designated schools in terms of physical accessibility.
- Enhance where necessary the accessible environments on offer (see Aim 1c).

## **Secondary Schools**

- Complete a full accessibility audit in the secondary schools which are not or are not due to become accessible.
- Decide which schools should have priority to be made accessible by classification and location (see Aim 1d).
- Continue to complete needs-led adaptations as necessary.

## **Special Schools**

Special schools have an important role to play within an inclusive education system, developing the role as specialist centres of excellence. The Authority is supporting special schools in developing this approach within the local framework. As part of this process Special Schools are identifying their areas of expertise and models of good practise in both physical and medical impairment to share with mainstream schools.

## **II. Increasing Access for Disabled Pupils to the School Curriculum (Aim 2)**

The Strategy recognises that in the first instance schools have a lead role to play in this strand of the duties. The guidance makes it clear that access to the curriculum covers not only teaching and learning but the wider curriculum such as after school activities and leisure, cultural and sporting activities and school visits. This strand of the planning duty covers a range of elements including ensuring that teaching and learning is accessible through school. Classroom organisation and support, deployment of staff, timetabling, curriculum options staff information and training are all covered by this strand. Curriculum access should be considered at a 'whole school' level as many barriers to access to the curriculum will be similar for many groups of children and it is helpful to take a strategic approach to removing those barriers. Schools will be able to utilise Standards Fund to support staff training which, will facilitate the teaching and support of disabled pupils by focussing on the needs of current and prospective pupils.

## **III. Improving the delivery of written information to Disabled Pupils (Aim 3)**

This is the part of the Strategy which covers planning to make information, normally provided by the school in writing to its pupils, such as handouts, timetables, information about events etc. Available in appropriate alternative formats. These will include formats such as Braille, audio tape, large print, symbol system and sign language. The quality of written information to pupils should take into account the views of the pupils and their parents and be in a form that is appropriate to their individual needs.

A working party will be established to look at this strand. This group will include professionals from Hearing, Vision and Physical/Medical Support Services, parents and pupils. The group will research ways to help schools to make written material available in alternative formats. Good practice will be shared and schools will be encouraged to identify the best methods for communicating to their current and future parents and pupils. A list of appropriate professional advice available will be drawn up and made available to schools.

## **IV. Monitoring and Evaluation (Aim 4)**

- As part of their inspection duties OFSTED will monitor the Authority's accessibility strategy

and schools' accessibility plans, in relation to the preparation, implementation and review. They will also inspect the publication of schools' plans.

- Asset Management Plans (AMP's) require an assessment of accessibility and this will be carried out in by the Authority in line with the DfES guidance.
- Local systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy need to be established. The Authority will review its strategy annually to take account of progress towards its objectives. The first review should be in March 2004. Schools will be asked to include reviews of the success of their plans as part of their self supported reviews.

## **6.0 Accessible Schools**

**6.1** Guidance on accessible schools is contained in DfES Guidance LEA/0168/2002 (July 2002). An extract from the guidance which relates to school planning and a helpful checklist identifying barriers to access is attached at Appendix 4.

**6.2** The Authority will provide training to schools/governing bodies enabling them to complete their accessibility plans by April 2003. The training will follow the guidelines contained in the DfES Guidance.

**6.3** In the short term the Strategy aims to raise schools' awareness of their responsibilities under the SEN and Disability Act, and in the longer term plans to support schools by securing appropriate staff training and encouraging the sharing of good practice. The Authority will also ensure that schools are aware of the support services available both from within the Education and Cultural Services Department and external services such as Health and Social Services. A working party will be established to consider training issues and curriculum differentiation.

## **7.0 Resources**

The Authority has a number of sources of funding available for disability access projects. These include formulaic capital funding for school building projects. Disability access is considered as part of all capital projects. The Schools Access Initiative provides capital funding specifically for disability access projects at mainstream schools. Maintained schools can use their delegated budget including the devolved capital funding.

Resources are also available under the Standards Fund. Some of this funding will be delegated to schools and it is a key source of funding for training teachers, support assistants and other staff as well as physical adaptations.

## **8.0 Redress**

The SEN and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) hears claims relating to disability discrimination but does not have the power to hear appeals against LEAs and schools with respect to responsibilities under the planning duty.

The Secretary of State can intervene where an LEA or school is not complying with the planning duty and can direct an LEA or school to do so.

The Authority has an established complaints procedure which covers accessibility strategy and plans. Parents also have access to a Disagreement Resolution Service (DRS) provided by the Boys and Girls Welfare Society.

Details on SENDIST and the DRS are available from the Special Educational Needs Section in the Education and Cultural Services Department.

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