



Buckinghamshire County Council

Accessibility Strategy

2016 - 19

INTRODUCTION

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a range of equality duties and requirements within one piece of legislation. The Act introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (sometimes also referred to as the 'general duty') that applies to public bodies, including maintained schools and academies (including Free Schools) and which extends to all protected characteristics - race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. This combined equality duty came into effect in April 2011.

The duty has three main elements. In carrying out their functions, public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act,
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it,
- foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This strategy covers the three areas required by the planning duties in the Disability Discrimination Act: Schedule 10 says:

An accessibility strategy is a strategy for, over a prescribed period:

- A. Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculum by an increased focus on relevance, modes of presentation and pupil involvement.*
- B. improving the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the school;*
- C. Improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible by an increased focus on relevance, modes of presentation and pupil involvement.*

The delivery of information in (c) must be:

A. *within a reasonable time;*

B. *(b) In ways which are determined after taking account of the pupils' disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.*

DEFINITION

A person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. A physical or mental impairment includes learning difficulties, mental health conditions, medical conditions and hidden impairments such as dyslexia, autism and speech, language and communication impairments (Equality Act 2010).

This broad definition within the Disability Discrimination Act means that, about 7% of children and young people are included and up to 20% of adults. It is acknowledged that schools and settings do not necessarily have complete information about disabilities as this is not always disclosed by parents/carers and there is no consistent national way of collecting such information

VISION

Buckinghamshire Children and Young People's Partnership Vision is that 'Children and young people are healthy and safe, feel valued and value others, are treated fairly, have lives filled with learning, achieve their potential and are able to enjoy life and spend quality time with family and friends.'

LOCAL CONTEXT

Buckinghamshire has a wide range of provision available to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. The Council's partnership with schools and settings is well-established and long-term. Specialist teams provide advice and support at whole-school, group and individual levels. In addition to our special schools' provision some schools have additional resourced provision (ARP).

Principles / Key Actions:

Buckinghamshire County Council has improved physical access and access to curriculum entitlement for children and young people with disabilities in its schools through:

- Encouraging all to share realistically high expectations for all children and young people.
- Wherever possible, meeting the needs of young people in their local mainstream provision.
- Encouraging multi-agency working to support local placements.

- Valuing diversity and encouraging all partners to recognise the benefits of having a diverse community of children and young people within each school or setting, who value one another and the different contributions they can make.
- Increasing the confidence, skills and expertise of mainstream staff through a comprehensive training programme to meet the more diverse needs of children and young people.
- Valuing and developing the expertise of school staff to enable children and young people with the most complex needs in our community to have their needs met. Encouraging the sharing of this expertise through outreach support.
- Using formulas to schools to promote early identification and intervention, enabling schools to have more scope to be proactive and creative. This includes provision to fund specialist equipment.
- Providing opportunities for further professional development of teaching and support staff to develop high quality first teaching, targeted provision and personalised provision.
- Providing high quality advice and support to schools through specialist locality multiagency teams.
- Managing the EHC assessment effectively.
- Providing advice to schools on writing effective Accessibility Plans.
- Investing capital resource, Schools Access Initiative, to ensure that an increasing number of schools in the County are accessible.

INCREASING ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM

The joint commissioning of education, health and care provision for children and young people required by the Children and Families Act 2014 should lead to the development of more integrated packages of support which will support children and young people with disabilities in accessing the curriculum. All schools are responsible for providing a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum for all pupils and in particular for disabled pupils.

The Local Authority SEND teams are working to embed the principles of personalisation and person-centred planning into all providers' work with children and young people with SEND. This, together with the graduated approach expected by the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25, January 2016, will make the curriculum more accessible to all children and young people by:

- Encouraging schools and settings to develop high quality teaching through using the graduated approach, by providing opportunities for training and further professional development of teaching and support staff.

- Providing guidance, support and training to schools and settings through SEND teams this includes support to schools and settings for individual students with additional needs from specialist teachers.
- Providing training for school SENDCOs to work towards establishing a fully accredited SENDCO workforce.
- Working with health colleagues such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and the complex needs nursing team to support children and young people in their schools.
- Delegating funding to schools to provide support for children and young people with special educational needs as part of the graduated approach.
- Providing information to schools and settings on how they should support children and young people through the graduated approach – SEND Support
<http://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/advice.page?id=Du-BvTHZMMI>
- Providing additional short term high need block funding to support individuals in school and settings in times of need or assessment and provides funding to schools to support children and young people with Statements of special educational need or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan.
- Arranging suitable full-time education (or as much education as the child's health condition allows) for children of compulsory school age who, because of health needs, would otherwise not receive suitable education.
- Working with the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and Family and Carers Together (FACT Bucks) collaboratively in supporting the LA to engage with parents and carers of pupils with disabilities to inform and develop good practice within settings.

IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Improving the physical environment of schools includes improving physical access to schools as well. All new school buildings have to comply with current building regulations and should be physically accessible to all pupils. Much of the work in this area will involve improving access to existing buildings.

Improved access to the physical environment can be achieved through reasonable adjustments and schools do need 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. Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to developing

the range of provision available across the county and recognises that investment in buildings supports improved access to a full curriculum for children and young people with special educational needs and disability.

Our aim is for all schools to be “broadly accessible”. This means school buildings would have a range of features to meet the core special needs associated with physical difficulties (access ramps, toilets and changing facilities, access to all key curriculum areas) where physically practical. The physical needs of some students (including those with sensory impairments) are very specific and may require specific further adaptations. The local authority may be able to assist schools with these, although this will depend on the specific requirements and the feasibility of undertaking such works. It should be noted that not all works will be feasible or achievable for a specific school.

Head Teachers and Governing bodies have responsibility for the physical accessibility of their schools. Disability discrimination legislation requires schools to plan to improve access for those with disabilities through their ‘accessibility plans’. Individual schools are required to use devolved budgets, including devolved capital, to ensure that these responsibilities are met, as far as is reasonably possible. Any adaptation works to school premises should be designed to comply with **Building Regulations Approved Document M - Access to and Use of Buildings**. <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/approveddocuments/partm/approved>

Buckinghamshire County Council holds a limited budget for capital projects to improve accessibility for individual or groups of students with SEN and disabilities to enable them to attend a local mainstream school / school of parental choice, where it is feasible and practical to do so.

Many pupil specific projects are relatively modest in cost (e.g. classroom blinds for a pupil with visual impairment, a classroom soundfield system for a pupil with hearing impairment, a wall mounted adjustable changing bed for a pupil with medical needs). Requests for such specific adaptations to school buildings will be made by health professionals/specialist teachers and will be set out within the Site Access Report and sent to the SEN Team.

Requests for specialist equipment for individual students with physical / medical difficulties are made to the SEN Team via health professionals or specialist teachers and, where approved for education purposes, purchases are fully funded by the local authority.

Should a pupil require an electric wheelchair solely for school access, this will be confirmed by the Specialist Teachers for Physical Difficulties and Physiotherapists/Occupational Therapists. The SEN Team will contact the Wheelchair Service once the need has been identified and confirmed.

NON-LOCAL AUTHORITY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

In the case of schools which it does not maintain (e.g. academies, free schools, independent schools etc.) Bucks CC's legal obligations to make changes to the physical environment are very limited. The primary obligation for ensuring compliance will fall on the school itself. However, if requested Bucks CC may consider providing advice, support and/or assistance on a case by case basis.

Guidance to schools on accessibility to the Physical Environment

1. Building Regulations – **Approved Document M (2013 Edition) Access to and Use of Buildings**. This can be downloaded at:

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/approveddocuments/partm/approved>

2. Guidance can be sought from the appropriate officer in the School Commissioning Team.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The requirement in the Children and Families Act 2014 to develop a LA Local Offer has the express purpose of making information more accessible. The Buckinghamshire SEND Local Offer is available at:

www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/localoffer

For those families who are not able to access the internet, the Local Offer is being made available in other ways, including:

- Via telephone: 0800 1601900 or in person through the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service who will provide information over the phone or in a printed format.
- Via a professional or organisation such as Childrens Centres, social workers and schools who can assist with accessing information or contact the Family Information Service on someone's behalf.
- Via the public computers at a local library.

Schools have a duty to provide information in accessible forms to students who may have difficulty reading information in standard written form.

The local authority supports this by making advice available from the specialist teachers for visual impairment, hearing impairments and physical difficulties. Access to specialist ICT communication equipment is also available for individual students with specific needs.

The communication duty covers the delivery of school information normally provided to pupils in writing. This 'school information' includes any

information given to pupils by the school, such as letters, handouts and worksheets, textbooks, timetables, handbooks, test and examination papers, notices and notice boards, posters around the school, information about school events, and reports on progress.

Schools should be aware that the 'written' form' does not simply mean printed text and might also include curriculum materials including handouts and worksheets that may include illustrations, diagrams and maps, materials presented on whiteboards, flipcharts and ICT systems, wall displays and timetables.

The Bucks SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) offers impartial information, advice and support to families of children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) encouraging and developing partnerships between children, young people, parents, schools, the council and other partners.

CONSULTATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Buckinghamshire County Council published an Accessibility Strategy in 2006. This Accessibility Strategy was reviewed and revised during 2009 and 2013. This revised strategy covers the period 2016– 2019 and sets out how the Local Authority (LA) plans to increase access to school education for disabled pupils, in the schools for which it is responsible. The strategy covers the duties in The Equality Act 2010 and related Equality Duty 2011 and reiterates the duty upon schools as laid out in the previous Disability Discrimination Act. Disability Discrimination Acts (1995 and 2005) and the SEN and Disability Act (2001). The legislation requires LAs and schools to take account of both existing pupils and prospective pupils – the duty is anticipatory.

This strategy will be further consulted on through the Local Offer and will be updated in 2019.