

Suffolk County Council

Children and Young People's Services: Accessibility Strategy

***Period covered by the strategy:
July 2013 - 2016***

Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 replaced existing equality legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act and others. Its function has been to simplify the law and bring together the duties and requirements within one piece of legislation. The effect of the Equality Act is to extend protection to groups of people who were previously covered by separate laws and to incorporate the provisions included within previous equality legislation.

The Equality Act has 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.

Requirements for local authorities to put in place an accessibility strategy are specified in schedule 10 of the Act: Accessibility for disabled pupils. This schedule provides for accessibility arrangements for pupils in schools as set out in section 88.

- (2) An accessibility strategy is a strategy for, over a prescribed period—
- (a) increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums;
 - (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 schools;
 - (c) improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.
- (3) The delivery in sub-paragraph (2)(c) must be—
- (a) within a reasonable time;
 - (b) in ways which are determined after taking account of the pupils' disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.

In keeping with the legislation, this Accessibility Strategy sets out the ways in which Suffolk County Council will increase access to education for disabled pupils, in the schools and

settings for which it is responsible. We will work with schools to ensure that both the curriculum and schools IT meets accessibility requirements set out within both Education and Equalities legislation.

1A. The purpose and direction of Suffolk local authority's strategy: vision and values

Our vision is to enable **all children and young people** in Suffolk to aspire to and achieve, their full potential giving them the basis for a successful life as active members of the community.

Learning is at the heart of delivering that vision and improving the attainment of all children is a key priority for Suffolk. The county council acknowledges that the attainment of pupils, including those with impairments needs to be improved. For this reason, raising attainment is a key priority for Suffolk; the Raising the Bar initiative demonstrates the County Council's commitment to improving the attainment of Suffolk children and young people. Outside of the family nothing else offers greater opportunities and responsibilities for making sure all children stay safe and healthy, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution to their communities in order that they are able to get the most out of life now and into the future. Making learning accessible to all our children in ways that will promote the best outcomes for them is the guiding principle underpinning this strategy.

We want the very best for Suffolk's children, starting with early years through to their transition into adulthood. Together with our partner agencies in Suffolk's Children's Trust we are working towards achieving this common aim.

There are many challenges for schools and the local authority, to ensure that we can deliver the very best education for all children. We need to respond to the changes ahead and to make efficient and cost-effective use of investment opportunities in the context of challenging economic circumstances and in a changing and increasingly more diverse school system of maintained schools and non-maintained academies and free schools.

Our aim is to ensure that children and young people, including those with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities are at the heart of the vision for Suffolk. Our strategy aims to provide the very best education for all our children, delivered as locally as possible to the child's home and local community.

It is important to note that because a pupil has a disability this does not necessarily mean that he or she has a special educational need. A pupil with a disability has a special educational need if they require any special educational provision to be made for them to access education. Children and young people may have either a disability and/or a special educational need.

The Social Model of Disability

Suffolk fully endorses the "social model" of disability, which proposes that it is society which dictates who is excluded – not the nature of the disability itself and recognises that removing barriers is as much about encouraging positive attitudes and behaviour traits as it is about removing physical barriers.

In a changing world, where social interaction, teaching and learning and access to information, goods and resources is increasingly delivered electronically, removing barriers experienced by those with impairments and disabilities is crucial and needs to be central to the delivery of services and information.

Capacity building in mainstream schools

Our SEN Strategy is based on the Vision for Learning 2016; this was developed following extensive consultation with communities, schools, young people and families. It takes account of the comprehensive review of provision and need that was instigated initially as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme and Suffolk's own review of school organisation. A detailed review of specialist provision was undertaken as an integral strand of work within those two programmes. The review took into account the needs of all children and young people identified as having SEN and Disabilities, the majority of whom receive their education in a mainstream setting (0.9% of children in Suffolk have a special school place).

Suffolk's strategy over a number of years has focused on preserving the place of small rural schools at the heart of their local communities. In so doing, there has been a policy of improving and extending the accessibility of the school building stock across the county.

1B. Information from pupil data and school audits

The nature of schools in Suffolk

Suffolk has had a mixed school organisation with parts of the county structured into three-tiers (primary, middle and secondary) and other parts of the county organised in a traditional two-tier structure. Performance data indicates that educational outcomes are significantly better in the two-tier areas of the county and there is a programme of reorganisation underway to move to a consistent model of two tier provision across Suffolk.

This programme of reorganisation is providing the opportunity to address some significant issues and barriers to learning in a large number of schools including accessibility for students with disabilities. The process of re-organisation involves extending both primary and secondary schools to accommodate the additional year groups and the closure of the majority of middle schools. Therefore a number of schools with significant access issues have been taken out of use whilst others have been adapted to ensure they meet regulations relating to accessibility of the buildings. Schools and settings themselves are responsible for ensuring the delivery of learning is fully accessible and therefore a key strand of this strategy is to ensure good advice is available to schools to assist them with this. Updated guidance will be issued to schools regarding the need for them to have access plans in place and to highlight good practice. This will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

During the first two phases of the re-organisation three primary schools and one secondary school have been re-located into new buildings which are fully compliant with accessible building regulations.

The current economic climate has had an impact on these plans particularly in relation to of the timescales for delivery. However, the programme is ongoing and should be complete by 2017.

Special schools in Suffolk

It is the county's policy to integrate students with disabilities in mainstream settings where this is appropriate for their learning. However, some young people have needs that are so significant and complex that they require specialist facilities and resources. The long term aspiration is to co-locate special school provision alongside mainstream facilities. This is in order to provide opportunities for integration so that pupils and students can experience a mainstream offer alongside their peer group, when appropriate and where this is in the best interests of the young person.

Access Grants and capital funding

For a number of years Suffolk encouraged schools to apply for capital grants to support accessibility in all schools. This funding was available to improve the physical access to schools but was also allocated to projects to improve curriculum access through the use of IT and other curriculum innovations.

This programme has made a significant impact and has improved accessibility in a large number of schools across the county with a total investment of **£12.2m** over the last **15 years**.

These bids have been used to address issues of various size and complexity in schools, with grants ranging from as little as £65 up to £178,000. A total of 294 schools have been supported which includes primary, middle and upper schools. This funding has been allocated to ensure that students have unrestricted access to the curriculum providing equipment such as laptops, software and Soundfield systems. It has also supported extensions to and refurbishment of existing buildings providing ramps, automatic doors, accessible toilets and medical facilities.

The county has invested in a specialist IT assessment centre, this is sited at Thomas Wolsey school; specialist occupational and speech therapists work with an advanced skills teacher and specialist IT technician to assess and recommend IT solutions including alternative and augmentative communication aids (AAC), for children with complex needs and significant barriers to communication. A new development in this area is the introduction of eye-gaze technology for some students with profound and complex needs.

1C. Views of those consulted during the development of the accessibility strategy

This accessibility strategy was developed initially in draft and was shared with a range of stakeholders. Copies of the draft strategy were made available to the groups listed below and the views collected helped to shape revisions to the strategy.

- parents
- those with a disability
- children and young people with impairments
- schools
- other professionals

- children's centres
- pre school providers
- Dioceses
- Partner agencies

As a result of feedback from consultation, more emphasis has been placed on the need to ensure there is good information and guidance for schools in removing barriers to electronic media and information.

Early Years and Childcare **0-19**

The countywide Early Years and Childcare service provides support and challenge to providers to ensure that all children's needs are met and that standards are continually improving for all. We support the inclusion of all children through the requirement for all providers to have a qualified setting SENCo. We also offer Early Years providers (settings and schools) access to training and networking events as part of their continuous professional development.

Additional resource is made available to support providers in their duty to meet children's individual needs and to make reasonable adjustments to enable all children to access the EYFS and/or Ofsted registered out of school care (breakfast, after school and holiday clubs). The Service also provides large items of equipment to Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers where this will enable the child's inclusion and access to the curriculum or activities.

The Service works with providers to ensure that premises are accessible and, wherever possible, assist providers to make improvements to their environment to be able to meet the needs of all children in their locality both now and in the future.

Where children attend special school assessment nurseries we encourage and support dual placement arrangements with mainstream early years provision in their community. We support transition arrangements for children with additional needs as they move from PVI into maintained provision.

Children with significant additional needs are offered a home based Portage service to support the family to engage with their child's early learning. This is a transitional service; leading to parents and carers being encouraged and supported to take up their child's free early education entitlement.

We work to ensure that all children can access and benefit from all universal provision whilst also providing additional specialist services as appropriate.

We require all providers to have an equalities action plan in place which is implemented and regularly reviewed.

2. The main priorities in the Framework strategy

At a strategic level, accessibility is a core principle of the County Council which permeates its work. In respect of the local authority's duty to provide an accessibility strategy, the Children and Young People's Services directorate leads on the specific aspects set out below. It also works within the Suffolk County Council corporate

framework to meet the public sector equality duty (PSED) and the county council's key priority to raise attainment of pupils across Suffolk.

2A. increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums

Our strategy places equality principles at the heart of service delivery. Services have been redesigned and reconfigured to achieve this; as a result a focus on increasing access to the curriculum has been prioritised. Key strands of our strategy are:

- *Service delivery*
- *Training, advice and guidance*
- *Developing a range of specialist provision which shares and supports the development of good practice e.g. through delivery of outreach support and through the development of good practice case studies*

Service Delivery:

The Learning Improvement Service has been restructured to ensure that inclusion and support for equalities, including those with SEN and disabilities is central to the work of the service with strong commitment to Equality and Achievement and is included as a key performance priority in all Learning and Improvement service planning. This is underpinned by our developing strategy for ICT which recognizes the importance of new technologies in delivering, enhancing and opening up the curriculum for all learners, including those with disabilities and has this mission statement:

Our mission is to ensure that Suffolk's children and young people use digital technologies to positively shape their futures by becoming discerning consumers, imaginative creators and lifelong learners."

An ICT development group has been established and a number of LA advisers and leading practitioners from schools are working on a range of separate action research projects aimed at developing the use of new technologies to assist learning. At least one project is focused on developing the use of tablet technology for children and young people with SEND and impairments.

Inclusive Services includes countywide teams including the Educational Psychology Service, The Sensory and Communication Service, Access Unlimited, the Futures team and the Learning Support Service. These services assist schools and settings to improve access, improve opportunities for interaction and engagement and to personalise and develop the curriculum for disabled pupils.

Considerable work has been undertaken with schools to support them in improving practice to:

- Remove barriers to learning
- Improve access through technologies and by making reasonable adjustments
- Adopt inclusive teaching strategies and improve classroom organization and practice.
- Promote dyslexia friendly and communication friendly approaches to learning.

Feedback from young people has specifically raised the importance of maintaining opportunities for face to face work. This has highlighted how important it is to engage with young people and their families directly and not just remotely or through printed information. An essential element of this strategy is the work promoting person-

centred planning and transition, through a programme of training and development. The Better Lives project is a positive example of this, working with parents to shape and develop services.

Suffolk is a large rural county and this strategy seeks to prioritise capacity-building and to develop our schools and settings and the workforce to promote the most effective inclusive learning and accessible curricula.

Training, advice and guidance:

This is being achieved through building a network of support and expertise, to assist schools in supporting access for pupils wherever they live within the county.

Developing capacity in mainstream schools, remains a key priority and is delivered through:

- A comprehensive programme of training at all levels which ranges from introductory level training for support staff, through to professional networks for SEN co-ordinators and teaching staff and includes masters level study programmes e.g. use of new technologies and the National SENCO Award. Accessibility is a key strand in the training programmes. Training is bookable through www.suffolkcpd.co.uk
- Information, advice and guidance including resources and materials available through our website – www.suffolklearning.co.uk
- Access to an expertise directory – www.suffolkcpd.co.uk
- An effective network of skilled teachers, with specific expertise is maintained – these include; Leading practitioners, advanced skills teachers as well as Local and National Leaders in Education who can demonstrate best practice and support other local schools.

Specialist Provision in Suffolk.

In addition to the services listed above, Suffolk has developed a range of specialist provision in order to meet the learning needs of children within the county. In each setting, the curriculum can be tailored and personalised to improve accessibility to learning.

Our strategy is to support the majority of children in their local mainstream schools; however, we recognise that some children require more specialist provision and therefore a key aspect of our strategy is to develop and keep under review a range of specialist provision. This includes:

Mainstream schools with access to outreach support and training for:

- Pupils with physical disabilities
- Complex learning difficulties
- Autistic spectrum disorders
- Speech, language and communication needs
- Support for emotional, social and behavioural difficulties
- Alternative and augmentative communication

In order to improve access to the curriculum, Suffolk's strategy includes the commissioning of outreach support services from mainstream and special schools.

These can be accessed by local schools. The following support services are available:

The County Inclusive Resource - an outreach support service to assist schools in meeting the needs of pupils with autism and autistic spectrum disorders. The service is deployed from a number of satellite bases at:

- Beacon Hill Special School, Ipswich
- Wells Hall Primary School, Great Cornard, Sudbury
- Honington Primary School
- Wickham Market Primary School
- Fen Park Primary School, Lowestoft

Outreach Services for children and young people with complex moderate learning difficulties from:

- The Priory special school (academy) in conjunction with Hillside and Riverwalk special schools.
- The Ashley School Academy Trust

and for children and young people with complex physical disabilities and communication needs from:

- Thomas Wolsey School Academy

The Specialist Learning Support Assistant service – for children with complex and continuing healthcare needs, who are technology dependent. This service is based at Claydon with the Access Unlimited team. Trained members of staff support children with very complex health needs who would otherwise struggle to access the curriculum or to attend pre-school or school.

Specialist Support Centres based in mainstream schools which provide support for children with complex learning difficulties and offer a half way house between mainstream and special schools. These Specialist Support Centres (SSCs) operate with a smaller pupil: teacher ratio and give pupils plenty of opportunities to integrate as appropriate (see appendix 1).

Provision for children with severe dyslexia; there are three schools with centres providing tailored in-centre or outreach support for children with specific learning difficulties including dyslexia. These centres offer intensive support for literacy and numeracy. Outreach support from these centres is aimed at embedding “dyslexia friendly” approaches in schools throughout the county. (See appendix 1).

Special Schools:

For those pupils requiring a special school place, there are 9 schools making provision for those with the most complex learning difficulties. These children and young people require a highly adapted and personalised curriculum. The County’s special schools are:

In Bury St Edmunds:

- Priory School Academy (9-16 years) includes residential places
- Riverwalk School (3-19 years)

In Sudbury:

- Hillside School (3-19 years)

In Lowestoft:

The Ashley School Academy Trust (7-16 years) includes residential places
Warren School (3-19 years)

In Ipswich:

Beacon Hill School (5-16 years)
The Bridge School(3-16 years)
Thomas Wolsey School Academy (3-16 years)
One Sixth form college (16-19 years) with resourced provision for
students with a range of learning difficulties.

A number of students in special schools are also supported on dual placements spending part of the week in a mainstream school and part of the week in a special school.

The County's strategy has encouraged and supported co-location where this has been feasible and when funding initiatives have allowed. One 6th form college in Ipswich is a fully inclusive provision; Thomas Wolsey academy is co-located on the site of The Ormiston Endeavour Academy secondary school in Ipswich and in Bury St Edmunds, Riverwalk School delivers its Early Years and Key Stage 1 provision at Sexton's Manor Primary School. Priory School has a new purpose built post-16 skills centre which is run in collaboration with West Suffolk College.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)

The definition of disability and the scope for protection within equality legislation includes mental as well as physical impairments, where they impact on the person's ability to carry out their day to day activities. Another aspect of the County's strategy has been to develop a strong network of 13 pupil referral units (PRUs) which provide outreach support for those children who have complex and challenging social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and disabilities, many of which are associated with medical conditions such as ADHD, Tourette's Syndrome, Tuberous Sclerosis and autism. The PRUs offer support across the age range and their skilled and experienced staff work with local schools to support re-integration and to improve access to the curriculum. See appendix 1 for a list of PRUs.

Schools are able to access help and support to assist them to improve curriculum access for their students in a number of ways. In addition to the specialist settings described above, guidance, training and advice is available from the County's Learning and Improvement Service, this includes specific support for key curriculum areas including English, mathematics and Science, PHSE and PE. An online expertise directory (www.suffolkcpd.co.uk) also provides schools with ready access to information about independent providers, offering a range of curriculum support.

2B. 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 schools.

As set out above, a large number of schools have improved access for their students through the targeted use of access grant funding. Suffolk has taken a strategic approach to the use of such funding to ensure that all areas across the authority

have benefited. Grants have also been used to address specific access issues when they have been identified as part of a larger capital project. In the past, the use of school contributions (Devolved Formula Capital) up to 25% has ensured that more projects could be supported through partnership funding with schools. This has helped to develop the county's strategy for improving the physical environment and accessibility of schools over time.

Suffolk also commissions the organisation 'DisabledGo' to carry out an audit of all schools. An annual report is published, which provides detailed access information on Suffolk Schools. This is updated on a regular basis to ensure there is clear and up to date information about the accessibility of schools and to provide a reliable and accurate data base to inform future projects. The website is free to use through the following link: www.disabledgo.com. DisabledGo surveyors visit every venue collecting information to a set standard, developed in consultation with disabled people. A range of information is provided including details about accessible toilets, parking, colour contrast, the positioning of fittings and more.

The county council recognises that children and young people learn, interact and socialise in environments that are not only physical, but are virtual and electronic. It is important that these electronic interactions do not exclude people with impairments. In education today Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), Learning Platforms, Mobile Apps and Websites are all part of the learning process; if these 'web products' are inaccessible this can affect the attainment of those young people. National and international guidance is available to meet the needs of these young people in the form of British and World Standards for web accessibility; this is being brought to the attention of schools and providers in the advice about schools' and settings' access plans.

2C. Improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.

Accessible information is made available to pupils with disabilities in a number of ways; the DisabledGo site provides access guides to over 100,000 venues across the UK, it is also possible to use the website to find out about disability news, to advertise events, post articles and join in discussions.

Suffolk was one of only two local authorities nationally to pilot the previous government's Home Access project – an initiative which was targeted at providing ICT access to families of children on low incomes. The scheme also provided for more specialised ICT equipment for those assessed with special educational needs and disabilities. As a result many more families in Suffolk can now access the internet and have the use of ICT equipment at home.

For those requiring more support to access their learning as detailed above, Suffolk has invested in developing its own communication and IT assessment service - based at the Thomas Wolsey School Academy, this service is staffed by specialists including technicians, an occupational therapist and an advanced skills teacher (ICT). The Suffolk Communication Aids Resource centre (SCARC) has a specialist speech therapist for alternative and augmentative communication aids (AAC) and the service is run in a partnership arrangement with the Health authority. SCARC is also based at Thomas Wolsey school and is accommodated within a suite of custom built rooms.

SCC website (www.suffolk.gov.uk)

- Suffolk County Council is committed to providing a website that is accessible to the widest possible audience, regardless of technology or ability. As such we are actively working to increase the accessibility and usability of our website and in doing so adhere to many of the national and international standards and guidelines available.
- The County Council website has undergone an independent accessibility assessment, completed by a company AbilityNet, c/o Flow interactive, Harella House, 90-98 Goswell Road, London, EC1V 7DF, Website: <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk>
- However it may not always possible to be fully accessible in all areas of the website, and in particular the use of third-party applications may present accessibility barriers for some visitors.
- The website endeavours to conform to level Double-A of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 which is the standard required by the national Government. Further technical details about how the County Council meets these requirements are available publicly at www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/web-accessibility

3. Making It Happen

3A. Management, co-ordination and implementation

Responsibility and accountability for this Accessibility Strategy extends to the highest levels within SCC and the Children and Young People's Directorate. The strategy is one of a number of approaches adopted by the council to help meet its stated ambition to Raising the Bar and to improve the attainment for all children and young people, including those with disabilities and barriers to their learning. The strategy has been developed in full consultation with the CYP directorate management group and the cabinet member for CYP and [will be] submitted to the Strategic Diversity Group for endorsement, July 2013.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy will happen in a number of ways. In common with other directorates within the county council, CYP has an Equality Action Group, which has a major role in holding services to account and to evaluating the impact of policies and practice.

For the services working most closely with schools and settings, regular monitoring of impact is undertaken and this feeds into service development and planning.

The LA is driving forward an approach to integrated service delivery, which seeks to co-ordinate services to best support families, including those with disabilities. The establishment of 7 locality integrated teams now provides greater opportunity for the coherent delivery of support, advice and guidance.

The local authority's special transport policy sets out the ways in which children and young people with disabilities can receive support with transport and help to develop independence with travel as an aspiration.

3B. Accessibility of the strategy itself

This strategy has been developed in accordance with Equality principles and an impact assessment.

The strategy is available on the Suffolk County Council website and can be made available in other formats (e.g. large font) on request.

Date of initial EIA: 24th April 2013

3C. Reviewing the Accessibility strategy

This strategy will be monitored regularly (annually) by the Schools' Infrastructure team and formally reviewed every three years, the reporting mechanism will be via the CYP Directorate Management Group.

Appendix 1

Specialist Support Centres

The SSC schools are:

- Gorseland Primary (Martlesham)
- Castle Hill Infant – (Ipswich)
- Castle Hill Junior – (Ipswich)
- Sidegate Primary – (Ipswich)
- Maidstone Infant – (Felixstowe)
- Causton Junior – (Felixstowe)
- St Gregory Primary - (Sudbury)
- Abbot's Green Primary – (Bury St Edmunds)

Centres for Dyslexia

Schools with centres for specific learning difficulties / dyslexia are:

- Wickhambrook Primary
- Claydon High
- Leiston Primary

Pupil referral units:

Key Stage 1

- First Base Bury St Edmunds
- First Base Lowestoft
- First Base Ipswich

Key Stage 2/3

- Hampden House Sudbury (includes residential places)
- Alderwood, Ipswich
- St Christopher's, Ipswich
- Kingsfield, Stowmarket
- Harbour, Lowestoft

Key Stage 4

Full time In-centre support is provided for pupils in Key Stage 4 at

- Albany PRU (Bury St Edmunds)
- Parkside PRU (Ipswich)
- Westbridge PRU (Ipswich)
- Old Warren House PRU (Lowestoft).