

Accessibility Strategy: Schools - DRAFT 30/03/17 (Action plan currently under review)

The priority for the Herefordshire Children and Young People's Partnership is to keep children and young people safe, and to give them the best start in life. We want them to have the best health and education, and to have opportunities to enable them to reach their full potential.

This accessibility strategy sets out the approach that Herefordshire Council is taking to increase access to education for disabled children and young people, so that they can benefit from educational provision to the same extent that children without disabilities can. (DfE advice, 4.2)

An accessibility strategy is required under the planning duty in the Equality Act 2010, Part 6, Section 88 (Schedule 10):

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/schedule/10>

This strategy applies only to schools: the Equality Act requires ALL providers to make reasonable adjustments to avoid disadvantaging pupils with disabilities, but schools have an additional duty to plan for better access for disabled pupils, as detailed below. The reasonable adjustments duty and a wider and more strategic planning approach for schools are intended to complement each other. (DfE advice, 4.22, 4.27)

These planning duties therefore do NOT apply to Further Education, Higher Education or Early Years settings (unless constituted as a school). For them, the requirement to remove physical barriers is contained within the reasonable adjustments duty.

The council has provided guidance to schools on their duties under the Equality Act, including clarification of how the reasonable adjustments duty is shared between schools and the council here:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200144/schools_and_education/359/accessibility_in_schools

Every local area is required to have Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA). Our analysis ('Understanding Herefordshire') contains a children's needs analysis which includes section 7.4 on children with disabilities:

<https://factsandfigures.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/14669/childrens-integrated-needs-assessment-2014.pdf>

The Equality Act 2010 requires an accessibility strategy for:

1. Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum

2. Improving the physical environment of 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 schools
3. Improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.

1: Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum

All schools must “use their best endeavours” to provide “high quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised” and which should “meet the individual needs of the majority of children and young people.” (SEN Code of Practice 1.24).

The council and its partners provide a range of services to support schools in making inclusive and accessible provision. Details are available in the Local Offer at: https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200228/local_offer

Services offered to schools by the council include:

- Support for:
 - Hearing Impairment
 - Visual Impairment
 - Physical Disabilities
 - Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (Behaviour Support Team)
 - Autism Spectrum Condition (coordinated by Hampton Dene primary school - see below)
- Home and Hospital Teaching Team
- Educational Psychology (including non-statutory work available for purchase by schools)

Specialist provision is also available through:

1. Resourced provision in mainstream schools for:
 - Autism Spectrum Condition and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (Hampton Dene primary school)
 - Autism Spectrum Condition (The Bishop of Hereford’s Bluecoat school)
 - More details are available at: <http://www.hamptondeneschool.com/lcc/>

2. Three special schools for Severe and Complex Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD), one special school for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, and one Pupil Referral Unit.
3. Support for pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) in mainstream schools is available through contact with county SLD special schools.

Some disabled children will require individualised equipment to enable access to the curriculum: smaller items such as pencil grips and writing slopes, and more specialist equipment such as height adjustable furniture, toilet seats and supportive seating. Such equipment will be provided as part of the reasonable adjustments duty (auxiliary aids). Currently the council expects schools to fund items up to £600 – https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200144/schools_and_education/359/accessibility_in_schools
https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200227/support_for_schools_and_settings/467/teaching_children_with_sen_and_disability/9

In some circumstances, NHS services also support access to the curriculum for individual pupils, including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy (e.g. specialist seating assessment), Physiotherapy and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) . Further details are available in the Health Local offer:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200228/local_offer/511/health_service_support_for_children_local_offer

Services are also available which are not directly council managed – schools are able to use their SEN budget to purchase as required. Advice on sources of learning support is available here:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200228/local_offer/502/support_for_children_with_disabilities/6

2: Improving the physical environment of schools to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services provided

The council has a planning duty to improve the physical accessibility of school buildings over time. The council strategy has been i) improvement of physical access for known pupils in the system, ii) investment to create a spread of accessible schools.

A system of physical accessibility ratings has been devised, based on our expected standards of accessibility which are published here:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200144/schools_and_education/359/accessibility_in_schools/2

The accessibility of our schools was audited in 2015 using these criteria, and 78% of county schools were found to be fully or mainly accessible. Detailed information is published in our web-based directory of schools:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/directory/18/a_to_z

A capital investment strategy for the school estates will be published in 2016. One of the aims of this will be to improve the standard of physical accessibility alongside planned capital investment.

Where there is a new build, extension or refurbishment, it is expected that the school will incorporate any access facilities needed for existing pupils, as well as, in accordance with its statutory responsibilities, anticipate the needs of future pupils (e.g. level access, height adjustable work stations). The Specialist Teacher for Physical Disabilities and the Capital Investment Team will be happy to assist with this planning.

Councils receive no dedicated funding for adaptation, improvement or alteration at any schools. It remains the case, therefore, that central funding for accessibility improvements related to pupils joining or transferring to an individual school will need to be considered by the council. There is a requirement on schools to notify the council of access needs, and parents need to identify on school admission forms that their child has physical access requirements.

PROCESS:

1. The Specialist Teacher for Physical Disability (STPD) will:

- Gather information about any pupils starting or changing school, who will require adaptations
- Ask the Admissions Team (when appropriate) for their best guess destination to aid early planning
- Gather information on the child's individual needs, including from other professionals involved
- Ascertain the views of the child and the family, and clarify future options
- Provide written recommendations to the Capital Investment Team.

2. There will be a presumption against agreeing a school place until discussions (or formal consultation if an EHC Plan is in place) have taken place with that establishment about its capacity to accommodate the needs of the relevant pupil.

3. Where complex adaptations are required, planning must begin at least 12 months ahead of transition. Schools need to give adequate notice, obtain landlord consent, and obtain agreement for any central funding, before incurring any costs.

4. Consideration should be given to whether adaptations at the school provide the best value for money as well as meeting the pupils' needs. There may be another school that is already accessible and can better suit the needs of the child. A cost analysis of potential transportation of the child for the duration of their term in school should be made in comparison to the cost of undertaking the required adaptations at the school.

5. The 'de minimis' for capital expenditure is set at £2,000. Any adaptations below this level will need to be funded from a school's own revenue budget. Examples of school funded schemes include but are not restricted to:

- level access to the main entrance and public/pupil areas of the site
- allocated accessible parking (and ongoing enforcement)
- Ongoing improvements to signage and the sensory environment (appropriate contrasting colour schemes, floor coverings, curtains, blinds, lighting etc), highlighting of steps and changes of level

6. For more complex and costly works there will need to be a minuted meeting on site with all parties present e.g. STPD, OT, Physio, School representatives, Capital Investment team, relevant Project Manager.

7. Once the LA has funded an adaptation, its upkeep and maintenance is then the school's responsibility. If a pupil moves and the school no longer needs a particular facility (e.g. a hygiene or physiotherapy room) the Governing Body must consult the council about any change; if subsequently the facility is needed again, this reinstatement will then be the financial responsibility of the Governing Body.

Adaptations in Voluntary Aided Schools:

Most, but not all adaptations in Voluntary Aided Schools are funded from the Locally Co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme (LCVAP) which provides funding at 90%

of the cost; the final 10% falls to the Governing Body of the school, trustees or to the relevant Church Authority.

Consideration will be given to the Governor's 10% being met by the council.

Adaptations in Academies:

Academy Schools are independent of the council and are funded directly by Central Government.

Advice from EFA is that councils should discuss the placement of a pupil with additional needs with an Academy prior to the issue of a Statement or EHC Plan and that the issue of costs and funding should form part of that discussion. The Academy may decline a placement where it cannot afford to make the necessary adaptations.

It follows that the council must either

- (i) Co-fund the cost of adaptations
- (ii) Fund the works required
- (iii) Offer the pupil an alternative, non-Academy place.

3: Improving the availability of accessible information to disabled pupils

This covers planning to make information (normally provided by the school to its pupils) accessible to disabled pupils. This should take account of pupils' disabilities, pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame.

Herefordshire council has a long-established support service for pupils with physical and sensory impairments (PASS). The specialist teaching teams for visually impaired (VI) and hearing impaired (HI) pupils offer specialist advice, training and support to schools on making information more accessible by using methods such as Braille, large print, tactile diagrams and signing.

The council will ensure that a trained specialist teaching assistant will be provided for pupils with significant sensory impairment who need Braille or British Sign Language. From April 1st 2016 school will be expected to contribute the first £6000 towards this cost from their delegated budget.

Children and young people with a visual impairment can also be trained in the use of specialist ICT and other equipment, such as low vision aids, so that they can access

printed material independently. We encourage and support the use and modification of electronic texts.

The council's teaching support services have for many years also promoted the use of symbols in schools to improve access to written text. The council has in the past funded a single-user licence for every school for Widgit Software's "Communicate: in Print" which enables the production of symbol-supported written material. Training is also offered in the use of Cricksoft's 'Clicker' supportive writing software and associated iPad apps. Further advice is available as follows:

- Assistive ICT for SEN and disability: https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200227/support_for_schools_and_settings/467/teaching_children_with_sen_and_disability/8
 - Physical and sensory support service: https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200227/support_for_schools_and_settings/467/teaching_children_with_sen_and_disability/7
 - Support for children with Autism Spectrum Condition and Speech, Language and Communication Needs: <http://www.hamptondeneschool.com/lcc/>
 - Herefordshire computing support: <http://herefordshirecomputing.com/>
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References:

The Equality Act 2010 and schools (DfE advice: May 2014):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

SEN Code of Practice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>