



**EDUCATION CAPITAL STRATEGY TEAM
EDUCATION ENTITLEMENT
PEOPLE DIRECTORATE**

**ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY
2023-2025**

1. ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The Equality Act 2010 extended protection to groups of people who were previously covered by separate laws and to bring together a range of duties and requirements under a single piece of legislation. Schedule 10 of the Equality Act determines what local authorities should do and what schools should do in order to provide access and provision for those who are disabled. The Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) extends this requirement to all public places. The PSED applies to public bodies, including maintained schools and academies (including Free Schools) and 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 and requires public bodies 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; and
- Foster good relations across all characteristics between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The Equality Act contains the duty to make reasonable adjustments for persons with a disability. For education, this means that schools must take reasonable steps to try and avoid disabled pupils being placed at a disadvantage compared to other pupils. This is an anticipatory duty.

The duty (Schedule 13 of the Equality Act 2010) is “to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the substantial disadvantage” to a disabled person. The disadvantage might be caused by matters relating to provision of equipment or materials, criterion (trigger thresholds) or practice determined by or on behalf of a school, or by the absence of an auxiliary aid or service.

What is a disability?

The Equality Act defines a disability if the child or young person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a child or young person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

For education, this means the pupils from Reception to Sixth Form (inclusive) will be treated in the same way as any other identified need. Other post-16 institutions, such as academies or Further Education colleges, are expected to do the same.

In addition to considering reasonable adjustments for individual disabled pupils, schools must also consider potential adjustments that may be needed for disabled pupils generally. Under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, schools and local authorities also have specific duties as follows:

The Local Authority

The local authority must, for the schools for which it is responsible, prepare an accessibility strategy. This strategy applies to local authority maintained schools, nurseries, children's centres and early years settings. It does not apply to academies, PFI funded schools or private nursery providers on school sites, for which owners/governing bodies of provisions must produce their own accessibility strategy in accordance with the Equality Act.

Schools

Schools retain the duty to produce and implement an accessibility plan designed to:

- Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum;
- Improve the physical environment of schools to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services provided; and
- Improve the availability of accessible information to disabled pupils.

Schools need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must review them regularly.

Power of Direction

If an appropriate body is satisfied that a responsible body has acted or is proposing to act unreasonably in the discharge of a duty under this Schedule or has failed to discharge such a duty, the power of direction may be invoked to rectify this lapse in accountability.

2. ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

This strategy sets out how Coventry City Council (CCC) supports school age children and young people (CYP) who are disabled and enables them to enjoy fair, appropriate access to education and not be disadvantaged in terms clarified in the Equality Act 2010.

The Accessibility Strategy will be kept under review for each prescribed period and revised as necessary. This is in response to Schedule 10 of the Act (parts 1, 2 and 5), which state the responsibilities of the local authority. The local authority is accountable for all maintained schools and academies. Free schools and studio schools are answerable to the Secretary of State.

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in schools' curriculum;
- Improve 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; and
- Improve the delivery of information to disabled pupils which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.

Relevant Legislation

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- SEN and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 (*DfE – revised January 2015*)
- Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions (*DfE – December 2015*)
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014

Local Context

Coventry is a compact urban city with a range of education providers including free schools, academies, maintained schools, trust schools, Diocese schools, post-16 colleges and training providers. Schools have been supported through previous building projects to prepare for basic

accessibility needs that apply to public buildings under the Disability Discrimination Act of 2006 and latterly under the Equality Act 2010. School governing bodies, in liaison with CCC, have been delegated the responsibility to ensure school building and sites are accessible; these are specified in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

There are a variety of special schools in Coventry and a range of Enhanced Resource Provisions that can accommodate CYP with significant special educational needs. These schools are widely spread across the city. There is a presumption in law that children with disabilities will have their needs met within mainstream schools. There is also outreach support offered by Coventry's special schools. More details of Coventry provision can be found in Coventry's SEND Local Offer.

The CCC Multi-Agency Equipment and Access Group review referrals for specialist (medical) equipment so that CYP can access the curriculum in educational settings. The objectives of the group are:

- To meet the needs of CYP who have been identified as requiring medical equipment following an assessment;
- To consider the advice of key professionals as part of the referral process;
- To make decisions based on clear evidence of need;
- To coordinate the distribution of existing/purchase of new equipment;
- To ensure value for money and best use of resources;
- To monitor CYP with physical and medical needs in transition to school and between phases of school, to deliver specialist equipment and to ensure they can access the curriculum; and
- To support educational settings in assessing access needs of children who require specialist access arrangements which will enable them to attend a setting. This also includes new to city CYP that are unable to attend school due to access issues.

The panel is made up of representatives from authority support services, CCC SEN Assessment & Provision Team, CCC Education Capital Strategy Team, CCC Equipment Services; and health services (Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy).

As part of this group – and to fulfil the local authority's statutory duty – the Education Capital Strategy Team work with colleagues and schools to establish if adjustments are required to school buildings/sites and support in making necessary changes where they are deemed outside of the school's responsibility to deliver 'reasonable adjustments'.

3. KEY PRINCIPLES

Our vision is that Coventry is a great place for children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) to grow up in and that they go on to live happy and fulfilled adult lives.

We want CYP with SEND to be happy and successful in their early years, at school and at college, to achieve the best that they can, find employment and go on to live happy and fulfilled adult lives.

We want CYP with SEND and their families to have choice and control over the support they receive and have confidence and trust in the system that has been designed to help them.

4. IMPLEMENTING THE KEY PRINCIPLES

Accessibility Plan

All schools and academies are required to publish an accessibility plan on their website and must comply with the statutory duties as detailed in Schedule 10 of the Act (parts 3, 4 and 5). Schools are expected to keep accessibility plans under review and publish information on their websites.

For maintained schools, publishing the accessibility plan is the responsibility of the governing body. As part of this regular review, schools should make sure that there are adequate resources for implementing plans. For academies, it is the responsibility of the Trustees.

An accessibility plan must be widely and easily available to parents/carers, e.g. on the school's website. Hard copies should be available on request and, also on request, the school should be prepared to make available versions of the plan accessible to parents/carers with different communication needs (including alternative languages). Written information for disabled pupils needs to be given in formats that take account of their specific needs and the views expressed by the pupils and their parents/carers about their preferred means of communication.

Reasonable Adjustments

In the Act as a whole, there are three elements to the reasonable adjustments duty that relate to:

- Provisions, criteria and practices – this duty was carried forward from the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and has not changed;
- Auxiliary aids and services – an element of the duty for schools introduced in September 2012; and
- Physical features – this does not apply to schools in relation to those who are disabled; instead, schools have a duty produce and report upon their accessibility plan.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments requires a school to take positive steps to ensure that disabled CYP can fully participate in the education provided by the school and that they can enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides.

The reasonable adjustment duty is wide. It includes admission arrangements, provision of education, and access to a benefit, facility or service for pupils (Equality Act, Section 20 and Schedule 13).

The duty on schools to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory. This means that schools should not wait until they admit a disabled pupil before making or planning to make adjustments. This delay could lead to a pupil being substantially disadvantaged. Schools should plan a broad range of accessibility improvements over time.

Schools are not obliged to anticipate and make adjustments for every imaginable disability. However, they do need to consider general reasonable adjustments, e.g. being equipped to produce large font papers for pupils with a visual impairment, even if there are none currently admitted to the school.

The Equality Act does not set out what would be a reasonable adjustment or a list of factors to consider in determining what is reasonable. Therefore, it is for schools to consider the reasonableness of adjustments according to the circumstances of each case. Factors that a school may consider when assessing the reasonableness of an adjustment could include:

- The financial or other resources required for the adjustment;
- Its effectiveness and impact on other pupils;
- Health and safety requirements; and
- Whether aids should be made available from other agencies, e.g. through an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

What would be a 'reasonable adjustment' is often a matter of judgement and, wherever possible, should be decided by agreement between the local authority, the school and parents/carers. Decisions should seek to find an appropriate balance between the right of a pupil to attend the school of their choice (within the context of CCC's Admissions procedures) and the Council's responsibility to make the most efficient use of its resources.

Adaptations to Buildings

The duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' can require the school and/or the local authority to invest in physical adaptations to the site and buildings in order to ensure that pupils can access the curriculum as fully as practicably feasible.

In the first instance, the school should determine whether a pupil or pupils could be disadvantaged in accessing the educational offer before the issue materialises. If the school's assessment is that the need can be met via minor adjustments that would typically be paid from a school's budget, e.g. painting, signage, and other external works, etc, they should be implemented and paid for by the school.

Significant capital works would involve an alteration to the structural fabric of the building and/or site, such as the installation of a lift, ramps, changing facilities, etc. In such cases, a member of the Education Capital Strategy Team will typically go out to site with a surveyor to assess the scale of the works required and the cost entailed. This assessment will enable the local authority to determine what form of adjustments would be deemed 'reasonable' in any given instance.

The local authority will work together with the school for which it is responsible to ensure that they do not disadvantage or discriminate against a disabled pupil because of their disability. The local authority will work closely with schools to agree reasonable adjustments, which will allow disabled pupils full access to school facilities and activities. Allocation of capital works and the funding for this will be decided on a case-by-case basis and will be dependent upon local requirements, the current accessibility of the school and the type of work required.

Physical and Medical Needs

The local authority cannot provide advice to schools and education settings regarding accessibility for CYP who have physical and/or medical needs – this is the responsibility of health professionals (e.g. Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy) and SEND & Specialist Services. Moving and handling training and advice to schools and settings can be provided by allocated health professionals.

Travel

Access to travel arrangements is delivered through CCC's SEN Travel Assistance Policy. Through this policy and commissioning arrangements, there is an expectation that local transport providers are able to source a range of accessible vehicles and that, subject to risk assessment, travel escorts can be made available. CCC expect that CYP are able to arrive ready for the school day with minimum disruption.

Where criteria for SEN travel assistance is met, the local authority has a range of travel assistance solutions. The local authority is keen to promote and enable independence where appropriate and has an Independent Travel Training Team in place. This is in line with principles enshrined within the SEND Reforms (Children & Families Act 2014) and the Coventry Send Strategy.

Budget

A budget for capital accessibility works (as funded and delivered by CCC) is allocated on an annual basis to deal with requirements as they arise. The funding is available for adaptations to schools for children with physical and/or medical needs and covers buildings and fixed items. This funding is to be allocated to projects on a case-by-case basis depending upon the varying need and situation.

Increasing access to the curriculum

The following tables set out the areas of responsibility expected under the headings of access to curriculum, access to the physical environment and access to information.

Access to Curriculum

Local authority will:	Schools will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support school managers, including Special Needs Coordinators, in relation to policies, strategies and systems available through the local authority; • Ensure availability of CPD opportunities for school staff to support and enhance the understanding of accessibility in the curriculum; • Provide opportunities for governor training in relation to increasing access to the curriculum and governor responsibilities; • Encourage liaison between Early Years settings and schools to ensure good transition; • Provide opportunities for capacity building in schools through advice and support available via CCC services, e.g. SEN Support Services; and • Encourage high aspirations for the most vulnerable learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have regard to national and local guidance on Auxiliary Aids and Services; • Support children at school with medical conditions, ensuring a good education for those with health needs who are unable to attend school (2015 DfE Guidance); • SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years; • Include improvements that increase access to the curriculum in an Accessibility Plan that is agreed by the Governing Body and published on the school website; • Plan for and teach children with learning needs through a range of interventions and teaching strategies; • Have regard to delivering the National Curriculum that includes catch-up programmes and appropriate support for vulnerable children; • Ensure the effective support for vulnerable children in transition; • Evaluate the outcomes of provision for additional provision and the value for money it provides; • Establish effective ways of assessing and monitoring the progress of vulnerable groups; • Enhance the life chances for their most vulnerable children; • Apply funding appropriately to ensure that vulnerable groups are not disadvantaged in relation to non-vulnerable groups; • Provide effective professional development for staff and governors; and • Keep parents/carers informed.

Access to Physical Environment

Local authority will:	Schools will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan new buildings and major extensions/adaptations that comply with accessibility requirements and facilitate access for individuals with physical impairments and medical needs; • Facilitate the access of individual CYP with a physical impairment or complex medical need; • Work with the School Admission and/or SEN Teams and other local authority staff to assist with issues regarding individual placements; • Commission audits to advise on the required adaptations and additional resources needed to accommodate CYP with physical impairment or medical needs; • Continue to review existing provision of buildings other than schools for which the local authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep under review the physical accessibility of the school building and site and make timely arrangements in preparation to accommodate access and the medical needs of children (and staff); • Include improvements that increase access to the physical environment in an accessibility plan that is agreed by the Governing Body and published on the school website; • All schools, academies and free schools being public buildings must comply with the anticipatory duties as set by the Equality Act 2010; • All schools, academies and free schools must respond to the expectations set in the statutory

<p>is responsible, e.g., children’s centres so that they comply with the latest accessibility legislation and requirements;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set expected levels of funding that maintained schools will be expected to contribute towards schemes that improve the physical environment; • Monitor transition arrangements for children coming into schools for the first time and those moving across school phases through its Multi-Agency Equipment and Access Group; • Liaise with schools that have buildings under local authority control to support and fund adaptations that go beyond the threshold funding arrangements; and • Provide support and consultancy to meet needs of pupils with hearing, visual and physical difficulties in mainstream schools through the Sensory and Physical Support Service. 	<p>advice and documents listed under relevant legislation (above);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund projects that increase access to the physical environment from their own resources and, where appropriate, liaise with the authority having overarching responsibility for the site (maintained and voluntary controlled schools to work with the local authority, voluntary aided schools to work with the diocese through the LCVAP programme, and academies and free schools to work with their funding authorities); • Local authority schools should adhere to the specific guidance contained within this document; • Schools will undertake any improvement projects in liaison with their Property Surveyors and adhere to building regulations and Health and Safety requirements; • Apply advice provided through environmental audits conducted by Occupational Therapy, Hearing and Visual Impairment Services, and Moving and Handling Specialists; • Ensure that curriculum needs are met by providing access to appropriate classroom facilities; • Carry out Risk Assessments for Educational and Residential Visits to ensure they are accessible for pupils with mobility or medical difficulties; • Provide effective professional development for staff and governors; • And keep parents/carers informed.
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Access to Information

<p>Local authority will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice to schools and maintained settings from its specialist teaching and advice services about how best to support CYP with accessing information. The Sensory Support Service offers a range of support, including access to screen reading technology and updating Braille resources to Unified English Braille; and • Ensure that any new buildings or extensions to buildings are appropriately signed in line with accessibility and Health and Safety requirements. 	<p>Schools will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include improvements that increase access to the physical environment in an accessibility plan that is agreed by the Governing Body and published on the school website.
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