

Accessibility Strategy

2015-18



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1. Introduction

Bolton Council strives to provide all children and young people with the opportunity to maximise their potential and be included in their community. The Local Authority recognises the need to provide a wide range of individual and often complex services to meet the needs of individual children and young people. Avoiding discrimination, promoting equality and celebrating difference supports our Community Strategy priorities of raising skills and attainment, tackling disadvantage, narrowing gaps and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable.

1.1 Key Principles

- Inclusion is a process by which schools, early years settings, post 16 establishments, Local Authorities and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all pupils;
- An inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and incorporates the views of parents/carers and children;
- The interests of all pupils must be safeguarded; schools, early years settings, post 16 establishments, Local Authorities and others should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation.

Bolton Council believes that educational inclusion is about equal opportunities for all children, whatever their age, disability, gender, ethnicity, attainment or background.

1.2 Remit and Scope of the Accessibility Strategy

This document has been written in accordance with the LA's duty under equality legislation to prepare an accessibility strategy, describing how the LA will work with schools and early years settings that provide government funded early education places to:

- Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' and early years' curriculums;
- Improve the physical environment of schools and early years settings;
- Improve the delivery of information to disabled pupils and their families.

This document addresses the parts of the Equality Act 2010 relating to disabled children and young people and their access to schools maintained by Bolton Council and has been widened to include early years settings that receive funding via the LA. The Accessibility Strategy complements existing LA plans and strategies, including the Children and Families Act/SEND Code of Practice (2014) and information published by schools to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

1.3 Resourcing the Strategy

To deliver the outcomes identified in this Strategy, existing funding streams will be directed toward the priorities identified. The LA will continue to look at ways to improve its efficiency and effectiveness to deliver the same quality and range of services for less money, or to deliver more for the same level of expenditure. Wherever possible, the LA will seek to develop services and projects in conjunction with key partners such as those in health and the voluntary sector to deliver services for children and young people.

1.4 Monitoring and Review Arrangements

This Strategy will be kept under review and amended as necessary to reflect new legislation and statutory guidance, and developments in local resources and service delivery.

2. The Legal and Strategic Framework

2.1 The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 brought together and simplified existing equality legislation. The planning duty for local authorities first came into force in September 2002. The Equality Act 2010 introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty or 'general duty' that applies to public bodies, including maintained schools, academies and Free Schools.

Early Years Providers, including private day nurseries, childminders, childminder agencies, pre-schools and playgroups, and Sure Start Children's Centres, which provide early education to pre-school children, have the same duties under the Equality Act 2010 as other service providers. Although not considered to be education institutions, they are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice if they are in receipt of the Free Entitlement funding, and are inspected by Ofsted.

2.2 Accessibility Planning

With regard to the planning duty for disabled pupils, three strands have been identified which schools and local authorities must address in their accessibility plans/ strategies:

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

This is known as 'The Planning Duty'. Schools must also have regard to the need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must regularly review them. An accessibility plan may be a freestanding document or may be published as part of another document such as the school development plan. Schools also have additional duties under the Equality Act to publish information e.g. to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Local Authorities must prepare accessibility strategies based on the same principles as the accessibility plans for schools.

2.3 Bolton's Strategic Priorities

The main aims of Bolton's Community Strategy are twofold:

- to increase economic growth
- to narrow gaps in health, achievement and prosperity.

Children and Young People are a key theme in Bolton's Community Strategy 2012-15 and Bolton Children's Trust, a partnership board, oversees the improvement of outcomes for all children and young people. The current priorities for children and young people are:

- Raising attainment.
- Improving children's health.
- Improving outcomes for looked after children.
- Reducing the number of children living in poverty.
- Keeping children safe.

Bolton SEND Steering Group reports to the Children's Trust Board on the implementation of SEND arrangements across the borough and their impact on children and young people with SEND.

2.4 Further Guidance

Guidance on the planning duties and wider compliance with the Equality Act as applicable to both schools and local authorities can be found in “Equality Act 2010: advice for schools” which was published in February 2013. This can be downloaded at

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

3. Increasing Participation in the School Curriculum

Schools are responsible for providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and have a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for disabled pupils and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The curriculum covers not only teaching and learning but the wider curriculum of the school such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities or school visits. The curriculum should provide relevant and challenging learning to all children. It should follow the principles set out in the National Curriculum inclusion statement:

- Setting suitable learning challenges
- Responding to pupils' needs and overcoming potential barriers for individuals and groups of pupils

Schools should consider the needs of a range of disabled pupils and prospective pupils, but they are not obliged to anticipate every imaginable disability and need only consider general reasonable adjustments for pupils that might attend in the future - e.g. being prepared to produce large font papers for pupils with a visual impairment even though there are no such pupils currently admitted to the school.

Additional provision to enable pupils with learning difficulties to access the curriculum is already delivered through the SEN framework and this will cover the needs of many disabled children, but the LA recognises that schools are likely to require external support to maximise their ability to respond to diverse needs. Information provided by a school such as **Provision maps** for individual pupils should provide clear information about targets and progress and help children and young people and their parents understand what is happening in school.

3.1 EYFS Statutory Framework (2014)

This framework is mandatory for all early years providers (from 1 September 2014): maintained schools; non-maintained schools; independent schools; all providers on the Early Years Register; and all providers registered with an early years childminder agency. The EYFS statutory framework and learning and development requirements form the curriculum for all children from birth to 5 years.

- The learning and development requirements are given legal force by an Order made under section 39(1)(a) of the Childcare Act 2006.
- The safeguarding and welfare requirements are given legal force by Regulations made under section 39(1)(b) of the Childcare Act 2006.

In 2013, Bolton Council introduced a pre-school inclusion supplement to ensure that all pre-school children with SEN and disability are able to receive the support they need within mainstream provision to access their free early education entitlement and EYFS provision within a setting of their parents' choice.

As part of the implementation of free places for 2 year olds, a small grants process was instituted between 2013-2015 to enable existing EY providers to increase the provision and accessibility of inclusive free early education places.

3.2 External Resources Available to Schools

Through various specialist teams and services, the LA promotes the inclusion and attainment of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), building capacity within schools and settings, supporting staff development and the implementation of effective policies and practices, so that children and young people with additional needs are included in all aspects of school/setting life and make good progress.

Specialist practitioners within the Education and Learning Division (such as advisory teachers, behaviour support mentors and Educational Psychologists), provide support to all schools and early years settings across the borough, sharing their expertise and their links to other agencies and advising on strategies and resources to meet the needs of pupils, improve outcomes and increase inclusion in school life and the wider community.

There are specialist posts within Bolton's Early Years and Childcare (Educational Improvement) Team of Early Support Manager and Early Years SEN Consultant to support settings with early identification and provision for pre-school children with SEN and disability. These posts work closely with Ladywood Outreach Service and the LA SEN Service to ensure effective transitions between early education settings and schools for children with SEND.

More specialist provision for pre-school children with high needs SEND is currently provided through resourced nursery places and this provision and associated referral processes and funding is being further reviewed to ensure it meets the specific needs of children identified from 0-4 years.

An SEN review was completed in 2014 and plans are currently being developed to move towards a sector led EY SEN 'hub and spoke model' which will include specialist nursery places within EY SEN bases, places within mainstream settings and outreach advice, training and support for early years providers.

The LA has a statutory obligation to identify, assess and make provision for those children and young people with the most complex and long-term SEND. This is achieved through an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment. If, following this assessment, the local authority issue an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), this document will be maintained, monitored and reviewed in line with SEN legislation. The local authority's range of specialist provision is reviewed and developed to correspond with increasing or changing patterns of demand for services for children and young people with additional needs using information provided by such documents as the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis.

Additional funding is available to mainstream settings across the LA to improve access to the curriculum. Funding mechanisms for SEN, and various specialist high cost equipment budgets assist schools in providing targeted support, resources and equipment for children and young people with the most complex needs.

4. Improving the Physical Environment of Schools

This strand of the planning duty includes improvements to the physical environment of the school and physical aids to access education. The physical environment includes steps, stairways, kerbs, exterior surfaces and paving, parking areas, building entrances and exits (including emergency escape routes), internal and external doors, gates, toilets and washing facilities, lighting, heating, ventilation, lifts, signs, interior surfaces, floor coverings, room décor and furniture. Improvements to physical access might include - ramps, handrails, lifts, widened doorways, electromagnetic doors, adapted toilets and washing facilities, adjustable lighting, blinds, induction loops, well designed room acoustics and way-finding systems.

All new school buildings have to comply with the Building Regulations and The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 and should be physically accessible to disabled pupils. However, much of the work in this area will involve improving access to existing buildings. Improved access to the physical environment can be achieved by rearranging room space, removing obstructions from walkways, changing the layout of classrooms and designated storage space or by reallocating rooms to particular subject specialisms.

When planning to improve the physical environment, schools should consider the needs of individual pupils or groups of pupils including:

- Pupils with complex physical impairments who may use a wheelchair to move around school.
- Pupils with less complex physical impairments, who are ambulant, but still require some adaptations, special considerations or adjustments to the school environment.
- Pupils with a sensory impairment or other difficulty requiring adaptations to the school environment or the presentation of information in appropriate formats.
- Pupils who, for a variety of reasons, require specialist toilet and changing facilities.

In addition to having a duty to consider reasonable adjustments for particular individual disabled pupils, schools also have 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. Bolton is committed to developing the range of provision available across the borough with the aim that children are able to access an adapted school within their local area, and recognises that schools are likely to require external support when looking to make improvements of this nature.

4.1 External Resources Available to Schools

Through various specialist teams and services, the LA provides advice to schools about, for example, improving the acoustic environment for pupils with hearing impairment, the reduction of glare and the improvement of signage for pupils with visual impairment, and reasonable adjustments to the physical environment for pupils with mobility difficulties.

Physiotherapists can advise a school about an individual pupil's mobility and physical development. This might include things like co-ordination and ability to sit, stand and walk.

They can advise the school on how best to help the child develop physically, to keep the child as mobile as possible and on any appropriate specialist equipment or adaptations to the environment.

Occupational Therapists can advise a school about using activity-based therapies to help raise an individual pupil's self-esteem and to encourage them to be as independent as possible. They will also advise on any appropriate specialist equipment or adaptations to the school environment if required.

The local authority also manages a variety of capital projects across the borough including the rebuilding, remodelling and refurbishing of primary, secondary and special schools.

Additional funding is available to schools for:

- minor adaptations to the physical environment such as ramps for wheelchair users.
- items of specialist equipment such as hoists and changing tables for pupils with toileting and other personal care needs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have produced technical guidance for schools on "Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Pupils"

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/Reasonable%20adjustments%20for%20disabled%20pupils%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/Reasonable%20adjustments%20for%20disabled%20pupils%20(1).pdf)

5. Improving the Delivery of Information

This part of the duty covers planning to make written information normally provided by a school to its pupils available to disabled pupils. The information should take account of pupils' disabilities, pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame. The information might include handouts, timetables, and information about school events. Schools might consider providing the information in alternative formats (such as large print and audio tape) using ICT, or providing the information orally.

The School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 specifies the minimum requirements for information which must be provided on school websites and reproduced as a paper copy without charge for any parent who asks for it.

School websites must be reviewed annually and include:

- The name, postal address and telephone number of the school, and the name of a person to whom enquiries should be addressed;
- The admission arrangements for the school, including any selection or oversubscription criteria, or guidance on how to access such information on the LA's website;
- Information as to where, and by what means, parents may access the most recent report about the school published by her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills;
- The school's most recent key stage 2 and key stage 4 results as published by the Secretary of State in the School Performance Tables published on the Department for Education's website;
- Information as to where, and by what means, parents may access the School Performance Tables published by the Secretary of State on the Department for Education's website;
- Information about the school curriculum including the content of the curriculum followed by the school for each subject and details as to how additional information relating to the curriculum may be obtained; the names of any phonics or reading schemes in operation; a list of the courses offered at key stage 4 which lead to a GCSE qualification; and a list of other courses offered at key stage 4 and the qualifications that may be acquired;
- The School's behaviour policy;
- The amount of the school's allocation from the Pupil Premium grant in respect of the current academic year; details of how it is intended that the allocation will be spent; details of how the previous academic year's allocation was spent, and the effect of this expenditure on the educational attainment of those pupils at the school in respect of whom grant funding was allocated;
- The School's policy for pupils with special educational needs and the school's SEN information report.

5.1 Early Intervention Team

Offering a targeted service, the Early Intervention Team works with schools and targeted families to ensure regular attendance at school. Services offered to families are the same, regardless of a child / young person's special educational need / disability and can help to identify barriers to attendance. Families will receive advice and support through keyworkers to help get their child into school and keyworkers will work with schools to ensure that barriers to attendance are removed, helping the child to access education. Parents will equally be informed of prosecutions if attendance continues to be an issue.

5.2 The 'Local Offer'

The SEND reforms require every authority to produce a web based 'Local Offer'. The Local Offer brings together information for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. In Bolton, the Local Offer sits on the Bolton Council Local Directory and this has been developed to ensure that the information required through the SEND reforms is part of a much bigger resource of information / advice, services and activities. Information is formatted so families can quickly filter information according to their needs.

<http://www.localdirectory.bolton.gov.uk/send.aspx>

Bolton's Local Offer has been developed in consultation with, and as a result of the feedback from service providers, young people, families and the parent/carer consortium.

Links to each of Bolton's schools, with their local offers, can be found on the Schools Directory:

<http://www.bolton.gov.uk/website/SchoolsDirectory/Pages/SchoolsDirectory.aspx>

5.3 Families Information Service

Bolton's Families Information Service provides universal information and advice for all families across Bolton. A specialist brokerage service is also offered to support those families who need assistance.

5.4 Parent Information Support Worker and Record Coordinator

Additionally, families are offered support through the Parent Information and Support Worker specifically in post for disabled children and their families. This role provides guidance to families, as well as information on short breaks, leisure activities and support groups.

5.5 The Record

Included in the Parent information and Support Worker role is responsibility for maintaining 'The Record', Bolton's disability register of children aged 0-19. This is used to inform future service development and to ensure that the Local Authority collates and keeps accurate records in respect of children's needs.

5.6 Connexions

Bolton Connexions Service provides free, impartial, advice and guidance to children and young people with statements or EHCPs (and their families) on the learning and vocational choices that are available to young people from year 11 onwards. This service commences in year 9, when preparation for adulthood is addressed, and includes one-to-one guidance, working closely with school SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs), and attending annual and person-centred reviews. Its aim is to support children and young people and their parents/carers in exploring and making well-informed decisions about learning, training and work beyond 16.