

Accessibility Strategy

2021-
2024





1. Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 (The Act) brought together a range of equality duties and requirements within one piece of legislation. The Act introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (sometimes also referred to as the 'general duty') that applies to all 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; and
- Foster good relations across all characteristics – between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This strategy covers the three areas required by the planning duties set out in Schedule 10, Accessibility for Disabled Pupils, which says:

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

- (a) Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' 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.

The delivery of information in (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.

2. Definition

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

3. Vision

Cumbria is committed to developing a co-operative future where local organisations work together with local people to deliver improved outcomes through innovation and new ways of working, and with particular focus on driving forward economic growth, job creation and delivering reformed public service.

- 3.1 Our vision is to ensure excellent services for all, working with families so that all children and young people are given the opportunities they need to enjoy a happy, healthy and safe childhood, and to develop into skilled and independent adults able to take their productive place in society.

We know that behind the story of success there are some real challenges and inequalities between relatively wealthy and relatively poor areas of the county and between children with particular needs. Our vision is to target the most support on those who need the most help, ensuring that every child in every part of the county, no matter what their background or their need, have their gifts and talents recognised and the opportunity to thrive within their families and communities.

- 3.2 Our vision specifically for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is that they will have a range of support and opportunities available to enable them to become confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens, to remain healthy and to achieve life outcomes to which they and their families aspire.

4. Local Context

- 4.1 Cumbria has a diverse range of provision available to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. Support and advice is available from a range of specialist teams at individual, group, whole school and collaborative levels to support children and young people in receipt of SEN Support or with an Education, Health and Care Plan and to support schools to develop and improve their graduated response to identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.

- 4.2 Local specialist provision caters for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, autism spectrum conditions, social, emotional and mental health needs and those with severe and complex SEN who require a specialist setting. A number of mainstream schools have additional resourced specialist provision to compliment the specialist provision available in the special schools.





5. Increasing Access to the Curriculum

- 5.1 The joint commissioning of education, health and social care provision for children and young people required by the Children and Families Act 2014 aims to develop more integrated packages of support which will support children and young people with disabilities in accessing the curriculum.
- 5.2 All schools and academies are responsible for providing a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum for all pupils and in particular for disabled pupils. Parents and carers are key partners in developing support for children and young people with SEND. Schools must work with parents and carers, children and young people to develop appropriate outcomes for their personalised plans.
- 5.3 Through the local SEND Partnership, schools and partner agencies are working together to embed the principles of personalisation and person-centred planning into all providers' work with children and young people with SEND. This, together with the graduated approaches expected by the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 creates improved access to the curriculum for all children and young people.
- 5.4 The local authority supports schools to respond to individual needs of pupils and training needs of staff with a range of specialist services. The Cumbria Local Offer provides information about the provision available to support access to the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities including those with SEND.
- 5.5 The LA's SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and the Cumbria parent/carer forum, work collaboratively in supporting the LA to engage with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, and with young people with SEND, to inform and develop good practice within learning settings. Good practice is shared through the SENCO Forum.

6. Improving the Physical Environment

- 6.1 Improving the physical environment of schools includes improving physical access to schools as well. All new school buildings must comply with current building regulations and should be physically accessible to all pupils. Much of the work in this area will involve improving access to existing buildings.
- 6.2 Improved access to the physical environment can be achieved through reasonable adjustments and schools do need to consider potential adjustments which may be needed for disabled pupils generally as it is likely that any school will have a disabled pupil at some point. However, schools are not obliged to anticipate and make adjustments for every imaginable disability and need only consider general reasonable adjustments.

6.3 Cumbria Council is committed to developing the range of provision available across the County and recognises that investment in buildings supports improved access to a full curriculum for children and young people with SEND. Our aim is for all schools to be broadly accessible: that is to say that school buildings will have a range of features to meet the core additional needs associated with physical difficulties (access ramps, personal care and hygiene facilities, access to all key curriculum areas) where physically practicable.

6.4 The physical needs of some pupils and students (including those with sensory impairments) are very specific and may require further specific adaptations. The LA may be able to assist schools with these although this will depend on the specific requirements and the feasibility of undertaking such works. It should be noted that not all works will be feasible or achievable for a specific school.

6.5 Head teachers and governing bodies have responsibility for the physical accessibility of their schools. Disability discrimination legislation requires schools to plan to improve access for those with disabilities through their accessibility plan. Individual schools and academies are required to use devolved budgets, including devolved capital, to ensure that these responsibilities are met as far as is reasonably possible. Any adaptation to school premises should be designed to comply with current building regulations.

6.6 For pupil specific projects in mainstream schools that are relatively modest in cost (e.g. classroom blinds for a pupil with a visual impairment, a classroom sound field for a pupil with a hearing impairment, a wall mounted adjustable changing bed for a pupil with medical needs). Applications will be considered by the SEND County Panel. Projects in mainstream schools which are necessary to support the pupil to make progress towards achieving the outcomes set out in their EHC Plan are funded by the LA.

6.7 In the case of schools not maintained by Cumbria LA (e.g., academies, free schools and independent schools) Cumbria LA's legal obligations to make changes to the physical environment are very limited. The primary obligation for ensuring compliance will fall on the school itself. If requested, Cumbria LA may consider providing advice, support and/or assistance on an individual case basis.

7. Improving Access to Information

7.1 The requirement on local authorities in the Children and Families Act 2014 to develop a Local Offer has the express purpose of making information more accessible. One of its key purposes, set out in the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25, is to provide clear, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about the available provision and how to access it. The Cumbria Local offer is available at:

www.cumbria.gov.uk/local_offer

For those families who are not able to access the internet, access to the local offer is available at several locations.

- Cumbria County Council libraries
- Children's Centres
- Cumbria's parent/Carer Forum



- 7.2 The developing and widening use of ICT is significantly transforming the lives of everybody but especially those children and young people who are unable to communicate using traditional methods. Cumbria LA liaises with RCAS - Regional Communication Aid Service (based in Newcastle), partners in schools, specialist teaching services and health professionals to ensure there is a consistent and equitable method of securing expensive technological aids, such as Alternative and Augmentative Communication Aids.
- 7.3 The Cumbria SENDIAS Service offers impartial information, advice and support to families of children and young people with SEND encouraging and developing partnerships between children, young people, parents, schools, the council and other partners.

8. Consultation, Implementation and Review

- 8.1 This strategy revises and replaces the previous strategy and will be further consulted on through the Local Offer. It covers the period 2021-2024 and sets out how the LA plans to increase access to school education for disabled pupils in schools for which it is responsible. The strategy covers the duties in the Equality Act 2010 and related Equality Duty 2011 and reiterates the duty on schools as laid out in the previous Disability Discrimination Act. The legislation requires LAs and schools to take account of both existing pupils and prospective pupils – the duty is anticipatory.
- 8.2 This strategy will be kept under regular review and updated no later than 2024.



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