
**Summary of the DfES Guidance “Accessible Schools:
planning to increase access to schools for disabled
pupils”**

Introduction

The introduction outlines the status of the guidance and the definition of disability, as used in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). The introduction also outlines the benefits of planning to the institution.

Section Two

This section outlines the legal status of the planning guidance. Sections 28D and 28E of the DDA place a duty on all LEAs to plan strategically to increase over time the accessibility of all of their maintained schools including pupil referral units and maintained nursery schools. Sections 28D and 28E of the DDA also place a duty on the responsible bodies of all schools to plan to increase the accessibility of their individual school. This includes the responsible bodies of all community schools, community special schools, foundation schools, foundation special schools, voluntary controlled (VC) schools, voluntary aided (VA) schools, independent schools, city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and city academies and non-maintained special schools. The responsible bodies for each type of school are set out below:

Type of school	Responsible body
Maintained school	The governing body*
Pupil referral unit	The LEA
Maintained nursery school	The LEA
Independent school	The proprietor**
Special school that is not maintained by a local education authority	The proprietor**

* The responsible body in maintained schools varies according to who has the general responsibility for that function in education. The governing body will be the responsible body for producing and implementing the accessibility plan.

** The Education Act 1996 says that the proprietor is the person or group of people responsible for the management of the school. This will vary according to the type of school but would include the trustees, the governing body, the private owner or the management group of the school.

The duty to produce an accessibility plan does not apply to pupil referral units or maintained nursery schools where the LEA is the responsible body.

The guidance states that all of the disability duties in Part 4 of the DDA, including the planning duty, come into force in September 2002. It will take time, however, to produce accessibility strategies and plans and LEAs and schools are not expected to have strategies and plans in place immediately. LEAs and schools are required to produce written strategies and plans by April 2003. Regulations prescribe that strategies and plans should run for an initial period of 3 years, from 1 April 2003 until 31 March 2006.

Section Three: three strands of the planning duty

This section explains the respective duties on LEAs and schools under the three strands of the planning duty and the links between LEAs and maintained schools in planning. The three strands of the planning duty are:

- increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum;
- 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 associated services provided or offered by schools; and
- improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is provided, in writing, to pupils who are not disabled. This should be done within a reasonable period of time and in formats which take account of any views expressed by the pupils or their parents about their preferred means of communication.

i. Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum.

The guidance states that LEA strategies should focus on how they intend to help schools increase the accessibility of the curriculum to disabled children by securing staff training and encouraging schools to work together and share good practice. LEAs should ensure that their schools are aware of their support services. According to the guidance, LEA support services can provide advice to teachers on teaching techniques and strategies, classroom management, and curriculum material. They can also provide support for curriculum development; direct teaching or practical support for class teachers; part-time specialist help, or access to learning support assistance.

Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. They have a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for disabled pupils. In focusing on this part of the duty and considering barriers to the curriculum, schools should consider the needs of a range of disabled pupils and prospective pupils. Although children with learning disabilities may experience some of the greatest barriers to curriculum access, the majority of such children will already have access to the curriculum provided through the SEN framework including provision through statements of special educational needs.

The guidance highlights the tools that already exist to help schools make the curriculum accessible to disabled pupils, for example the National Curriculum inclusion statement and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) general and subject guidelines on *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties*. Both of these documents are available from <http://www.qca.org.uk>. *Supporting the Target Setting Process* (DfES/QCA) provides guidance on target setting for pupils with SEN.

ii. Improving the physical environment of schools

The guidance points out that since 1996, LEAs have been managing the Schools Access Initiative (SAI) which funds projects to increase disabled access at mainstream schools. LEAs also manage the capital estate of their schools (including, to a significant extent, that for VA schools). This includes preparing condition, suitability and sufficiency assessments of their school buildings through their local asset management plans (AMPs), prioritising investment and obtaining agreement to the approach to prioritising investment.

The planning duty requires LEAs to take a strategic approach to planning for increased disability access to all maintained schools across their areas. To achieve this, LEAs will need good data on the accessibility of their schools. LEAs will have some data on the accessibility of their schools from the AMP suitability assessments. The guidance states that where the LEA does not have clear information about the accessibility of their schools, they should undertake an access audit of their schools to identify all barriers and hazards to access.

The guidance makes it clear that schools' plans for increasing the accessibility of the physical environment of the school to disabled pupils are likely to be on a much smaller scale than LEA strategies. While the DfES expects LEAs to undertake and fund much of the larger scale work, the guidance states that this does not mean that schools can wait for their LEA to make their school accessible. According to the guidance, schools will have to consider what they can do to improve the accessibility of the physical environment of the school within the resources available to them. Schools might consider accessibility in all purchasing decisions.

iii. Improving the delivery of information to disabled pupils

This part of the duty covers planning to make written information normally provided by the school to its pupils, such as handouts, timetables, textbooks, information about school events, available to disabled pupils. This will include alternative formats such as large print, audio tape, braille, a recognised symbol system, the use of ICT and also the provision of information orally, through lip speaking or in sign language. The information should take account of the pupils' disabilities and pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame.

According to the guidance, a reasonable timeframe would ensure that materials would be produced for the start of the academic year. Accessible written information needed during lessons should, wherever possible, be provided at the time of the lesson.

Where LEAs have centrally provided support services, the guidance says that they should make sure that all their schools have information about this support and what it can provide, including systems for converting information into alternative formats. LEAs should encourage their schools to share good practice on providing information in different formats.

LEA strategies should detail their plans for developing and improving support for the provision of information in different formats. Schools should set out in their plan the mechanisms by which they would provide the written material they usually provide for all pupils in alternative formats for disabled pupils within a reasonable time.

Section Four: How to Develop and Accessibility Strategy

This section gives guidance on how LEAs can develop an accessibility strategy.

Section Five: How to develop an Accessibility Plan

This section gives guidance to schools on how to develop an accessibility plan. An example of a plan is given in Annex E.

Section Six: Resources

In paragraph 6.1 and 6.2, the guidance states that:

“LEAs have a number of sources of funding available to them that can be used for disability access projects. This includes formulaic capital funding for school building projects, including those addressing barriers to access. LEAs have information on their individual allocations of these funding programmes. There is a total of £6.5 billion of capital available over 2002-03 and 2003-04, and LEAs should consider disability access as part of all capital work. The Schools Access Initiative provides capital funding specifically for disability access projects at mainstream schools and there is a total of £70 million available in 2002-03 and £100 million in 2003-04, which is allocated to LEAs by formula. Maintained schools can use their delegated budget for disability access including the use of devolved capital funding.

There is £91 million available in 2002-03 for SEN and disability under the Standards Fund. The majority of this funding will be delegated to schools and it is a key source of funding for training teachers, learning support assistants and other staff.”

The guidance reiterates that there will be £91m available in 2002-03 for SEN and disability under the Standards Fund. The majority of this funding will be delegated to schools and it is a key source of funding for training teachers, learning support assistants and other staff.

Monitoring

As part of their inspections, OFSTED will monitor LEAs' accessibility strategies and schools' accessibility plans.

Redress

The SEN and Disability Tribunal, which comes into force in September 2002, does not have the power to hear appeals from parents or other interested parties against LEAs and schools concerning their responsibilities under the planning duty.

The full DfES guidance contains the following annexes.

Annex A outlines the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Annex B contains a list of useful documents.

Annex C highlights where to go for further help and information.

Annex D outlines a checklist on identifying barriers to access.

Annex E outlines gives an example of a school access plan.