

# Schools' Accessibility Plan

2020 – 2023



## Document Control

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# 1 Context

- 1.1 An Accessibility Plan ensures that long-term planning for disabled pupils meets the requirements of sections 1 to 3 of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002.
- 1.2 In 2020 there were 503 pupils of school age assessed or declared as having a disability in Aberdeen City, representing 7.35% of pupils with additional support needs. Seventy-five percent of disabled pupils attend mainstream schools. This plan is focussed on improving access to education for all disabled pupils, both those who are declared disabled and attending schools and early learning and childcare settings and those who choose not to declare.
- 1.3 The Plan encompasses the vision for Aberdeen: 'a place where all people can prosper' and the values and objectives stated in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan
- 1.4 The Council has a range of documents to support improvement planning and decision making, this Plan should not be considered in isolation. The Schools Accessibility Plan aims to pull improvement activity together into one high level accessible document which can be used to support self-evaluation and planning for improvement.
- 1.5 This Schools Accessibility Plan will ensure that the Council continues to evaluate and focus on the three planning duties under the Act:
  - Increasing disabled pupils' participation in the curriculum.
  - Improving the physical environment of the schools, and other buildings where education is provided, to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can take advantage of education and associated services.
  - Improving communication with disabled pupils and their parents and carers.

# 2 Disability Definition

- 2.1 The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines a disabled person as someone who has 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. This includes:
  - Physical, including sensory impairment
  - Mental impairment, including learning difficulties
  - Impairments as a result of mental health issue, must have substantial, long term impact on day to day, but need not be recognised through NHS.
- 2.2 In addition, the following are also defined as disabilities:
  - Cancer, HIV infection, Multiple Sclerosis
  - Severe disfigurement
  - Progressive conditions, eg muscular dystrophy, where the effect on ability to carry out day-to-day activities is not substantial but is likely to be so in the future.
- 2.3 The definition of disability may include what may be termed hidden disabilities such as dyslexia; autistic spectrum condition and speech and language impairments.

### 3 Key Legislation and Guidance

- 3.1 The [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) provides the legal framework for identifying and addressing the additional support needs of children and young people who face a barrier, or barriers, to learning including those who are disabled. The framework guides the provision of appropriate support to help them work towards achieving their full potential.
- 3.2 The [Children and Young People Scotland Act 2014](#) guides careful consideration of effective universal and targeted support following an assessment of wellbeing. The legislation recognises that many children require support from a range of different agencies.
- 3.3 The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on a range of protected characteristics including disability. The Act sets out duties in relation to disabled pupils including the duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to non-disabled pupils. This Act also places Aberdeen City Council under a public sector equality duty which requires it, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to: eliminate prohibited conduct under the act; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between persons who share protected characteristic and those who do not. This includes by removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by disabled pupils, taking steps to meet the needs of disabled pupils that are different from those without a disability, and encouraging disabled pupils to participate in public life or any other activity in which participation is disproportionately low.
- 3.4 The United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) will soon be incorporated into Scots Law. A recent [self-evaluation](#) of the extent to which Aberdeen City Council upholds and promotes children's rights and associated Child Friendly City Plan has proved a key source of information in developing this Plan.

“A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families” Article 23

“Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.” Article 29

### 4 The Self Evaluation Process

- 4.1 In addition to a review of legislation and guidance many hard data sources enabled the initial drafting of this Schools Accessibility Plan. Sources included:
- Self-evaluation against the UNCRC
  - Themes identified from the Additional Support for Learning Review
  - Data sets held by the Supporting Learners workstream
  - Quality Improvement data from recent school visits
  - School inspection reports
  - Attainment data for children registered as disabled

- Population needs assessments
- Tribunal data
- Complaints
- Pupil surveys including surveys of wellbeing and children's rights ▪ Data held by Corporate Landlord

4.2 Data was holistically considered to help start to determine our position in regard to the three areas to be explored in this Plan. This enabled a series of themes to be drawn from the data for further exploration. A period of engagement took place with groups representing parents and carers of disabled children, disabled pupils and professionals who support children and families impacted by disability. There was a particular focus on qualitative data or softer data during this period of engagement. This approach ensured that we effectively balance quantitative and qualitative data sets and take a rounded view of our current state to help identify action for inclusion in the Schools Accessibility Plan.

## 5 Is the Curriculum Accessible for All Disabled Learners?

5.1 Data from learners, parents and quality improvement visits identifies that the curriculum is accessible for most, but further efforts are required to ensure that it is accessible to a minority of learners. In almost all cases the children and young people most at risk of not having an accessible curriculum have an individual plan (Individual Education Plan or

Child's Plan) and some also have a Coordinated Support Plan. In some cases, planning does not sufficiently include the learner and isn't sufficiently differentiated. The Supporting Learners workstream will lead on developing improved consistency in this area.

5.2 In the best cases, school staff engage disabled learners in the planning process by encouraging pupils to consider themselves as a learner and asking the learner to identify (or show) interventions or approaches that work well for them. They also work with parents, carers and partners to identify and address accessibility needs. This is the standard expected across the City and will be a key focus of Quality Improvement visits over session 2020/2021.

5.3 The use of accessible technology such as Texthelp and Google tools is recognised as a strength. These enable disabled learners to personalise their support and access the curriculum as independently as possible. This resource should continue to be promoted alongside lower tech solutions so that individual needs are taken account of.

5.4 Effective curriculum design places the needs of disabled learners at the centre of a plan which is aspirational and allows access to flexible learning pathways and a range of qualification routes. Although there is some evidence of flexibility not being in place in a few cases, attainment measures for children with additional support needs in Aberdeen City

(and the subset of those who disclose a disability) are higher than both the virtual comparator and national average. The Quality Improvement Team will work with colleagues in Data and Insights to ensure that they are able to track the progress of children with a disability more easily through the use of Power BI.

- 5.5 Aberdeen City's four-year average positive destination figure is 90.68% and 84.88% for young people with additional support needs. The figure sits below the virtual comparator (88.54%) and national average (89.17%) and highlights a need to review post school transitions. Many parents do not identify their child as disabled and more work will be undertaken to cleanse the data to enable more effective reporting of disabled young people's destinations. This will be aligned to the work of the LOIP to ensure maximum reach.
- 5.6 Parents of children with a disability ask that provision of high quality professional learning is made. This request also came through surveys previously reported to this Committee through the Supporting Learners Programme. This is being progressed at pace and a suite of professional learning has been developed by a range of partners (including CAHMS). Support groups have offered to help develop training that captures the lived experiences of disabled people and this will be built into our approaches.
- 5.7 Access to the curriculum is impacted when disabled learners are not in school. The total number of primary school exclusions is at a three year low. Exclusion levels across secondary schools vary significantly and a reduction is being supported through our Quality Improvement approaches, our Supporting Learners programme and a review of our Exclusion Policy and guidance. There is a need to ensure that staff have a solid understanding of the requirements of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) and the Equality Act 2010 and this will be built into our professional learning calendar.
- 5.8 Parents made reference to a lack of personalised support or range of extracurricular activities available for disabled children. Disabled children should be enabled to access to activities. There is evidence that better promotion, communication and making reasonable adjustments could help disabled children and young people access a wider range of extracurricular activities.
- 5.9 The [Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the response to COVID-19 in Scotland](#) indicates that many children and young people with additional support needs and/or disabilities have been unable to access adequate additional support for learning or teaching either in school or remotely. Feedback from parents across Aberdeen City is mixed with 81% reporting very good support whilst others feeling that digital support was less impactful with 6% wanting another form of learning, with similar responses from learners. The supports/adaptations available to disabled learners over the next few months will be carefully monitored through live data monitoring to inform the shaping of services around their needs.
- 5.10 Some groups of learners requiring additional support/reasonable adjustment will be impacted in the medium to long-term by the pandemic. Our curriculum needs to respond flexibly to the changing needs of our learners in the current context. Given this, our 2020/2021 quality improvement visits will seek to understand and support those impacted by COVID-19.
- 5.11 Resource is currently shaped around pre-defined categories of children and young people. This is limiting flexibility and the Supporting Learners Programme is looking

at how best to develop a system which can analyse and predict trends to anticipate demand. This will help shape services and resource around the needs of disabled learners.

- 5.12 Services supporting children and young people with disabilities often place restrictions on accessing services (such as the need for an official diagnosis) and this should be reviewed urgently. Parents highlighted this as a significant concern and this will be addressed through the Supporting Learners programme.
- 5.13 Resource allocated across an Associated Schools Group can be highly effective although the collaboration and creativity required to allocate resource for maximum impact is not consistent. There is a need to share best practice in this area.

## **6 Can Everyone Access the Physical Environment?**

- 6.1 Aberdeen City Council has invested heavily in the school estate over recent years and are committed to building four new schools. All new school buildings are fully wheelchair accessible and offer a level of flexibility.
- 6.2 34 schools (58%) are graded as A or B for suitability according to nationally agreed criteria and some have specialist resources. The remaining 25 buildings are graded as “C – Poor”. Many of these are the oldest buildings in the estate, including nine Victorian buildings, the design and construction make it challenging to improve their suitability, often because they cannot easily be made fully accessible for those with limited mobility although it should be noted that accessibility is not limited to those with a physical disability.
- 6.3 Parents requested that consideration be given to widening our understanding of disability access. This should include an audit of school buildings looking at access for all disabilities not just physical disabilities and consideration of how needs can be met. This must include assessing spaces from a sensory (autistic) perspective and for those with sensory impairments by or with input from specialist services including, for example NHS. This approach will help identify how best to support our school building programme but also give an indication of how best to support when operating in a building with limited flexibility.
- 6.4 Learners identified that signage in school could be improved by being at an appropriate height and labelled inclusively. This will be fed into the review of the School Estate.
- 6.5 Accessibility will be a key driver in the upcoming review on the School Estate with delivery through the Condition and Suitability Programme.

## **7 Do Disabled Pupils Have Access to Information in a Timely Manner, which Takes Account of Disability and Meets their Communication Needs?**

- 7.1 The recent local Child Friendly Cities Evaluation Report highlights key strengths including well-established participatory approaches and groups which enable most children and young people to influence decision-making. It noted further work being required to ensure greater opportunities to influence a wider range of decisions that directly affect the lives of learners, including disabled learners, personally and at a city-wide level. This ability to influence decision making will be taken forward through the Child Friendly Cities Action Plan.
- 7.2 Most staff take positive and proactive steps to reduce communication barriers to the curriculum. 81% of our children and young people advised that information was easy to understand. Work is required to ensure that the 19% who reported that it wasn't easily understood are effectively catered for including the availability of information in alternative formats and supporting any necessary communication aids/technology provided to enable disabled learners to communicate effectively .
- 7.3 Further consideration and efforts need to be undertaken to ensure that communications from all services including health, justice, social services are accessible, easy-to-understand and user- friendly for disabled learners. The planned communication plan will help to co-ordinate messaging from across the council and wider partnership and enable more formal measurement of impact. This again will be progressed in partnership with Community Planning Partners as we progress our Child Friendly City Plan.
- 7.4 Work is underway to increase the accessibility of information to families and staff, particularly around process and services to meet disabled learners' needs. It is hoped that we can build on the digital developments made over the last few months to further enhance our Digital Hubs.

## **8 Review and Evaluation**

- 8.1 The Implementation of this Plan will be monitored and reported to Committee through the Supporting Learners Programme.
- 8.2 Formal review of this Plan will take place after 30 months to ensure a new Plan is in place three years after completion of this one. This will ensure that we maintain a focus on improving outcomes for those who are disabled and meet our duties set out in the 2002 Act.



**Action Plan to improve access to the curriculum:**

| What are our goals?   | What will this achieve?  | When will we do this by? | Who will make sure this happens?                                    | How will we know our progress?  |
|---|--|--------------------------|---|---|
| <p>Improve awareness of legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disability and Equality</li> <li>▪ Additional support needs legislation</li> <li>▪ Exclusion</li> </ul> | <p>Improve consistency of practice and build confidence and knowledge base of staff</p> <p>Reduce stigma in declaring a disability</p> | <p>June 2021</p>         | <p>Building Capacity Team</p> <p>Supporting Learners Workstream</p> | <p>Attendance at professional learning and feedback</p> <p>Reduction in the number of associated complaints</p> <p>Reduction in the number of ASN Tribunal references</p> <p>Reduction in levels of exclusion of disabled pupils</p> <p>Increased number of children and young people declared disabled</p> |
| <p>Disabled learners use digital technology to increase access to the curriculum by increasing the provision of technology and use of accessible tools</p>                                | <p>Improve accessibility of the curriculum</p>   | <p>Dec 2022</p>          | <p>Raising Attainment Workstream</p> <p>Senior Leadership Teams</p> | <p>Increase in the provision of technology</p> <p>Quality Improvement Visits</p>  |

|   |  |               |   |  |
|---|--|---------------|---|--|
| Staff have an appropriate understanding of additional support needs of disabled pupils through a suite of professional learning opportunities at different levels | Increased confidence and knowledge base of a range of additional support needs and disabilities. | Dec 2022      | Supporting Learners Programme<br>Building Capacity Workstream                           | Feedback from Professional Learning Programme<br>Quality of planning and practice<br>Number of staff trained |
| Improve knowledge of and improve access to extra curricular activities for disabled learners  | Improved access and uptake of activities outwith the school day                                  | December 2023 | Supporting Learners Workstream  | Disabled Learner feedback<br>Feedback from parents and carers of disabled pupils                             |
| Learners are supported to be fully involved in their own learning, planning and review.   | More impactful plans   | June 2021     | School teams  | Plans for learners   |
| Improved transition planning for children with a disability<br><br>All transitions: nursery to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to adult services.        | Improved outcomes and destinations<br><br>(Link with Economic Rescue Plan)                       | Dec 2023      | Senior Leadership Team<br>Skills Development Scotland<br>Social work and other agencies | Positive destination data<br>Learner feedback  |

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|---|--|------------------|--|---|
| <p>Curriculum personalised to meet the needs of individual disabled learners including the provision of Locality Hubs with a particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Those with a disability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Those impacted adversely by COVID-19 with a disability</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p>Reduction in exclusion of learners with a disability</p> <p>Increase in attainment Increase in the overall time learners access education</p> | <p>June 2023</p> | <p>Senior Leadership Teams</p> <p>Supporting Learners Workstream</p> <p>Educational Psychology</p> | <p>Reduction in exclusion Increase in engagement</p> <p>School leavers data for those with a disability</p> |
|---|--|------------------|--|---|

**Action Plan to improve access to the physical environment:**

| <b>What are our goals?</b>  | <b>What will this achieve?</b>  | <b>When will we do this by?</b> | <b>Who will make sure this happens?</b>  | <b>How will we know our progress?</b>                 |
|---|---|---------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Augmentative and alternative signage at learner appropriate height</p> <p>Toilets signposted as accessible</p>   | <p>Inclusion of those with disabilities, hidden and visible</p>                         | <p>June 2023</p>                | <p>School Support Managers</p> <p>Senior Leadership Teams</p> <p>Corporate Landlord</p>          | <p>Signage in buildings compliant</p>                 |
| <p>Involve disabled children, parents, specialists and services in the development of the school estate strategy, including nurseries and preschool centres</p> | <p>Meet statutory duties, anticipate need and look forward to what is best practice</p> | <p>June 2021</p>                | <p>Corporate Landlord</p> <p>Children and Family Services</p> <p>Allied Health Professionals</p> | <p>School estate strategy in place</p>                |
| <p>Provide guidance on how to meet a range of needs (particularly sensory needs) when environments are not as flexible</p>                                      | <p>Sensory needs being better met</p>   | <p>June 2022</p>                | <p>Supporting Learners Workstream</p>  | <p>Individual plans for children and young people</p> |

**Action Plan to improve communication and access to school information:**

| <b>What are our goals?</b>  | <b>What will this achieve?</b>   | <b>When will we do this by?</b> | <b>Who will make sure this happens?</b>  | <b>How will we know our progress?</b>  |
|---|--|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Information regarding additional support need is meaningful, relevant and readily available in variety of formats or language | Learners use the form of communication which suits.<br>Everyone can access and understand information            | Dec 2023                        | Senior Leadership Teams<br>Children and Family Services<br>Child Friendly City Project group | Parents and carers/children and young people and staff report improvement in the quality of information being shared |
| Establishment of Digital Hub as a one stop shop for all information for all stakeholders                                      | Improve staff awareness of digital technology and accessibility for all  | June 2022                       | Supporting Learners Workstream<br>Digital Depute   | Hits to the Digital Hub<br>Quality Improvement visits  |
| Information gathered and shared directly ASN Parent forum   | Partnership with parents to share and inform practice<br>Appropriate format agreed – to include virtual meetings | Dec 2022                        | Children and Family Services   | Feedback from participants   |