

# **Gateshead Accessibility Strategy**

2021 - 2024



# Contents

## Section 1 Context and Background

Introduction.....	3
The Legislative Background .....	4
The Planning Duty .....	5
The Special Educational Needs Context.....	6

## Section 2 The Accessibility Strategy

Improving the Physical Environment of Schools.....	7
Improving Provision and Access to the Curriculum .....	9
Improving the Delivery of Information .....	11
Monitoring the Strategy .....	11
Recommendations .....	11



# Section 1 Context and Background

## Inclusion Statement

Gateshead’s vision is that all children and young people should have an inclusive education.

**‘To build on their futures, we believe in including everyone. Our children and young people are our greatest strength and they will flourish if they all contribute to this future.’**

## Introduction

The local authority is promoting that the culture and curriculum in our schools supports accessibility for our children and young people. Support for many children with disabilities is provided by schools and the Local Authority (LA) through the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework, guidance for which has been set out in the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

### The principles of the Code are that:

- a child with special educational needs should have their needs met
- a greater emphasis on Vulnerable pupils
- a greater emphasis on safeguarding
- the special educational needs of children will normally be met in mainstream schools or settings
- the views of the child should be sought and taken into account
- parents have a vital role to play in supporting their child’s education

- children with special educational needs should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education, including
- an appropriate curriculum for the foundation stage and the National Curriculum
- these principles apply equally to children with disabilities.

## Inclusion: providing effective educational learning opportunities

*(Also refer to Gateshead Inclusion Standard and SEND Descriptors documentation)*

### Setting Suitable Learning Challenges

Schools should aim to give every pupil the opportunity to experience success in learning and support children to develop. The Curriculum sets out the knowledge skills and understanding in ways that suit their pupils’ abilities. This may mean referring to earlier or later year groups so that individual pupils can make progress. A similarly flexible approach will be needed to take account of any gaps in pupils’ learning resulting from missed or interrupted

schooling and a greater degree of differentiation will be needed for example that which may be experienced by travellers, refugees, those in care or those with long-term medical conditions.

### Responding to Pupils’ Diverse Learning Needs

When planning, teachers should set high expectations and provide opportunities for all pupils to achieve. Schools need to be aware that pupils have a wide range of interests, strengths and experiences which will influence the way in which they learn. Teachers should plan their approaches to teaching and learning so that all pupils can take part fully in lessons.

### Overcoming Potential Barriers to Learning and Assessment for Individual and Groups of Pupils

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Teachers will encounter a wide range of pupils with SEN, some of whom will also have disabilities. Curriculum planning and assessment must take account of the type and extent of the difficulty experienced by the pupil. In many cases, curriculum access will be met through careful consideration of tasks and materials although a small number of pupils may need access to specialist equipment and alternative activities.

## Pupils with Disabilities

Not all pupils with disabilities will have special educational needs. Some pupils will learn alongside their peers without the need of additional resources beyond the aids they use as part of every-day life e.g. wheelchairs, hearing aids. Curriculum planning must still take into account the needs of these pupils and ensure they are able to participate as fully as possible within the National Curriculum.

## Pupils who are Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Pupils who have EAL have diverse needs in terms of support necessary in the learning of English. Planning should take into account previous educational experience and language skills. Careful monitoring of pupils' progress in the acquisition of language skills is essential and they should be supported to access the National Curriculum in full.



## The Legislative Background

The Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010. It effectively consolidated the disparate equality/discrimination related to legislation into a single act. The requirement to write an accessibility strategy is set out in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and specifically relates to pupils with a disability.

It supports the principle that

*'All children and young people who live in a school's locality, no matter what their background, circumstances or perceived ability, belong in the local community and share the same rights to quality education in their local neighbourhood school.'*

The Act has a Single Equality Duty and covers: disability, race, gender, age, sexual identity, religion and pregnancy.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 to prevent discrimination against disabled people in their access to education. It is unlawful for LAs or schools to discriminate, without justification, against disabled pupils (and prospective pupils) in all aspects of school life. There are two key duties:

- not to treat disabled pupils (and prospective pupils) less favourably; and
- to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage.

The passing of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (which amended the 1995 Act of the same name) introduced a new duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination against disabled people and to actively promote their equality and positive attitudes towards them.

The principle behind the 2001 legislation is that wherever possible disabled pupils should have the same opportunities as non-disabled pupils in their access to all aspects of education. The 2005 Act extends the definition of disability and also defines the pre-emptive approach which is required from public authorities towards disability equality.

Duties on schools and Local Authorities and guidance on how to avoid discrimination against pupils are set out in the Code of Practice for Schools published by the Disability Rights Commission (July 2002).

**The Equality Act 2010 sets out the legal obligations that schools, early years providers, post-16 institutions, local authorities and others have towards disabled children and young people:**

They **must not** directly or indirectly discriminate against, harass or victimise disabled children and young people.

They **must** make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that disabled children and young people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers. This duty is anticipatory – it requires thought to be given in advance to what disabled children and young people might require and what adjustments might need to be made to prevent that disadvantage.

Public bodies, including further education institutions, **local authorities**, maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies and free schools are covered by the public sector equality duty and when carrying out their functions must have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled children and young people. They **must** publish information to demonstrate their compliance with this general duty and **must** prepare and publish objectives to

achieve the core aims of the general duty. Objectives must be specific and measurable.

The duties cover discrimination in the provision of services and the provision of education, including admissions and exclusions. All providers **must** make reasonable adjustments to procedures, criteria and practices and by the provision of auxiliary aids and services. Most providers must also make reasonable adjustments by making physical alterations. Schools and local authority education functions are not covered by this last duty, **but they must publish accessibility plans (and local authorities, accessibility strategies) setting out how they plan to increase access for disabled pupils to the curriculum, the physical environment and to information.**

**School governing bodies and proprietors must also publish information about the arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps taken to prevent disabled children being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to assist access of disabled children, and their accessibility plans.**

Where a child or young person is covered by SEN and disability legislation, reasonable adjustments and access arrangements should be considered as part of SEN planning and review. Where school governors are publishing information about their arrangements for disabled children and young people, this should be brought together with the information required under the Children and Families Act 2014.

## The Planning Duty

The 2010 Equality Act has consolidated all equality/discrimination related legislation. The 2001 (SENDA) Act also introduced a planning duty under which all LAs must produce an Accessibility Strategy for the schools for which they are responsible, and all schools must produce their own Accessibility Plans. The aims of both the LA Strategy and individual School Accessibility Plans are to improve the physical environment and increase access to the curriculum.

Gateshead Council's first (2003-2006) Accessibility Strategy set out how the Council intended to fulfill its duties under the 2001 Act. The Strategy was also drawn up in accordance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995; it took account too of the guidance provided by the Department for Education & Skills (DfES) in "Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils".



**The current strategy 2021 – 2024 has set the following objectives:**

- ensuring the school curriculum meets the needs of pupils with SEND and disabilities
- ensuring school leaders and governors evaluate and address the physical environment of their schools to make improvements for disabled pupils
- ensuring schools produce accessibility action plans
- providing training and resources that develops teaching staff awareness of how they can improve their delivery for SEN and disabled pupils.
- working with health and social care in supporting accessibility in schools.

## The Special Educational Needs Context

### Principles

Support for many children with disabilities is provided by schools and the LA through the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework, guidance for which is set out in the SEN Code of Practice. The principles of the Code are that:

- a child with special educational needs should have their needs met
- the special educational needs of children will normally be met in mainstream schools or settings
- the views of the child should be sought and taken into account
- parents have a vital role to play in supporting their child's education
- children with special educational needs should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education, including an appropriate curriculum for the foundation stage and the National Curriculum.

These principles apply equally to children with disabilities.

Gateshead LA recognises the knowledge which parents have of their child's abilities and disabilities, and in light of the Lamb Report recommendations, seeks to work collaboratively with them in overcoming the barriers to education and life chances which each child may experience as a result of their disability or special educational needs. Working with parents in partnership is important in developing and improving communication between the services of the LA, voluntary agencies, parents and children.

The LA also works in partnership with other agencies, both voluntary and statutory, in understanding



children's disabilities and providing effective support. Various groups and committees support the strategic development of policy and provision in areas of SEN. These groups include representatives of parents, health, voluntary and private organisations as well as statutory agencies.

This Strategy is supported by the SEND strategy and is delivered through the 3 working groups - Early Years, 5-16 years and Post 16 groups. This Accessibility Strategy supports Priority 1 of the SEND Strategy - **To support early years providers and mainstream schools to improve inclusion.**

## Section 2 The Accessibility Strategy

### Improving the Physical Environment of Schools

The LA considers inclusive design and accessibility of the physical environment of its schools through each new building development. The LA team now have considerable experience and knowledge based on previous Accessibility strategies and the work involved with all partners. In partnership with schools the LA will continue to support that accessibility is not a barrier to preventing pupils from attending local schools when their needs could be met there.

#### Context

The planning duty on schools and LAs includes improvements to the physical environment of schools and the provision of physical aids to education. Such improvements may include unique facilities located to be accessible to all users. Improvements could also be achieved by the reallocation of rooms for particular specialisms, the removal of obstructions from circulation areas, improving the acoustic environment and changing classroom layouts. Physical aids to education could include the provision of specialist seating or desks, and ICT equipment. Contact with Gateshead HINT, LINT or EPS teams could help in advising. Health therapists may suggest some equipment, this also needs to be advised in consultation with SEND teams. Continued professional development arrangements should be made for staff to receive specialist advice when using accessible software that includes 'voice to text' or communication aids. Schools need to work alongside health professionals including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists to ensure that care plans are up to date and relevant. This will keep equipment storage to a minimum without unused items.

Schools also need to consider the effective deployment of support staff who will provide flexible support and facilitate independent learning for pupils with SEND.

The LA recognises the need to work positively with governing bodies of schools to assist them in understanding their additional responsibilities under the Equality Act, including the planning duty and, where appropriate, to plan jointly the improved accessibility of school buildings and facilities.

#### Resources

It is important that the schools consider the long-term access needs of the school. Schools should use the routine refurbishment and other maintenance and equipment budgets to improve the physical environment of the school. The *Equality Act* requires schools to resource their Accessibility plans adequately. Schools should recognise the costs of implementing the plan as legitimate expenditure which should be incorporated into current budget commitments. **Please also refer to the Accessibility checklist in the Appendix 2 when considering physical environment.** When thinking about physical environment, for some pupils remember they may need to be calm and low sensory stimulation in the classrooms. Consideration of the physical environment includes adequate lighting for children with visual impairment and sensory issues. See Appendices 3 and 4.

There is continued support and advice regarding the physical environment through a referral to the LA advisory services, LINT and HINT. Your school Education Psychologist is also an important contact to advise on



pupils and the appropriate environments and practices for them. These advisory teams will encourage schools to consider accessibility through completion of the Accessibility plan. Please consider the training for staff you will need to implement and add it to your plan.

Funding sources available to schools which could assist in improving access are currently extremely limited. Previous funding streams such as the Schools Access Initiative are no longer available.

Schools should use the repairs and maintenance budget to maintain the standard of accessibility upgrade works already carried out.

Despite limited funding opportunities, as stated previously, the LA Team has built up considerable knowledge regarding inclusive design and accessibility to the physical environment. Schools are encouraged to utilise this source of advice when developing construction projects in their schools to ensure the project is as inclusive as possible.

Resources from other agencies may need storage space and this also needs consideration. For example, standing frames, walking frames, IT equipment. Schools need to work alongside health professionals including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists to ensure that care plans are up to date and relevant. This will keep equipment storage to a minimum and address unused items.

The LA takes in to account **‘the Area guidelines for SEND and alternative provision’** which sets out non-statutory area guidelines for buildings and supersedes the recommended areas in ‘Designing for disabled children and children with special educational needs’ (Building Bulletin 102). In BB104 the term ‘alternative provision’ includes pupil referral units (PRUs). It also provides guidance on outdoor areas.

The document will assist those involved in briefing for and designing new and refurbished buildings. Because special schools, alternative provision, PRUs, specially resourced provision and units vary, it is important to understand the nature of an individual setting and to make full use of the recommended area ranges in this document.

## Proposals

The LA will:

- promote a solution focused approach to the physical environment where accessibility can be school managed through classroom management, timetabling lessons on ground floors or in larger spaces thereby enabling the environments and layout to accommodate disability. This would include hidden disabilities, such as Autism, Specific Learning Difficulties and Sensory impairment.
- Ensure any new buildings planned will take full account of the needs of pupils with disabilities and, where appropriate, of other members of the community.



## Improving Provision and Access to the Curriculum

### Aim

To provide ongoing support and advice to schools in order to:

- raise awareness of disability equality and access issues
- encourage schools to develop curriculum policies which reflect inclusive practice whilst
- encourage a positive approach to how pupils with SEND can be involved in activities, trips, residential stays; how pupils with SEND can be involved in all areas of the curriculum including physical education giving them a broad and balanced education
- provide person centred planning through high quality teaching
- ensure inclusion of children with medical needs
- have high aspirations for pupils with SEND by supporting teachers to plan for and develop skills for learning, life and work, supporting transitions through each key stage and preparation for future destinations beyond school

### Context

The new DfE National Curriculum 2013 states in Chapter 4 the following:

#### Responding to pupils’ needs and overcoming potential barriers for individuals and groups of pupils

Teachers should take account of their duties under equal opportunities legislation that covers race, disability, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.

The Local Authority (LA) has produced the SEND descriptors 2021 document as guidance for schools. This document covers a graduated approach and curriculum advice. It emphasises disability, inclusion and the duty to produce a SEND report.

A wide range of pupils have special educational needs, many of whom also have disabilities. Lessons should be planned to ensure that there are no barriers to **every** pupil achieving. In many cases, such planning will mean that these pupils will be able to study the full national curriculum. The **SEN Code of Practice** includes advice on approaches to identification of need which can support this. A minority of pupils will need access to specialist equipment and different approaches. The SEND Descriptors document based on the Code of Practice outlines what needs to be done for them. Advice and support is offered via referrals to the LINT/HINT teams where liaison teachers offer advice to help break down the barriers to learning that are associated with a pupil’s SEND.

With the right teaching, that recognises their individual needs, many disabled pupils may have little need for additional resources beyond the aids which they use as part of their daily life. Teachers must plan lessons so that these pupils can study every national curriculum subject. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset of work.

The LA is committed to the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in its mainstream schools, and has established Additionally Resourced Mainstream Schools (ARMS) for some areas of special educational needs. This is a current priority to develop a new model of ARMS from 2022.



Early Years practice also promotes the development of inclusive early year’s provision. All pre-school children, including those with disabilities, have access to good quality early education, from the beginning of term following their third birthday.

Regulations and guidance on off-site activities and educational visits support schools in ensuring that pupils have equal opportunities to participate in off-site educational, residential and adventurous activities.

In acknowledging that barriers to learning can be emotional as well as intellectual and physical, the LA promotes flexibility of response and a continuum of provision within its schools.

## Training

There is a well-established continuing professional development programme with a clear SEND thread. Training to overcome barriers to curriculum access is embedded within this Strategy. The governor training programme has a strong focus on governors' responsibilities as defined within Education Acts and SEN Code of Practice.

There is guidance available for schools on SEN issues through a new SEND Descriptors document. There is also a model Accessibility plan. Health are promoting their training with schools.

SEND teams within the LA offer advice on all areas of SEND. Special schools are also increasingly having more contact with mainstream schools to give advice.

Safeguarding and disabled children is included in the training for schools. Issues on bullying, discrimination, access to curriculum and communication are covered. Specialist courses on moving and handling, Makaton, intimate care are available. A separate intimate care guidance document has been produced by the LA and given out to schools.



## Monitoring and support

The LA and Ofsted use a categorisation approach for schools, which incorporates judgements on how effectively schools achieve a quality of education which includes a level of educational inclusion. The reminder below is for Ofsted inspectors in relation to SEND. Please note ambition for SEND pupils, identifying and assessing needs and SEND pupils fully involved in the life of the school are some important areas they will focus on. It is therefore important that the curriculum, access to it and promotion of SEND and disability has high regard in school by leaders.

### A few reminders

- The school's ambitions for pupils with SEND
- Quality of identifying, assessing and meeting needs
- The views of parents and carers are considered
- Are all pupils fully involved in the life of the school?
- Assessment and the impact of the curriculum for SEND pupils
- Preparation for next steps, including adulthood, for SEND pupils

It is the LA's aim that increasing numbers of schools, year on year, should be judged as good or outstanding with regard to both standards, inclusion and accessibility. This is monitored through the School Intervention Support Programme (SISP).

All Gateshead schools can apply to do **Gateshead's Inclusion Standard**. This is a self-evaluation process which supports schools in identifying their evidence for inclusive practice including accessibility. A large number of schools have attained good level with some moving to outstanding. This strategy provides a focus for developments in school that will be underpinned by the principles of the Inclusion Standard. The SEND teams,

EPS, HINT, LINT, Behaviour Support, Area SENCOs, EYAIT all provide the support to greater inclusive practice.

## Multi-agency involvement

The LA promotes work with other statutory and voluntary agencies as well as parents and carers in evaluating practice and proposing developments. Schools and education staff will work alongside health professionals to help develop a cohesive approach to provision and breaking down the barriers to learning associated with SEND.

### Proposals

The LA will:

- make available cohesive advice and training on issues relating to the delivery of an accessible curriculum
- ensure training supports the development of teacher and support staff skills
- include accessibility within school self-evaluation documents, such as, the Inclusion Standard
- promote that schools update accessibility plans



## Improving the Delivery of Information

### Aim

To increase awareness within schools of the importance of accessible information for pupils with special educational needs, and promote the provision and publication of appropriate advice, guidance and resource materials, especially through new technologies.

### Context

The planning duty requires written information normally provided by a school to be made available to disabled pupils. Such information should take account of pupils' disabilities, as well as the preferred formats for pupils and parents; it should also be made available within a reasonable time frame. The Code of Practice for Schools from the Disability Rights Commission suggests that disabilities should include not just physical difficulties, learning difficulties, hearing &/or visual impairments, but also mental health conditions and certain medical conditions (such as epilepsy and diabetes).

Although the duty relates primarily to written information, schools will be advised to consider how other formats (for example, spoken information) could be made available to parents and pupils who have hearing and visual impairments. This could include a recognition of British Sign Language and similar formats, the use of signers at school functions, the availability of portable induction loops for use at parents' evenings and so on.

Consideration of written information: aid or High tech/ Low tech AAC.

Schools could continue to promote accessibility to learning by resources and strategies used during the lockdown period in 2020 such as AVATARS.

The implementation of the Disability Equality Duty requires public bodies, including schools and local authorities, to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. They must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment against disabled people
- promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people & encourage disabled people to participate fully in public life.

Schools are required to report on their Accessibility Plans/ Single equality plans and the outcomes for pupils.

### Actions

The LA will:

- advise and update schools on specific special educational needs and disabilities
- continue to work with partners to update and improve on the Local Offer
- make relevant in-service training programmes available to support provision for pupils with SEN/D
- update information in alternative formats relating to central processes such as statementing, reviews and admissions
- support schools in making school information and communication available in Braille and large print formats for pupils and parents with visual impairment
- provide access to sign language support for school information and communication for pupils and parents with hearing impairment
- Signpost to the guidance and support of independent partners, e.g. SENDIASS.

## Monitoring the Strategy

It will be the responsibility of SEND Strategy group to ensure that the principles outlined above will be carried out and achieved in fulfilment of this strategy. The Capital Investment group chaired by the Director for Schools and Families will consider all proposals for new schools and developments and how they are supporting Accessibility. The most recent delivery supporting this was the newly built Gibside school which provided state of art accessibility.

## Recommendations

- Ensure that new building programmes maximise opportunities to provide environments to support SEND provision in the LA
- Ensure bespoke training for SEN and disability to raise expectations and meet policy guidance.
- Ensure schools have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010, following completion of planned works, including repair and maintenance of facilities and equipment.

# Appendix 1 Accessibility Plan 2021

School : \_\_\_\_\_

Activities	Resources	Date achieved	Responsible	Outcomes
<b>1 Leading and monitoring the Accessibility Plan</b>				
Review all school policies, procedures and plans to ensure that our vision and value statements in relation to SEND and disabilities are explicit within them.				
Survey views of disabled people and their families to identify key actions to promote greater inclusion.				
Ensure all staff are inducted in how they can promote and support inclusion.				
The plan will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.				
<b>2 Promoting curriculum access for disabled pupils and adults</b>				
Pupils with disabilities can access ICT.				
School visits are made accessible to all pupils irrespective of attainment and impairment.				
Pupils with disabilities are encouraged to take part in music, drama and physical activities.				
Training for support staff on SEND descriptors guidance.				

Activities	Resources	Date achieved	Responsible	Outcomes
<b>3 Improving the quality of information for and about disabled pupils and adults</b>				
Provide on the website information in a range of formats.				
Ensure that parents who have a disability can receive information and reports by an alternative method.				
<b>4 Improving the physical environment of the school and its services</b>				
Ensure that pupils in wheelchairs can move around the school without experiencing barriers.				
Provide pathways to travel around the site.				

## Appendix 2 Consideration of the Physical Environment

### Accessibility checklist for schools

School/setting: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Access to school site	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Clear high contrast signage at entrance				
Level Access pedestrian pathway with dropped kerb and textured paving where necessary				
Signposting to disabled parking at entrance				
Disabled parking space				
Dropped kerb from the car park to the pathway with appropriate textured paving				
Pathway is well lit				

Access to school site <i>continued</i>	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Pathways in good condition and even				
Pathways are clear of hazards such as open windows or overhanging foliage				
Ramps are available to access stepped areas on the school site or an alternative route is provided				
Ramps are slip resistant when wet				
Do ramps have a resting area?				
Handrails are situated on stepped areas				
Steps have highlighted edge				
Is there a designated drop off/ pick up point at the entrance?				
Is there a waiting area/ bench at the pick up point?				



Entrance to school	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Entrance is clearly visible with clear high contrast signage				
Level access entrance with level matting				
Entrance call system at accessible height and clearly marked				
Is entrance call system accessible to those who can't hear or speak?				
Entrance is well lit				
Is there a cover/weather protection at the entrance?				

Reception	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Reception is clearly marked with accessible signing in station				
Widened entrance with clear pathway				
Glazing is clearly marked				
Exit signage is clear				
Entrance lobby is big enough for a wheelchair user and carer				
Consider lighting and transition to different lighting levels when entering or exiting building. Is there space to wait and adjust if VI?				
Are chairs available if disabled visitors need to wait?				

Corridors	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Wide, accessible corridors with non-slip flooring				
Directions and signage clear, tactile and high contrasting				
Corridors are well lit				
Corridors are kept clear				
Are doors and handles clearly visible and contrasting to walls				
Displays are at appropriate, differing levels according to need				
Raised areas or steps should be highlighted and clearly marked making it clear when there is a change in floor or ground height				

Cloakrooms	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Coat hooks are at an appropriate height and clearly marked. Pictures or identifiers should be above the hook				
Walkways and floors are kept clear				
Glazing is clearly marked				
Exit signage is clear				

Lockers	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Accessible lockers at the appropriate height for user				
Well-lit area				
Pathways and floors are kept clear				

Classrooms	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Adjustable blinds or window coverings to adjust lighting and avoid glare				
Light switches at an appropriate height				
Clear pathways around furniture				
Clear signage and labelling around the classroom in varying contrasting colours				
Access to storage and shelving promotes independence				
Clear non-distracting walls and muted coloured displays				
Exit signage is clear				
Consider lighting and transition to different lighting levels when entering or exiting classroom. Is there space to wait and adjust if VI?				

Toilets	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Access to a disabled toilet				
Hand rails fitted on both sides of the toilet				
Clear high contrasting signage				
Pathways and floors are kept clear				
Hand dryer at appropriate differing height				
Hand towels and bin placed appropriately for easy access				

Dining Hall	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Cutlery and tray collection at appropriate height				
Cutlery stacked with sharp ends away or down to reduce risk of injury				
Clearly mark or cover hot areas to reduce risk of injury from accidental touch				
Pathways and floors are kept clear				
Accessible table areas for wheelchair users				

Changing Area	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Access to a disabled toilet				
Height adjustable changing table with step and cot sides				
Portable hoist or ceiling track hoist availability				
CPD available to appropriately train staff in manual handling and hoist management				
Bins are clearly labelled for general use or sanitary use				
Bins are emptied everyday				
Area has a cleaning schedule with allocated responsible staff				
Pathways and floors are kept clear				
Handwashing facilities are available				
Hand dryer at appropriate differing height				
Hand towels and bin placed appropriately for easy access				

Outside Areas	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Level access pathways to outside areas				
Clear high contrasting signage				
Clearly mark any external posts				
Pathways are kept clear				
Raised areas or steps should be highlighted and clearly marked making it clear when there is a change in floor or ground height				
Do steps have a tactile surface of raised ribs set parallel to the top step nosings (according to Part M of the Building Regulations)?				

Emergency Evacuation Procedures	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility LA/School
Do you have protocols/procedures in place to evacuate disabled people safely from your building?				
Are emergency alarms both auditory and visible to all? Do you have a flashing light system working?				
Do staff have appropriate Manual Handling training to assist disabled people from the building?				
Do you have Evac Chairs available for upper floors?				

**Please note** that the above checklist is a template for accessibility at your setting. This list is not exhaustive. The template is designed to assist you to identify potential hazards and areas where accessibility needs to improve.

If you have added 'NO' to any of the entries then please add your recommendations and state if this is a priority. This will demonstrate that you have considered full and inclusive access to your setting and have identified the areas that need to improve. Please note the date completed in the appropriate box.

## Appendix 3 Low Incidence Needs Team

### Identifying and addressing barriers in the physical learning environment for deaf and hearing-impaired learners

#### Lighting

Light that is too bright or too dim can affect D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners' ability to access lip pattern, and other elements in the classroom clearly. This can impair their concentration and limit their accessibility to learning.

##### Assessment of lighting in the learning environment:

1. Can the lighting in the room be adjusted?
2. Is the teacher's spot in the classroom well lit?
3. Is there a window where glare may make it difficult for learners to see the teacher or the support staff? If so, are there blinds that can be drawn to eliminate glare?
4. Does the teacher stand in front of a light source, e.g. window or whiteboard, therefore precluding access to lip pattern?
5. Can the teacher move to a position where the light source is not behind them causing a shadow?

#### Acoustics

The presence of background noise especially for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners who depend on their residual hearing, can become a barrier to learning in the classroom. A radio aid/sound field system can be effective as it amplifies and gives the teachers voice priority over background noise. However, this does not eliminate poor acoustics.

##### Assessment of acoustics in the learning environment:

1. Does the classroom have soft furnishings/surfaces e.g. carpet, fabric or hessian on the wall, to absorb sound thus decreasing reverberation?

2. Can windows be closed to minimise noise from outdoors?
3. Does the equipment in the room such as the air-conditioning, heating or overhead projectors create noise problems?
4. Do the regular activities in nearby classrooms, hallways and from outside, produce noise (though open windows/doors) that can disrupt the learning of D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?
5. Every teacher has a different way of speaking. Is the voice of a specific teacher intelligible to D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?

#### Seating Arrangements

The way the desks and chairs are arranged in the learning environment impacts learning and communication in the classroom to a large extent. Seating that is organized in a semi-circle or circle compared to traditional rows of desks, is ideal for maximum access to communication.

##### Assessment of seating arrangements:

1. Can D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners see the teacher clearly?
2. Are the D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners seated near at or at the front of the classroom?
3. Can all the learners see each other clearly?
4. Does the seating plan take into account optimal positioning for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners who have better hearing in one ear?

#### Position and Movement of the Teacher

The teacher needs to be aware of the visibility of their position in the learning environment and whether they move around the classroom while teaching. This can become a roadblock to clear and visual access to the teacher and other visual elements in the room.

##### Assessment of position and movement of the teacher:

1. Does the teacher speak while writing on the whiteboard or looking down at the computer at the same time? Can the learners lip-read easily?
2. Does the teacher tend to pace up and down the class whilst speaking?
3. Do the computers and presence of other equipment block the learners from seeing the teacher?
4. Is the teacher's face visible at all times to learners who may depend on lipreading?

#### Safety Features

Ensuring that the learning environment is a safe place for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners as well as those with other disabilities should be a priority.

##### Assessment of safety features in the learning environment:

1. Are flashing emergency alarms and/or vibrating pager system installed in case of a fire or break-in?
2. Are pathways or the space in the learning environment free from obstructions?
3. Is a PEEP (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) in place for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?

## Appendix 4 Identifying and Addressing Barriers in the Physical Learning Environment for Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Learners

Lighting				
Light that is too bright or too dim can affect D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners' ability to access lip pattern, and other elements in the classroom clearly. This can impair their concentration and limit their accessibility to learning.				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/School
Can the lighting in the room be adjusted?				
Is the teacher's spot in the classroom well lit?				
Is there a window where glare may make it difficult for learners to see the teacher or the support staff? If so, are there blinds that can be drawn to eliminate glare?				
Does the teacher stand in front of a light source, e.g. window or whiteboard, therefore precluding access to lip pattern?				
Can the teacher move to a position where the light source is not behind them causing a shadow?				

Acoustics				
<p>The presence of background noise especially for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners who depend on their residual hearing, can become a barrier to learning in the classroom. A radio aid/sound field system can be effective as it amplifies and gives the teachers voice priority over background noise. However, this does not eliminate poor acoustics.</p>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Does the classroom have soft furnishings/surfaces e.g. carpet, fabric or hessian on the wall, to absorb sound thus decreasing reverberation?				
Can windows be closed to minimise noise from outdoors?				
Does equipment in the room such as the air-conditioning, heating or overhead projector create noise problems?				
Do the regular activities in nearby classrooms, hallways and from outside, produce noise (through open windows/doors) that can disrupt the learning of D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?				
Every teacher has a different way of speaking. Is the voice of a specific teacher intelligible to D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?				
Is the noise level in the classroom regulated?				

Seating Arrangements				
<p>The way the desks and chairs are arranged in the learning environment impacts learning and communication in the classroom to a large extent. Ideally, seating that is organised in a semi-circle or circle compared to traditional rows of desks, is ideal for maximum access to communication.</p>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Can D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners see the teacher clearly?				
Are the D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners seated near at or at the front of the classroom?				
Can all the learners see each other clearly?				
Does the seating plan take into account optimal positioning for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners who have better hearing in one ear?				

Position and movement of the teacher				
<b>The teacher needs to be aware of the visibility of their position in the learning environment and whether they move around the classroom while teaching. This can become a roadblock to clear and visual access to the teacher and other visual elements in the room.</b>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Does the teacher speak while writing on the whiteboard or looking down at the computer at the same time? Can the learners lip-read easily?				
Does the teacher tend to pace up and down the class whilst speaking?				
Does the position of computers and presence of other equipment block the learners from seeing the teacher?				
Is the teacher's face visible at all times to learners who may depend on lipreading?				

Safety Features				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Are flashing emergency alarms and/or vibrating pager system installed in case of a fire or break-in?				
Are pathways or the space in the learning environment free from obstructions?				
Is a PEEP (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) in place for D/deaf and hearing-impaired learners?				

Audio Clips				
<b>Deaf/deaf/hearing impaired learners may not be able to access DVD/Audio clips on whole class or individual PC/lpads. Alternative arrangements must be in place to allow the D/deaf learners to access the same curriculum .</b>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Use subtitles when watching videos.				
Use live voice for audio clips/assessments so D/deaf learner has access to lip pattern?				
Provision of transcription of the audio/video materials prior to or after the lesson.				
Provide visual material to support learning of any auditory instructions.				

Signed Support / 1-1 Support				
<b>The teacher needs to carefully consider placement of support staff to ensure the D/deaf learner has access to them, the class teacher and their peers.</b>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
Identified seating/standing position of sign support when whole class teaching is being delivered to ensure clear line of sight?				
Identified seating position of 1-1 support staff during independent or group tasks?				
If lesson is outdoors/in a different room or hall where will staff stand/sit?				

Specialist Equipment				
<b>Many D/deaf learners will have personal specialist equipment (auxiliary aids) such as radio aids/mini mic/soundfield systems/cochlear implants/hearing aids and bone anchored hearing aids to support optimum access to the teacher's voice in lessons. All equipment requires regular checks to ensure that it is in full working order – deaf learners may not be able to hear when their equipment is not working optimally.</b>				
	Yes/No	Recommendations	Priority	Responsibility/ School
There is an identified person within schools who has responsibility for checking equipment is stored safely at the end of the day, at weekends, and over holiday periods.				
Secure storage is available for specialist equipment.				
Member of school staff is identified to support learner in charging equipment in a specified location and checking the equipment is working.				

If you require further help or advice and for information about learners with hearing impairment in your school, please contact the Low Incidence Needs Team - Hearing Impairment: [LINTEnquiries@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:LINTEnquiries@gateshead.gov.uk)

## Appendix 5 Inclusive Design in Educational Settings

If you have a child or young person with vision impairment in your educational setting, you will need to consider whether the environment is accessible for them. An accessible physical environment will help to promote safety and independent mobility and reduce barriers to participation and learning in line with Disability legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

This publication consists of

- advice relating to good practice when designing or adapting the environment for a student with vision impairment.
- a checklist with which to assess the environment of your educational setting and to highlight areas which might require adaptation.

Changes to the environment do not have to be costly but can make a big difference to the daily lives of students with vision impairment.

### 1. Internal space

In order to minimise bumps, trips and collisions, it is important to keep floors clear of bags and coats and walls free from protruding obstacles. Cupboard doors and drawers should not be left open when unattended and chairs should be pushed under tables, as they may cause a collision hazard. Classroom doors can be very difficult to detect if half open, so are better pinned right back or closed for safety.

Consider the classroom layout as well. Discrete areas for different functions (eg. reading corner, painting area) can help orientation but make sure that there is enough space to pass between furniture without bumping on a sharp cupboard corner.

Internal Space	Date	Classroom Area			
Are doors and doorways: - kept clear of obstacles? - clearly visible eg. not left ajar, not made of glass.					
Are floor textures used to denote location?					
If mats are used, are they safe (not curling up or sliding)?					
Do any floor or wall-mounted hazards protrude into the space eg. cupboard corners?					
Are there any obstacles or clutter that may restrict access: - on the floor? - on table tops/ worksurfaces? - hanging from ceiling or walls?					
Is layout regularly changed? If so, will the student be informed and given help to explore the changes?					

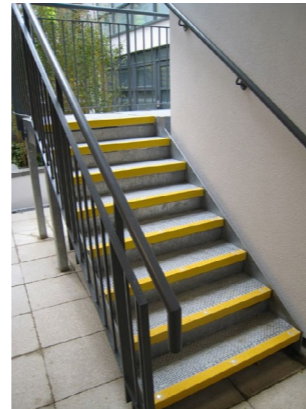
## 2. Changes in level

Do not automatically assume that a child or young person with a vision impairment will use a lift rather than the stairs. Walking up and down stairs is an important strength building skill and most people with vision impairment can learn to do this with the right supervision, practice and sometimes also a mobility aid such as a long cane.

Children and young people with some residual vision will benefit from **edge markings** on steps and stairs around the school, to increase visibility. High contrast, non-slip paint (weather-proof if outdoors) or nosing strips in a contrasting colour to the background step significantly increase safety. Edge markings should cover an area of 55mm on top and riser edges, along the whole width of the step, so that markings can be seen when ascending or descending stairs.



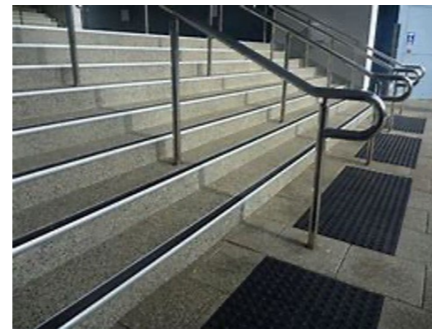
Fitting **bannisters** on both sides of stairways is recommended for safe use of stairs to aid balance; these must extend all the way to the bottom of the flight and preferably beyond the end of the stairs to provide warning. Bannisters should be clearly visible so that they are easy to find against the colour of the wall or background environment.



**Ramps** should be marked with tactile and/or line markings, using yellow line at top and bottom of ramp. Triangles can also indicate direction of slope, such as on speed bumps.



**Tactile flooring** at the top and bottom of the stairs is especially beneficial for the safety of long cane users and those with significant vision impairment.



Changes in level	Date	Classroom Area			
Are steps or stairs clearly signed at the top and bottom eg. with tactile flooring?					
Are steps and stair edges sufficiently contrasted? (E.g. outdoor concrete steps should be edged as they are particularly difficult.)					
Are there handrails in place on both sides of steps/stairs or ramps, and which: - extend beyond the steps / stairs (or at least to the end of the stairs). - contrast in colour to walls? - Are suitable height for the child or young person to hold?					
Do the stairs have open undercarriage which might cause a hazard?					
Are steps and stairs well/evenly lit?					



### 3. Storage, signage and displays

Students with vision impairment benefit from accessible signage within the school environment. Ensure that print on doors, wall boards, storage boxes or whiteboards is:

- Written in plain, high contrast font (eg. Arial bold) against a plain background (clean whiteboard)
- Written in the correct size for the student in question.
- Accessible in terms of height, so that students can get up close to view information if they wish.
- Written on matt laminate, rather than shiny, to reduce glare within the classroom from reflected light.

Try to keep classroom environments static as moving furniture can impact on independent mobility and orientation. If changes are made to the classroom, ensure that students with vision impairment have time to explore the changes with an adult as soon as they enter the setting.

If there is a student in your class who has more specific needs, such as braille or objects of reference to indicate door numbers or room function, please contact the Low Incidence Needs Team for more information.



Storage, signs and displays	Date	Classroom Area			
Are signs and information labels accessible to the CYP eg. size of print, tactile, colour contrast, not crowded					
Are displays clearly labelled and at a suitable level?					
Is matt laminate used?					
Are white/black boards / portable writing boards positioned away from glare (and not backing onto windows?)					
Are whiteboards/computer screens at correct height for student's use.					
Are whiteboards kept clean?					
Is equipment clearly labelled so that the visually impaired pupil can collect and store equipment independently?					

### 4. Lighting

Many children and young people with vision impairments experience great discomfort and reductions in their visual abilities if lighting in educational settings is not suitable to their needs.

Lighting levels should be even throughout the building, with no areas of shadow or darkness which may be falsely perceived as steps.

- Leave lights on in areas that are dark (eg. corridors or cloakrooms), as it may take a long time for the vision of students to adjust if lighting levels are variable.
- Fit blinds on windows to allow for adjustment of lighting conditions

- Make sure that computers and whiteboards are not located against a window and that students are seated with backs to windows.
- Consider reflections across other surfaces in the room eg. off a shiny floor or tablecloth. Use of matt surfaces reduce the degree of discomfort and visual confusion experienced from glare.

Lighting / glare	Date	Classroom Area			
Where are natural sources of light (and when is sunlight strongest in the area?)					
Does natural lighting result in excessive brightness on sunny days?					
Are there areas of glare from work surfaces, floors, computers, mirrors or gloss finishes?					
Are there blinds or curtains (preferably plain) which work and can control potential glare and control overall lighting levels?					
Are there any areas of shadow or darkness which might cause a difficulty?					
Are there any places where the CYP will need to adjust to different lighting levels eg. moving from classroom to cloakroom?					
Are lights switched off in areas not in current use?					
Does overhead lighting appear adequate for the task? If not, is there provision for task lighting?					
Does task lighting comply with health and safety regulations?					
Are there sockets for additional task lighting without hazardous trailing leads?					

## 5. Colour and contrast

Colour of furniture and décor can impact on independent, safe mobility and orientation in the educational setting. In general, it is helpful if:

- Environmental surfaces such as walls and floors are plain, rather than patterned, to reduce the risk of visual overload and confusion.
- Décor makes use of colour contrast, with light (but not glaring white) wall and ceiling surfaces and edges highlighted in a contrasting colour eg. pale yellow walls and dark blue contrasting door edges, light fittings, wall rails, skirting boards, display board edges.
- Furniture stands out visually from background wall and floor colour, so that students can identify where structures and furniture are located. Consider switching classroom furniture with another class, moving it around or marking the edge with brightly coloured electrical tape to make it more visible.



Patterned carpets can be visually confusing.



Good colour contrast makes it easier for children with vision impairment to locate toilet/sink.

Colour and contrast	Date	Classroom Area			
Good colour contrast can enable students to find the toilet or sink more easily.					
Are work surfaces plain, and do they give good contrast?					
Is there colour contrast between:					
walls - skirting boards - floor?					
walls - ceiling?					
walls - door frames - doors?					
walls - handles - light switches?					
walls - display edges					
Does furniture contrast with floor/walls?					
Is the ceiling light in colour?					
Are floor/table coverings plain?					

## 6. Auditory considerations

Children or young people with vision impairments may find it difficult to concentrate or hear in noisy environments and may experience sensory overload. Consider the impact of high ceilings or flooring surfaces on acoustics in the room and ensure that there the student can move nearer to the focus of the lesson to hear or withdraw to a quiet place for a sensory break as necessary.

Acoustics and auditory considerations	Date	Classroom Area			
Does the area have features that may cause acoustic difficulties eg. high ceiling (over 12 ft), hollow floor, large areas of tiled wall?					
Can you hear echoes in the area eg. from speech / loud vocalisations / equipment / movement of chairs?					
Are there high levels of background noise?					
Is the CYP able to move near to the teacher or sound source?					
Are quiet areas available here or elsewhere for withdrawal?					

## 7. Outdoor areas

- It is important that children and young people with vision impairments have access to the outdoors with their peers. Some considerations to the outdoor environment include:
- Making sure that path edges, play equipment, outdoor furniture edges and steps stand out from the background colour in the playground. Particular attention should be paid to wooden play equipment, which in general contrasts poorly with yard flooring, especially when weathered to a mid-brown colour. All steps and drop-offs in the outdoor yards and on the wooden play equipment should be marked with

- a material of contrasting colour, such as non-slip, weatherproof yellow paint (55mm on top and riser edges, along the whole width of the step).
- Marking supporting posts and poles in the outdoor yards with a yellow stripe of weatherproof paint at child eye height, in a thick band (around 8-10cm thickness).
- Regularly maintaining and repainting railings, step edges, playground furniture, playground and field markings, so that children or young people with vision impairment have the best chance of accessing play and sporting activities safely.

- Clearing yard areas of unnecessary clutter, such as toys not in use, wet leaves or overhanging branches, which might not be seen.
- Providing shaded areas if they experience difficulties with glare associated with bright sunlight or cloud cover.
- Think about adding sensory elements to the outdoor area to aid enjoyment and navigation eg. sensory garden, musical areas (windchimes, saucepan drums), tactile elements such as flooring.

Storage, signs and displays	Date	Classroom Area			
Are there tactile/visual clues to mark indoor/outdoor boundaries (e.g. metal grids, bristled doormats, ramps)?					
Are pathways (and edges) clearly defined?					
Are there handrails to aid balance/orientation?					
Are there a variety of outdoor floor surfaces, delineating different areas?					
Does playground equipment stand out visually from the surface or background?					
Is playground equipment safe and well-maintained?					
Is playground equipment surrounded by soft textured ground?					

Storage, signs and displays <i>continued</i>	Date	Classroom Area			
Does furniture (such as benches and 'bins') contrast with surroundings?					
Are supporting posts, pillars and door retainers sufficiently contrasted from the background?					
Are signs and signposts sufficiently clear for pupils to read?					
Look at markings on playing fields / sports courts etc. for clear contrast.					
Are school site boundaries clearly defined?					
Are external hazards highlighted in yellow e.g. low railings, drainage channels?					
Are routes kept free of obstacles eg. route to playing field/forest school area?					
Are movable toys such as bicycles kept to a certain area/put away after use?					
Are plants and trees trimmed so that they do not overhang the path?					
Are shaded areas available?					

For further classroom design tips, follow the link below: <https://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/classroom-design-tips.html#>

If you require further help or advice, please contact:

Kate Jakubovics, Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialist, Low Incidence Needs Team (Vision Impairment), Dryden Centre, Evistones Rd, Gateshead, NE9 5UR.

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