

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Accessibility Strategy 2015-2017

1. Introduction

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has big plans for the young people of our Borough:

“Every single child in the Borough is important to us. So we are determined to give each and every one of them as many opportunities as we can to help them be the very best they can be in life. We’ll do all we can to protect those children who need our care and we’ll keep striving to provide the best in education.

To give them the confidence to grow into valued, respected and included members of the community. Our promise is that not one child in this Borough will be knowingly forgotten or let down.”

This is reflected in the key outcomes the Council has set out in the Council Plan for Children and Young People:

‘Our aspirations for the children and young people of Stockton-on-Tees are that they are provided with and access as many opportunities as possible to help them be the best they can be in life and that for those who are vulnerable we do the very best we can to protect and care for them.

We will do this by:

- *Ensuring children and young people are safe.*
- *Making sure there is effective early years support for children and families*
- *Improving educational performance of all children and young people across the Borough*
- *Supporting young people to make a successful transition into adulthood*
- *Improving outcomes for children and young people in care.’*

Our accessibility strategy is set in this context and aims to ensure that all children and young people, no matter what their needs may be, can access education, make progress and be active members of their community.

We believe that:

- All children and young people have a right to the best education which will enable them to progress and be successful in adult life.
- Inclusion is determined by culture, policy and practice and we all have a responsibility to promote this.
- Engaging with young people, parents/carers, education providers and the wider community is essential to develop inclusion.
- Workforce development, focus on outcomes, robust challenge and partnership approaches are the key to the ongoing development of inclusion.

2. The National and Legislative Background

Improving access to education and educational achievement for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is essential to ensure:

- Equality of opportunity
- Full participation in society
- Access to employment opportunities
- Inclusion within mainstream education.

In this context we work within the following legislative framework:

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and 2005
- The SEN and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA)
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The Special Educational needs and Disability Code of Practice 0-25 2015

The SEN and Disability Act 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by introducing new duties on Local Authorities (LAs) and schools in relation to disabled pupils and prospective pupils. From October 2010 the Equality Act replaced most of the DDA, but the Disability Equality Duty in the DDA continues to apply. The main duties are:

- Not to treat disabled pupils less favourably
- To take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage.

Additional provision under the new Equality Act 2010 was introduced in September 2012 and relates to the requirement for schools to provide auxiliary aids for disabled pupils subject to the Reasonable Adjustment duty.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 introduced the duty to promote disability equality from December 2006. This duty applies to Early Years settings, schools and LAs.

The Equality Act 2010 and Schools' May 2010 (DfE 2014) identify schools' duties around accessibility for disabled pupils as follows:

4.28 Schools and LAs need to carry out accessibility planning for disabled pupils.

These are the same duties as previously existed under the DDA and have been replicated in the Equality Act 2010.

4.29 Schools must implement accessibility plans which are aimed at:

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

4.30 Schools will also need to have regard to the need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must regularly review them. An accessibility plan may be a

freestanding document but may also be published as part of another document such as the school development plan.

4.31 OFSTED inspections may include a school's accessibility plan as part of their review.¹

All Stockton Schools are aware of these duties and as a result have accessibility plans (as a freestanding document or as part of another document), which identify steps taken to ensure that curriculum, resources and environment is fully accessible to disabled pupils.

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduces significant changes to the systems for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and also a culture change in the way we work. These changes are generally known as SEN reform. Part 3 of the Act covers the reform. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0-25 2015 is statutory guidance which provides further relevant information. The Code includes reference to relevant legislation and guidance such as:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Equality Act 2010:Advice for schools
- Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Pupils (2012)
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (2014)
- The Mental Capacity Act 2005: Protecting the Vulnerable.

There is also a requirement under the Children and Families Act 2014 for LAs to include their accessibility strategy in the Local Offer and this document will be published in Stockton's Local Offer at www.stockton.gov.uk/localoffer .

3. The Local Context

In Stockton-on-Tees we aim to ensure that every child or young person with special educational needs or disabilities can access full participation in education and in the community. We work in a number of ways to achieve this including:

- Developing our Local Offer and school support offers (school information reports) to include information for parents/carers and children and young people to ensure that they have the right information to make choices about services and education opportunities.
 - Exploring and pursuing opportunities for joint commissioning for services for children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities.
 - Promoting an inclusive ethos for all those working with children and young people
 - Delivering training and professional development opportunities which enable those working with children and young people to support their inclusion in education and in the community.
 - Ensuring that the implementation of SEN reform is carried out in partnership with parents/carers, education providers and partners in agencies such as health and social care. We are working to include children and young people as much as possible in this work.
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- Having a family of schools, academies and colleges of the Borough known collectively as Campus Stockton. All of our schools, academies and colleges work in

¹ The Equality Act 2010 and Schools May 2014 Department For Education. Page 29

partnership with a collective responsibility to ensure that all of the Borough's young people have access to the best possible learning opportunities so that they can achieve their full potential, with no child left behind. Campus Stockton is built upon key principles:

- *Putting the learner first - putting students at the heart of planning and decision making*
- *Every school a good school - ensuring that all Stockton-on-Tees schools, academies and colleges offer and provide a high standard of education and are among the very best in the country with commitment to support them on the journey to good or outstanding*
- *Schools in partnership at the heart of the community - working with other agencies to make sure that children's needs are met so that they can learn and thrive.*
- We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our school buildings, working hard to make the most of the funding that is available to us.
- Promoting school improvement via the Inclusion Quality Mark- a self-evaluation tool for schools, which promotes inclusive practice, benefiting all children and young people, including children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Developing short break opportunities for children and young people with disabilities
- Working in partnership with our local parent/carer forum Stockton United for Change in respect of developments such as SEN reform and short breaks.
- Promoting the appropriate use of High Needs Funding to support children and young people in accessing mainstream education opportunities.
- Ensuring that schools are aware of importance of use of interpreters for working with children and families who have English as an Additional language, to enable effective and robust access.

This strategy aims to build on that work and to:

- Increase the extent to which children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities can access both the Early Years Foundation Stage and the school curriculum in a way that meets their needs and ensures they make progress.
- Improve the physical environment of early years settings and schools to increase the extent to which children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities can benefit from education and associated services.
- Improve the information available for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their parents/carers, including through the Local Offer, ensuring this is accessible to all.

This strategy will cover the period 2015 -2018.

4. Access to curriculum

Considerable progress has been made to improve the accessibility of the curriculum. This covers not only teaching and learning, but also the wider curriculum of Early Years settings and schools, such as school trips and visits, after school activities and extended school activities.

Early Years settings and schools are responsible for providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and have a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for all pupils, and in particular for pupils with SEN and disability .

Support for Early Years settings and school managers, including Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO), in relation to policies, strategies and systems, is available from local

authority staff, through regular SENCO Briefings, a support group for new SENCOs, SENCO drop ins and through training sessions and specific advice given to Early Years settings and schools.

Advice and support in relation to individual pupils is available from a range of LA teams and health staff.

In line with the new Teachers' Standards (September 2012), and a quality first teaching approach, the Education Improvement Service support schools to:

- adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils
- know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively
- have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these
- demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development
- have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them .

Stockton-on-Tees LA will:

- ensure that appropriate links to accessibility are made in all the training that it arranges
- ensure that awareness training and updates are available for key LA staff, settings and school staff and governors in relation to a range of assessed needs
- provide training on the responsibilities of governing bodies in relation to the inclusion of pupils with disabilities
- provide guidance on meeting the medical needs of pupils and for intimate care.
- provide guidance and monitoring (under the auspices of the Local Safeguarding Board) on positive handling and broker Team Teach training
- encourage Early Years settings and schools to work together and share good practice
- enable schools to access advice and support from a variety of sources in relation to the wide range of issues involved in accessibility and inclusion
- provide access to SEN support services to develop capacity in Early Years settings and schools and to support school to adapt and differentiate the curriculum
- encourage high aspirations for progress of the most vulnerable pupils
- prioritise the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities around the need to narrow gaps and raise the attainment of vulnerable learners
- ensure schools are aware of the importance of use of interpreters for those children and families who have English as an additional language, to ensure robust and effective accessibility for all.

Schools will:

- plan for and teach children with learning needs through a range of proven interventions
- use a range of inclusive teaching strategies
- be fully conversant with the range of catch-up programmes

- take an informed and independent view of the possible literacy and mathematics interventions that are available
- ensure the effective supported transition of vulnerable children and young people
- evaluate the outcomes of their current additional provision and the value for money it provides
- make informed decisions about how best to target available funding in the future
- recognise and unlock the potential of pupils and develop a strong culture for success
- enhance the life chances of their most vulnerable children
- provide effective professional development for staff and governors
- keep parents and carers informed in line with school policies and the requirements of the 0-25 Code of Practice.
- use interpreters where necessary.

5. Access to environment

Early Years settings and schools are aware that reasonable adjustments may be needed to the classroom or setting to create safe spaces, calming areas and workstations for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties. From September 2012 there has also been a new requirement to provide auxiliary aids for disabled pupils subject to the Reasonable Adjustment duty.

Support services from health and education can advise about adaptations to the inside and outside environment for individuals to help include pupils with sensory integration needs.

This will include advice and guidance relating to:

- issues of physical space and how to reduce distractions
- opportunities to present information visually
- providing organisational strategies to complete activities
- having visual structure to help with organisation, increase clarity and provide instruction.

6. Areas of need

All schools and settings have duties under the Equality Act 2010 towards individual disabled children and young people. They must make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services for disabled children, to prevent them being put at a substantial disadvantage. These duties are anticipatory – they require 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. Schools also have wider duties to prevent discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

Communication and Interaction

Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.

Children and young people with ASD, including Asperger's Syndrome and Autism, are likely to have particular difficulties with social interaction. They may also experience difficulties with language, communication and imagination, which can impact on how they relate to others.

The Local Authority will:

- Provide relevant and appropriate advice, training and development
- Liaise with health providers including Speech and Language Therapy and CAMHS to support meeting the needs of pupils
- Commission additionally resourced provision and special educational provision to meet the needs of pupils with this area of SEN.

Cognition and Learning

Support for learning difficulties may be required when children and young people learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation. Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs, including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), where children are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and associated difficulties with mobility and communication, through to profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), where children are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment.

Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.

The Local Authority will:

- Provide relevant and appropriate advice, training and development
- Commission additionally resourced provision and special educational provision to meet the needs of pupils with this area of SEN.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.

Schools and colleges should have clear processes to support children and young people, including how they will manage the effect of any disruptive behaviour so it does not adversely affect other pupils. The Department for Education publishes guidance on managing pupils' mental health and behaviour difficulties in schools.

The Local Authority will:

- Provide relevant and appropriate advice, training and development
- Liaise with health providers including CAMHS to support meeting the needs of pupils
- Commission additionally resourced provision and special educational provision to meet the needs of pupils with this area of SEN.

Sensory and/or physical needs

Some children and young people require special educational provision because they have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities generally provided. These difficulties can be age related and may fluctuate over time. Many children and young people with vision impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or a multi-sensory impairment (MSI) will require specialist support and/or equipment to access their learning, or habilitation support. Children and young people with an MSI have a combination of vision and hearing difficulties. Information on how to provide services for deafblind children and young people is available through the Social Care for Deafblind Children and Adults guidance published by the Department of Health.

Some children and young people with a physical disability (PD) require additional ongoing support and equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers.

The Local Authority will:

- Provide relevant and appropriate advice, training and development
- Liaise with health providers including physiotherapy and occupational therapy to support meeting the needs of pupils
- Commission additionally resourced provision and special educational provision to meet the needs of pupils with this area of SEN.
- Commission specialist teaching support for children with hearing and visual impairment
- Provide funding for specialist equipment and ICT assessment, according to agreed procedures.
- Ensure all new buildings comply with the criteria in the Acoustic Performance Standards for the Priority Schools Building programme or performance standards to the criteria on BB 93.

Medical Needs

The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on maintained schools and academies to make arrangements to support pupils with medical conditions. Individual healthcare plans will normally specify the type and level of support required to meet the medical needs of such pupils. Where children and young people also have SEN, their provision should be planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way with the healthcare plan. Schools are required to have regard to statutory guidance '*Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions*' (2014).

7. Buildings

The Local Authority will:

- Continue with the policy of undertaking specific adaptations to individual primary and secondary schools to enable the access of individual disabled pupils where this is practicably possible and provides an efficient use of resources.
- Ensure that all building programmes for children's centres, new schools, extensions and adaptations comply with the latest accessibility legislation and requirements.
- Continue to review existing relevant accessibility information to identify further early years settings, children's centres, primary and secondary schools that require enhancements to accessibility in the strategic plan. Minor adaptations to existing buildings may be undertaken if this will provide easier access for an individual pupil and where there is clearly an efficient use of resources.

- Continue to deploy specific LA staff to be involved with issues regarding individual placements.
- Provide improved accessibility to secondary schools. This will be according to available funding.

Schools – it will be expected that:

- All new or remodelled buildings for SEN accommodation include withdrawal spaces, work stations or alternative classroom layouts, internal and /or external time out spaces, including all necessary detailed design features.
- Building improvements to help individual pupils will be progressed where individually appropriate and an efficient use of resources; minor adaptations to existing classrooms or buildings may be undertaken if it will provide for the needs of an individual pupil and where there is clearly an efficient use of resources.
- Reasonable adjustments are made, including the requirement to provide auxiliary aids for disabled pupils subject to the reasonable adjustment duty. These adjustments will take aspects of health and safety into account where relevant and appropriate.
- Schools have an up to date accessibility strategy that had been agreed by the Governing Body and incorporate the outcomes into school planning.
- Schools seek to include minor building works or developments to improve accessibility, identified by the school, or through their accessibility strategy, into the school development plan.
- Schools ensure that training is made available to Governors and school staff as necessary to raise awareness of school responsibilities and opportunities to improve
- Schools continue to maintain up-to-date information about the number of children and young people with disabilities in the school, or anticipated to be attending in the future
- Schools consider, on a planned basis, how to improve the accessibility through reorganising or rearranging aspects of the school environment without physical adaptation or building works.

8. Admissions

The oversubscription criterion for community and controlled schools in Stockton-on-Tees gives first priority to children in local authority care and second priority to pupils with complex needs who have been discussed at the High Needs Panel and who have been identified as needing a 'named' primary or secondary mainstream school.

Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan, follow the arrangements set out in the SEN Code of Practice and associated regulations and are not subject to the general admission arrangements. Schools should not take any action that might discourage the admission of any disabled pupil.

Local Authority staff will continue to be involved in assisting with issues regarding individual placements.

N.B. Admissions policies may vary in academies and voluntary aided and foundation schools.

9. Transport

The Local Authority will:

- continue to require transport providers to employ accessible vehicles where these are necessary to enable access by disabled children
- provide access to additional support, as appropriate and agreed via the relevant risk assessments where these are necessary to ensure that children's reasonable needs can be met
- anticipate that current established practices will continue particularly regarding the partnership between parents, passenger assistants, schools, transport providers and other agencies in order to provide accessible transport for pupils.

The Council is also currently offering independent travel training and is seeking to promote this particular scheme.

A process is being established to review the transport needs of children and young people with SEN and disabilities linked to normal SEN processes,. As this is embedded transport needs will be reviewed on at least an annual basis. The Council will always aim to support children and young people to travel as independently as possible.

10. Engagement with parents/carers and partners

The Local Authority will:

- Ensure consultation is carried out with parents and carers on this strategy
- Work with the parent/carer forum Stockton United for change on all matters relating to children and young people with special educational needs and/or disability
- Work with partners such as schools and other educational providers, health and social care and the voluntary and community sector to raise awareness of their duties and in the implementation of this strategy.

Schools will be expected to engage with parents and carers of children and young people as they develop and review their accessibility plans.

11. Information, advice and support

The Local Authority will ensure that appropriate information, advice and support is provided for children and young people with SEN and disability and their families. The Stockton –on – Tees Local Offer provides information about services available for children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities and their families and can be found at:

www.stockton.gov.uk/localoffer

Information, advice and support is also provided by the Families Information Service and impartial information, advice and support is provided by the SEND Information Advice and Support Service (formerly Parent Partnership).

Schools also need to set out on their website information about what they provide for pupils with SEN and disability.

The Local Authority will:

- Continue to develop the Local Offer to include a wider range of information and to respond to feedback from those using the Offer, including parents/carers and children and young people.

- Develop the service offered from the Families Information Service to increase the information advice and support provided for families of children and young people with SEN and /or disabilities.
- Develop the service offered from the SEND Information Advice and Support Service (formerly Parent Partnership) to increase the information advice and support provided to parents, carers, children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities.
- Use a range of methods to distribute information including the Local Offer, the Disability Register, Stockton United for Change, council communications such as Stockton News and the website.
- Provide information in a range of accessible formats
- Support the use of interpreters where required.

Schools will:

- Ensure they publish their schools support offer (school information report) on their website
- Explain the measures they are taking to promote accessibility to the curriculum and environment in their prospectuses
- Provide accessible information for disabled pupils and their parents
- Where necessary provide interpreters including sign language interpreters where required.
- Be clear where parents can obtain hard copies of information published on the school support offer should they not have access to the internet.

12. Monitoring, evaluation and review

The Local Authority has in place the following systems which will contribute to the monitoring of this strategy:

- Teams within the Schools and SEN Service analyse and report information about the children and young people with SEND as part of their area of responsibility. This includes information about progress, Support and challenge is provided to schools to ensure they meet their responsibilities for children and young people with SEND.
- The Schools and SEN Service also deliver training to schools and education providers and the impact of this is monitored.
- The process for reviews of Statements of Special Educational needs and Education, Health and Care plans allows the Local Authority to review provision and arrangements for individual children and young people.
- The Inclusion Quality Mark assists with monitoring the approach of schools to inclusion.

School OFSTED inspections can also consider the accessibility strategy.

The strategy will be formally evaluated and reviewed every two years.

13. Consultation

This strategy was consulted on between June and August 2015. Groups consulted included:

- Education providers
- Stockton United for Change parent/carer forum
- Local Authority Officers across relevant service groups
- The Local Authority's Children and Young People's Management Team
- Health partners

There was also an open consultation on the Local Authority's Local Offer.

14. Useful information

Information about local and neighbouring education provision for children and young people with SEND can be found on Stockton-on-Tees Local Offer at www.stockton.gov.uk/localoffer

Any comments or queries about this strategy should be directed to the 0-25 SEN team who can be contacted on 01642 527145 or 01642 528739, or sensection@stockton.gov.uk.