

Essex schools accessibility strategy 2019 to 2022

Supporting accessibility in Essex schools for pupils with a disability



Essex County Council

Who is this document for?

This document is for all schools for which Essex County Council has responsibility, as well as parents and carers of disabled pupils.

It complies with the requirement within the Equality Act 2010 (Schedule 10) that all local authorities **must**, in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body, prepare and publish an accessibility strategy setting out how they plan to increase the following;

- The extent to which pupils with a disability can participate in the school's curriculum
- Improving the physical environment of the schools
- Improving the delivery of information to pupils and their parents/carers

This accessibility strategy also provides a framework (Appendix 1) to help schools develop and implement their accessibility plans for disabled pupils and will be kept under review.

Academies, free schools, independent schools and other educational settings may also find this document useful in preparing their accessibility plan.

The overall aim of this strategy is to ensure that Essex County Council supports the schools for which it is responsible, in meeting the needs of disabled pupils and raising their attainment. The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that accessibility of the curriculum, the physical environment and information for disabled pupils is central to the delivery of services and supports schools with their accessibility plans.

It is intended that this strategy be reviewed to reflect the Essex vision and strategy for SEND over the course of the 2019/20 academic year to produce a genuinely co-produced accessibility strategy. This document will be updated when that work is complete.

Essex's Inclusion statement

This statement was developed by the Essex Headteacher Roundtable for SEND and reflects partnership working between school leaders and the Local Authority in developing a school-led approach to SEND across the system.

Schools have been invited to show their commitment to inclusion by signing up to the values set out below.

We stand for:

SEND being positioned at the heart of school leadership and not viewed as the exclusive preserve of the SENCO. We encourage every school to be an inclusive school and to take a whole school approach to inclusion and SEND.

Making sure that every child and young person in our schools/academies or settings, whatever their circumstance or ability, has a sense of belonging, feel respected, and is valued for who they are.

Delivering the right education which supports and develops children so that they become positively participating citizens in society.

Ensuring we equip children with the skills, knowledge and confidence to enable them to move on to the next phase of learning and life with success.

Understanding that there are different types of provision that a child may need at different points in their lives, and that movement between provisions must have a specific purpose which will lead to better outcomes for them as they prepare for adulthood.

We recognise:

That an inclusive approach, including to admission and exclusion, with an appreciation of diversity, individuality and ambition for all to achieve their optimum potential is essential in raising attainment for all.

That school leaders must be confident that before a decision to exclude is made, that they can show that all reasonable options available to them have been exhausted and that this will lead to improved practice and provision available to meet all needs in the future.

That collectively we have a responsibility to provide for Essex children whatever their background and current circumstances and ensure that they receive a precise identification of their needs so that high quality teaching leads to positive experiences and outcomes for all.

That sometimes we may not have the appropriate provision or capacity to meet the needs of all children who want to come to our schools / academies or settings but that we will work together to ensure that this is addressed and leads to better practice in the future.

That there are currently capacity challenges with our PRU and Alternative Provision settings and our referral systems need to be regularly reviewed and, where necessary, changed so that they are effective and responsive to local needs.

We strive:

To ensure that all schools, academies and setting are equally and effectively inclusive.

We commit:

To challenge and be open to challenge and to show transparency in our thinking and actions, being able to clearly justify evidence-based decisions.

To examine the way we do things in our own settings to become even more inclusive through systematically reviewing our practice and through working in partnership to review practice in other settings.

To agree to work collaboratively with colleagues in schools, the Local Authority, parents/carers and health and social care to create a new way forward to meet the needs of all Essex children.

To seek and accept any learning, training and development for inclusion for our staff, engage with research and to share our own good practice generously.

To ensure that we follow not simply the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law so that we all put inclusive values into practice in the decisions we make.

Schools Accessibility Strategy 2019-22

National Background

Improving access to education and educational achievement for pupils with a disability is essential to ensure equality of opportunity, full participation in society, access to employment opportunities and inclusion within mainstream education.

The Equality Act 2010 replaces all previous disability discrimination legislation and disability is one of the nine protected characteristics in the Act. The Equality and Human Rights Commission website gives full details of the Equality Act.

The General Duty

This duty requires schools, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010;
- Eliminate harassment of disabled pupils that is related to their disability;
- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people;
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life;
- Take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.

The General Duty applies across schools' duties, and applies to disabled pupils, staff and parents/carers, along with other users of the school.

The Specific Duty

In addition to the General Duty, there is a Specific Duty for schools to demonstrate how they are meeting the General Duty. The main requirement is for schools to prepare and publish a disability equality scheme, involving disabled people in the development of this scheme, and to implement the scheme and report on it. In effect, the General Duty sets out what schools do, with the Specific Duty setting out how schools have to do it and what they need to record as evidence of what they have done.

Reasonable Adjustment Duty

The Equality Act requires schools and the LA to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled pupils are not at a substantial disadvantage. Reasonable adjustments meet the statutory requirements when they act to prevent disabled pupils being placed at a substantial disadvantage, and when they enable pupils to participate in education and associated services.

When deciding if a reasonable adjustment is necessary, schools need to consider potential impact on disabled pupils in terms of time and effort, inconvenience, indignity and discomfort, loss of opportunity and diminished progress.

Duties placed on schools

All schools are required to develop and publish an Accessibility Plan that outlines how they will improve the access to education for disabled pupils over time.

Essex Context

In Essex, we believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential and that children are best supported to grow and achieve within their own families. Through changes in national policy, including the Children and Families Act 2014, there is now a focus on collaborative working between schools, families, partner agencies and the LA.

We believe that parents, carers, schools, the local authority, and partners should work together to ensure opportunities for every child and young person to strive for the highest aspirations.

We believe that we must all work towards removing any barriers that may exist to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude child and young people with SEND.

As one of the largest counties in England, Essex supports more pupils than most localities;

- In Essex, we support 28,960 pupils who require additional and specialist support
- Our 19 special schools have 2,675 pupils on roll
- 24,482 pupils with SEND are supported in mainstream settings

*School Census 2017

The key features of the Accessibility Strategy are:

Increasing access to the curriculum

Ensuring access to the curriculum is vital in providing equal opportunities to children and young people with SEND. Schools need to consider how to improve the accessibility of the curriculum, covering teaching and learning, trips and visits and after school activities. Schools are responsible for providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and play a key role in planning to increase access to the curriculum for all pupils. Therefore schools are required to have an 'Accessibility Plan' that demonstrates what actions the school is taking to increase access to the curriculum, particularly those with SEND. All schools must "use their best

endeavours” to provide “high quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised” and which should “meet the individual needs of the majority of children and young people” (SEN Code of Practice 1.24).

The following is considered good practice:

- **Develop effective classroom partnerships** by differentiating the learning objectives and outcomes, ensuring all staff are fully briefed and can adjust the lesson to meet the needs of individual pupils. This partnership should be underpinned by encouraging independence amongst pupils.
- **Develop a whole school approach** that raises the capability of all school staff to assist in the teaching of pupils with SEND in mainstream settings. In particular this approach should focus on ensuring school staff can provide care and support for vulnerable pupils, and know who to speak to, to find out more.
- **Make SEND a priority** by ensuring there is a member of the governing body, or a sub-committee, with specific oversight arrangements for SEN and disability. This should include regular reviews between the headteacher, SENCO and the governing body on how resources are being allocated and the impact of this allocation.

Improving access to the environment

Reasonable adjustments may be needed to ensure equal access to the environment, including the creation of safe spaces, calming areas, and individual workstations. Since September 2012 there has also been a requirement for educational settings to provide auxiliary aids for disabled pupils subject to the Reasonable Adjustment Duty.

Support services from health, social care and education services are available to advise educational settings about suitable and reasonable adaptations to the inside and outside environment to help include pupils with SEND (specifically those with sensory integration needs).

Improving access to information

The LA will ensure that appropriate information, advice and support is provided and continually developed for children and young people with SEN and disability and their families. The Essex Local Offer provides information about services available and can be found at www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk

Information, advice and support is also provided by the [SEND Information, Advice and Support Service](#) for both parents and young people.

Schools need to set out on their website, the information about what they provide for pupils with disabilities, including their School Information Report.

Expectations of schools

The following sections represent what is expected of the school to ensure participation and inclusion of all children and young people with SEND. Further information can be found in the Essex Provision Guidance document.

Speech and language and communication needs

- Focus on the teaching of vocabulary by:
 - Selecting key vocabulary to teach
 - Supporting the teaching with visual cues
 - Teaching definitions of key words with age-appropriate language
 - Providing consolidation activities to reinforce the word learning
- Modify adult language so that it is unambiguous, not complex and clearly delivered.
- Keep instructions simple and give them in the order they need to be done.
- Repeat instructions when necessary and allow processing time.
- Use visual tools to support learning language and organising information for tasks.
- Teach strategies that support the development of independent learners.
- Provide written information in a straightforward style.
- Support the development of conversational skills and other aspects of social communication.
- Be aware of the strong links between language and literacy and recognise the importance of oral language for successful literacy skills.

Social emotional and mental health needs

- Use a multi-sensory approach to maximise pupil engagement and thus learning
- Be sensitive to potential frustration and confusion, which can lead to increased anxiety in the school environment
- Values and expectations of conduct are based on equal rights and the responsibilities of all to the preservation of rights.
- Incidents of misconduct are investigated without judgement or discrimination and all parties provided with opportunities to be heard through a range of means so that they can communicate views e.g. restorative approaches.
- When addressing communication needs, avoid asking pupils to speak unless they are comfortable to do so, instead offer alternative methods of communication.
- Ensure expectations for attention during learning activities match the pupil's attention ability (ADHD/ADD/SLCN/SEMH needs).
- Minimise distractions in environment and task design

- Provide specified sensory diet e.g. movement breaks and/or fiddle objects to support attention ability.
- Carefully consider presentation of work sheets, sectioned or chunked to adjust quantity and minimise anxiety due to overload.
- Provide pupils with photocopies of key text to allow for highlighting.
- Regularly place the child in a group where they can contribute knowledge.
- Ensure that the adult-child interaction uses evidence-based positive, assertive, non-confrontational strategies that consider the emotional and social developmental age of the pupil or any identified anxiety conditions and are based on principles of unconditional positive regard.
- Ensure the work/materials suit the pupil's cognitive ability, as well as reading age. Consider the cognitive 'load' of the task and ensure that the materials match the pupil's cognitive ability and consider any known anxiety issues affecting the pupil.
- Ensure adequate reinforcement/consolidation of reading and writing skills to the level of automaticity.
- Use colour and visual clues to support reinforcement.
- Help the pupil organise themselves by developing visual timetables, prompts and structures to support their memory and routines.
- Use alternative methods for recording content, specifically methods that support revision.
- Use positive feedback when marking work, and focus on marking content rather than accuracy, neatness or quantity.

Cognition and Learning

- Train staff on how to assess and meet the needs of pupil with learning disabilities, including recognition that these pupils will need more processing time and make slower progress in core subjects than their peers.
- Carry out baseline assessment of pupils, aimed at their developmental stage, to identify gaps in skills and knowledge, and address these through explicit teaching.
- Provide adequate time and support for teaching and consolidation of reading, writing and numeracy skills to the level of automaticity.
- Use cumulative approaches to teaching, where prior learning is regularly revisited alongside small amounts of new information.
- Prioritise the teaching of generalisable skills and life skills, allowing opportunities to practice these in a wide range of contexts.
- Use a multi-sensory approach to maximise learning and pupil engagement.
- When addressing literacy needs, avoid asking pupils to read in public unless they are comfortable to do so, instead find an area of strength for them to demonstrate.
- Regularly place the pupil in a group where they can contribute knowledge.

- Ensure the work/resources suit the pupil's chronological age, as well as developmental stage.
- Use colour and visual clues to support reinforcement of key language and information.
- Carefully consider presentation of work tasks i.e. font and type size, quantity of written text, accessibility of language.
- Provide pupils with photocopies of text to allow for highlighting of key vocabulary, and to reduce dependency on written note taking.
- Demonstrate new concepts in a practical way, using relevant manipulatives, before moving to representational approaches (i.e. tables or charts) and finally abstract approaches (i.e. using mathematical symbols).
- Help the pupil organise themselves by developing visual timetables, prompts and structures to support their memory and routines.
- Use alternative methods for recording (i.e. mind maps, photographs, voice recordings), with a focus on methods that support revision of prior learning.
- Use positive feedback when marking work, and focus on marking content rather than accuracy, neatness or quantity.
- Provide interventions as outlined in One Planning and/or EHCP.

Autism and social communication

- Use of a visual timetable to enable the child to make sense of their day to lower anxiety
- Use of visual supports for tasks, including world maps, tables' grid etc to enable processing time
- Regular, timetabled sensory or movement breaks
- Access to a quiet space
- Differentiated tasks and simplified language
- Clear beginnings and endings to tasks and use of a task planner
- Support for social interaction and understanding

Sensory and physical needs

- Ensure that all pupil coat pegs, drawers and furniture are at appropriate heights
- Sinks, taps and play equipment to be at a suitable height and suitable for pupils with poor motor skills
- Playground markings to promote appropriate motor planning games and route planning
- Handrails to be placed adjacent to steps
- Adjustable height furniture in science and technology rooms
- Alternative means of access determined to avoid difficult steps
- Doorways to be wheelchair accessible
- Fire doors to be suitable and accessible for physically impaired pupils

- Liaise with health authority staff when considering the height of any toilet aids and equipment that may be required
- Ensure that any adaptations to toilet areas allow space for a changing bench and suitable storage areas
- All uneven surfaces on the premises to be monitored and repaired
- Any obstacles, steps or uneven surfaces that cannot be removed to be clearly marked
- The tread and riser of steps to be clearly marked with a contrasting colour

Visual

- Improvements can be achieved by increasing the contrast of one object to another, and by ensuring good lighting throughout the school
- Ensure clear areas of movement throughout the building, including ensuring doors are kept fully open or shut – not ajar
- Lighting should be kept consistent throughout and without shadow, particularly in corridors
- All appropriate and uneven surfaces to be supported by handrails
- Equipment to be stored consistently in the same location, including the pupils' coat peg, drawer and/or locker

Hearing

- Manage the acoustic environment to enable listening and learning, including using fittings and furnishings, such as, acoustic ceiling tiles, carpets, fabric wall displays, vertical blinds and rubber feet on tables and chairs in order to reduce both reverberation times and noise levels.
- A quiet area to be provided for pupils
- Staff will use and manage appropriately any fitted additional amplification, such as a radio aid or soundfield system.
- Pupils with a hearing impairment should sit near the person speaking with a good view of their mouth that is unobscured by objects and shadows. Speakers should look at those listening when talking. During whole class lessons the hearing-impaired listener would usually be placed towards the front and on one side in order to maximise listening and lip-reading. The exact placement should be discussed with the individual child and carers and supporting professionals as each case will vary.
- Use acoustic materials and treatments on walls, ceilings and floors to improve the listening conditions of any school space, including classrooms and the school hall.

Evaluation and Review

This Accessibility Strategy covers the period 2019-2022 and will be regularly reviewed by the contributors and revised/updated as required within this time period.

This Strategy will be published on the Essex Local Offer website –

www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk

Key Documents

[Children and Families Act 2014](#)

[SEND Code of Practice 2015](#)

[Equality Act 2010](#)

[Essex Provision Guidance](#) – The guidance is to support school staff in the process of building on current good practice and to help schools to develop systems, skills and structures for responding to pupils' needs. It provides clarity and consistency when deciding the level and type of support a child needs.

[Essex Local Offer](#) – ECC and local partners in health, social care, public sector and parents/carers and young people have coproduced an online resource containing the provision and support services available in Essex to children and young people with SEND, their parents and carers, and practitioners.

[SEND Information, Advice and Support Service](#) – provide impartial and confidential support over the telephone, or in person, via 0333 013 8913 or send.iass@essex.gov.uk

[Essex Family Forum](#) – Essex's Parent Carer forum, ensuring the lived experiences of families in Essex are heard and work with service providers across education, health and social care.

Appendix one – School Accessibility Plan framework

This section provides an overview of the statutory duty of schools to develop and publish an Accessibility Plan that outlines how the school will improve access to education for disabled pupils over time.

The school's Governing Body holds responsibility for publishing the Accessibility Plan, and as part of a regular review process, schools will need to have regard to the need of providing adequate resources for implementing this plan, and reviewing this plan.

An Accessibility Plan will be deemed satisfactory when:

- It is in writing
- It covers the following three strands of increasing access over time:
 - Increased access to the curriculum for disabled pupils;
 - Improvements to the physical environment to increase access to education and associated services at the school; and
 - Improvements in the provision of information for disabled pupils where it is provided in writing for pupils who are not disabled.

In addition, an Accessibility Plan should be:

- Adequately resourced;
- Implemented;
- Reviewed regularly;
- Revised as necessary (e.g. when accommodation improvements or repair work are being planned)
- Revised, if necessary, during a three year period to ensure information is reported to parents/carers annually;
- A free standing document or part of the school development plan; and
- Published in the context of the Equality Act 2010, which can be interpreted as making the school's Accessibility Plan widely and easily available.

Regarding the final point, it is suggested that the school's Accessibility Plan is published on the school website, and hard copies can be provided upon request. The school should be prepared to make available versions of the plan in other, accessible formats to meet the needs of those requesting it; i.e. parents with English as a foreign language.