

Wakefield Council – Accessibility Strategy

Introduction

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a range of equality duties and requirements within one piece of legislation which came into effect in April 2011. The Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It has replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. The single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) applies to public bodies, including maintained schools and academies (including Free Schools) and extends to all protected characteristics;

- age
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- disability

The PSED has three main elements and as a Local Authority, Wakefield Council is required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act,
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it,
- foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Schedule 10 of The Equality Act 2010 requires local authorities to put an Accessibility Strategy in place which plans to;

- increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums;
- improve the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools;
- improve the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled. The delivery of information must be within reasonable time and in ways which are determined after taking account of the pupil's disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.

The need for accessibility plans also applies to local authority maintained schools, nurseries, children's centres and early year settings. Therefore as a Local Authority, Wakefield Council must provide guidance in order that education settings can produce accessibility plans which adhere to the above requirements laid out in The Equality Act 2010.

Children and Families Act 2014

In April 2014 the Children and Families Act received Royal Assent. The Act outlines a significant reform agenda to improve services for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) and to enable Children, Young People and their families to be at the centre of decisions and to have greater control over the services they receive and the outcomes they wish to achieve.

The Act promotes the need for parents/carers to be engaged at an individual and strategic level, and crucially, the Act recognises the importance of children and young people having the ability to express their views and to be heard, especially when a young person moves towards adulthood.

The legislation and duties placed on Local Authorities and Health Partners are set out in the SEND Code of Practice which was issued in June 2014 (and has had a number of minor revisions to date).

Definition

Under the Equality Act 2010 a person is deemed to have a disability if they have;

- a physical or mental impairment
- and the impairment has a substantial and long-term (a year or more) adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Types of disabilities include physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health issues regardless of their effect, sensory impairments such as those that affect sight and hearing, long-term health conditions such as asthma, cancer, diabetes or epilepsy, and also some medical conditions.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) states the definition of Equality as:

"An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be."

Wakefield's Children and Young People with a SEND – Our Vision

The Education and Inclusion Service at Wakefield Council is committed to ensuring all Children and Young People have the opportunity to succeed at all levels of learning giving them the skills they need for achieving their aspirations in life.

Our vision is that our Children and Young People will enjoy learning in an environment in which they feel valued, giving them confidence to fulfil their potential. We aim to give them the knowledge, understanding and skills to thrive and achieve this.

Our focus will be on person centred planning, treating every child or young person as an individual in making sure they receive the right level of support they need to achieve their goals.

Our approach will be to look at what a person can do regardless of their learning difficulty or disability, rather than what they cannot do, and how services can work together in providing the appropriate package of support.

We aim to deliver the best possible future for our Children and Young People with a Special Educational Need and/or a Disability, ensuring all feel safe, supported and fulfilled in order to achieve their full potential.

SEND Strategy

Delivery of the key priorities of the Wakefield Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) strategy will enable the local authority to ensure that all children have access to high quality inclusive learning;

Wakefield Council has been working closely with partner agencies, particularly schools/academies, colleges and the local health community to ensure delivery of the SEND reforms. Over the duration of the strategy, we have identified five priorities:

1. Engagement and the Local Offer – to continue to develop the Local Offer further to improve accessibility, interaction and use of the Local Offer website. Engagement with parents/carers and children/young people will influence the continued development of the Local Offer as well as shape the delivery of services to support children/young people with SEND aged 0-25 years.
2. Integrated assessments, personalisation and personal budgets – to continue to review and improve the integrated education, health and care assessment process ensuring the system and outcomes are increasingly personalised. This in turn will link to the opportunity for all eligible individuals to access a personal budget for education, health and/or care, as appropriate.
3. Integrated services and joint commissioning – to bring together services across education, health and social care to enable smoother planning and delivery of services to children/young people with SEND.
4. Developing choice for specialist care provision – to support and lead on the development of external providers, such as childcare settings, out of school clubs and personal care providers to ensure they are better equipped and able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

5. Education provision for children/young people aged from 2-25years – to further develop education provision for children/young people with SEND to access an appropriately broad, balanced curriculum that supports their individual needs and aspirations. In post 16, the learning offer will be varied and support young people to progress towards their future goals and achieve meaningful outcomes.

These priorities will be delivered collaboratively across the Council, schools/academies, colleges and Health Partners.

Local Context

Access Issues

All Children and Young People with a Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and their families are entitled to equal access to services which do not discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnic origin, linguistic background, culture, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

Where services are offered, it is recognised that in terms of access to these services, inclusion may be an issue. Therefore, where appropriate, the following priorities should be given consideration:

- A workforce who is representative of the community it serves.
- Avoiding physical features that make access difficult for people with a disability and making reasonable adjustments to improve the environment.
- Improving access to information, premises, a safe environment, transport and communication.
- A focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning.

Wakefield has a wide range of provision available to meet the needs of Children and Young People with SEND. The Council's partnership with schools is well-established and long-term with specialist teams providing advice and support at school, group and individual levels. In addition to our special schools' provision a number of schools have resourced facilities. The Local Authority SENCo Network provides an on-going training and development partnership enhancing provision and support for SEND pupils.

Our Strategy

Increasing Access to the Curriculum

Schools support pupils with a wide range of SEND. They regularly review and evaluate the breadth and impact of the support they offer or can access. Schools co-operate with the Local Authority in reviewing the provision that is available locally and in developing the Local Offer. Schools also collaborate with other local education providers to explore how different needs can be met most effectively. They must have due regard to general duties to promote disability equality under the Equality Act 2010. All schools have duties under the Equality Act 2010 towards individual disabled children and young people and must publish;

- An SEN Policy
- A Medicine in School Policy
- An Access Plan
- Information on admissions

Schools must also make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and equipment required by disabled children and young people, to prevent them being put at a substantial disadvantage. These duties require thought to be given in advance in terms of 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 and to foster good relations.

The joint commissioning of Education, Health and Care provision for Children and Young People required by the Children and Families Act 2014 has led to the development of a more integrated package of support which has improved access to the curriculum for Children and Young People with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability.

All schools are responsible for providing a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum for all pupils including pupils with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability. The Local Authority provides ongoing training and development to schools assisting them to successfully embed the principles of personalisation and person-centred planning. Ongoing support is provided to schools around the Education, Health and Care Plan process, ensuring each Child or Young Person is completely satisfied with the support they receive. This should make the curriculum more accessible to all Children and Young People with a SEND.

Wakefield Council supports schools to respond to individual needs of pupils and the training needs of staff. Wakefield's Local Offer provides information about the provision available to support access to the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

KIDS SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and TEAM Parent Carer Forum work collaboratively in supporting the Local Authority to engage with parents and carers of pupils with disabilities to inform and develop good practice within settings. The strategic workstreams created to implement the SEND Reforms will undertake analysis of outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Good practice will be shared through the SENCo Network and meetings with school leadership teams and governors.

Improving the Physical Environment

Improving the physical environment of schools includes improving physical access to schools as well. All new school buildings have to comply with current building regulations and should be physically accessible to disabled pupils. Much of the work in this area will involve improving access to existing buildings. Improved access to the physical environment can be achieved through reasonable adjustments and schools do need to consider potential adjustments which may be needed for disabled pupils generally, as it is likely that any school will have a disabled pupil at some point.

However, schools are not obliged to anticipate and make adjustments for every imaginable disability and need only consider general reasonable adjustments. Wakefield Council is committed to developing the range of provision available across the district and recognises that investment in buildings supports improved access to a full curriculum for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Improving Access to Information

Wakefield Council will;

- Continue the development of Wakefield's Local Offer
- Ensure Wakefield's Local Offer and Schools SEN Statements are linked
- Continue to work across schools, early years, post 16 education providers and with health partners

As required in the Children and Families Act 2014 Local Authorities have to host a Local Offer, ensuring information on support for Children and Young People with SEND is accessible. Wakefield's Local Offer is available at <http://wakefield.mylocaloffer.org> For those families who are not able to access the Local Offer on the internet, information can be provided by calling the SEND Transformation Team on 01977 723236.

The developing and widening use of ICT is significantly transforming the lives of everybody but especially those children and young people who are unable to communicate using traditional methods. We liaise with partners in schools and health professionals, e.g. Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service, to ensure there is a consistent and equitable method of securing expensive technological aids, such as Alternative and Augmentative Communication Aids.

In addition, the Council's Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENSS) and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service are able to make information available through alternative methods and formats.

KIDS SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) offers impartial information, advice and support to families of children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) encouraging and developing partnerships between children, young people, parents, schools, the council and other partners.

Consultation, Implementation and Review

This strategy has been produced in association with parents and carers and in consultation with our schools and other partners. The Council will support schools in implementing the strategy which will be kept under regular review.

All maintained schools will be required to have an accessibility plan which is regularly reviewed. This is the responsibility of the governing body. As part of this regular review, schools will also need to have a regard to the need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must regularly review them.

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Our Commitment to Equality

Wakefield Council is committed to advancing equality and will ensure that its workforce and Elected Members provide accessible, non-discriminatory services to all citizens by:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from these protected groups where these are different from the needs of others
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life and activities where their participation is disproportionately low

The Council and all its services have a number of statutory requirements with regard to residents and those working in or visiting the district. These include:

- ***The Equality Act 2010*** – The Public Sector Equality Duty
- ***The Child Poverty Act 2010*** – reduce and mitigate effects of child poverty
- ***The Children and Families Act 2014*** – Safeguarding Duty
- ***The Crime and Disorder Act 1998*** - actively work towards preventing and reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.
- ***The Local Government Act 1999*** – Duty of Best Value
- ***Health & Social Care Act 2012*** - improve and protect health and use “all levers at their disposal to improve health and wellbeing”

For us to be fair cohesive and prosperous; inequality needs to be tackled and discrimination eliminated. Wakefield Council is committed to building on and simplifying the existing legal framework as required in the Equality Act 2010.