

Enquire within

THE NEWSLETTER BULLETIN OF ENQUIRE, THE NATIONAL ADVICE SERVICE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SCOTLAND

Accessibility Strategies

Inclusion has been on the education agenda for many years. Local authorities now have to take practical steps to enable inclusion to become a reality. This will be done through 'accessibility strategies'. Accessibility strategies are new planning tools which must now be developed throughout the education sector. This bulletin outlines the background to accessibility strategies, draws attention to some work carried out by the Disability Rights Commission in this area and gives a school perspective on accessibility and inclusion in the mainstream.

Background to the legislation

When the *Disability Discrimination Act* was introduced in 1995, it did not include schools or other educational establishments. A Disability Rights Task Force was established to provide the UK government with advice on how to secure rights for people with disabilities. The Task Force reported in 1999 and made recommendations which included extending the 1995 Act to cover education.

The *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001* followed. This introduced educational provision into the 1995 Act. While it also imposed a strategic planning duty on local authorities in England and Wales, it did not extend to Scotland because of the devolution of certain powers to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive had to move very quickly to remedy this, and the *Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002* resulted. (The Act included reference to pupil records to ensure that existing legislation was in line with data protection guidance and the maintaining of confidentiality.)

In October 2002 the Scottish Executive issued guidance to all local authorities and those responsible for independent and grant-aided schools on preparing accessibility strategies entitled *Planning to improve access to education for pupils with disabilities*.

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SCHOOL DESIGN

Well designed, well built and well managed school buildings have a key role to play in the development of inclusive and accessible education for all of Scotland's school pupils. Giving due recognition to diversity in children's physical, cultural and social needs as part of the design process is just one topic which will be debated at a national conference on designing spaces for children and young people. **Out of the box** organised by Children in Scotland, in association with four partners, will be held in Glasgow on 29 May 2003.



For more details contact: Radha Singh, Children in Scotland, Princes House, 5 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh, EH2 4RG, tel: 0131 222 2438, fax: 0131 228 8585 or e-mail: rsingh@childreninscotland.org.uk.



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



Enquire



At a time when local authorities are under pressure to prepare an accessibility strategy by April 2003, many professionals, head teachers and parents welcomed the opportunity to attend one of a series of conferences *Beyond the Ramp: developing accessibility strategies in Scotland* held around Scotland by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in October and November 2002. Accessibility planning groups from all thirty-two local authorities attended these events and key aspects in implementing the new duties were covered in the programme. Sessions included *The importance of consulting*

amount of flexibility in how to prepare their plans.

The Disability Rights Commission has received excellent feedback from the *Beyond the Ramp* events.

Two parents who attended the event in Nairn, Lindsay Graham and Avril Hutchison, commented: "To have our views listened to and valued was crucial. To have parental input to future planning from a strategic level is definitely the way forward for all local authorities."

The DRC has also commissioned a baseline piece of research, undertaken by Children in Scotland, the University of Edinburgh and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research (University of Glasgow). This research investigates the awareness of stakeholders in Scotland, and seeks to ascertain how prepared education providers are for implementing their new duties. The result of this research is expected in the spring.

The process of developing an accessibility strategy is as important as its implementation. There is a recommendation in the Scottish Executive guidance that education providers consult widely with stakeholders including parents, health and social work staff and young people themselves when developing the strategy. The DRC hopes that this will ensure a sense of ownership and a shared understanding of what may be achieved.

*Julia Dee Wilson,
Disability Rights Commission*

The Disability Rights Commission has information for schools and parents on part IV of the Disability Discrimination Act as it applies to Scotland. These two publications along with the codes of practice for schools and post-16 sector are available from the Disability Rights Commission helpline, tel: 08457 622 633 or download from the website at www.drc-gb.org.

Legislation on education for disabled people goes 'beyond the ramp'

The 2002 Act requires responsible bodies to plan, prepare (in consultation and with regard to guidance), implement and review an accessibility strategy. This strategy should, over time, increase access for pupils with a disability to:

- the curriculum;
- the physical environment;
- communication of school information.

By focusing on a combination of these three strands the strategies should, in effect, cover the wide range of education services including school trips, after school clubs, breaks and lunchtimes, and exam arrangements. The legislation covers:

- independent and grant-aided schools;
- all schools and nursery schools for which the local authority is responsible;
- local authority schools in non-school centres.

with pupils (Children in Scotland), *How to manage planning* (local authority representatives) and *Existing examples of good practice* (RNIB), as well as parents' and disabled teachers' perspectives on disabled pupils. The events aimed to both highlight good practice and enable parents to play an active part in the planning process. In relation to accessibility education providers should now be thinking about issues such as:

- IT equipment and software;
- contracts with external agencies such as transport companies;
- consideration which might be given to pupils with a particular disability eg lighting and signage might be improved in a school for those with visual impairments.

In its guidance published in October 2002, the Scottish Executive set out a process for developing the strategy, but local authorities still have a fair

Communication, parental involvement and flexibility the key to successful inclusion

Karen Lindsay, Information Officer from Enquire, met with the head teacher of a Scottish mainstream primary school to find out about accessibility strategies and inclusion in practice.

KL What does accessibility mean in relation to your job in a mainstream environment?

HT It means looking at how staff, pupils and parents interact together. It means looking at all areas of operation in the school and potential impact on children with disabilities. It's about being aware and open to new ideas and options available.

KL How do you think accessibility strategies will impact on the work of the school as a whole?

HT We will be exploring different options, trying new approaches, differentiating the curriculum to suit the needs of children and ensuring parental involvement at all times.

KL Looking at accessibility and practical applications in your school, can you give me some examples of approaches you used that worked well?

HT One example of success in this school was an opportunity we took up with a local special school to work specifically with children with disabilities. In particular, this venture was to concentrate especially on the social integration and inclusion of the children into a mainstream environment. We worked in partnership with all those involved in the lives of the children. We took particular care to ensure that the parents were fully informed of everything that was going on and took direction and guidance from staff at the special

school as well as from the educational psychologist. We focused on consistency and this approach ensured a seamless handover and the routine helped the children adjust.

For each child we looked at the curriculum so that when they were at school we tried to include activities or particular subjects that they enjoyed or excelled at. This was very clearly an option as our remit was primarily to work on personal and social development. It worked well and the children looked forward to their time at school.

In particular, the support staff involved have been a great asset to this experience and without their expertise it may have been more difficult. The calibre of support staff is paramount and their commitment, ability to engage with the children, relationships with staff and other pupils and their firm but fair approach ironed out a lot of issues before they became a problem.

KL Were there any areas that caused you particular difficulties or obstacles you had to overcome?

HT Co-operation and open, frank and honest communication with all parties involved is vital with all children in school but particularly so in order to promote successful inclusion. We did experience some problems but we learned that what may work for one child and their family may not be an approach that is

instantly transferable to another. The key, again, is communication and flexibility.

KL What have you, your staff and the school gained from your experiences in working towards accessibility?

HT In terms of accessibility our experience in socially integrating children in mainstream has had enormous benefits to all those involved. It has certainly broadened my own horizons in terms of the impact working practices have and the benefits involved, and has reaffirmed my faith in management and classroom approaches to the work.

“There is so much satisfaction in seeing the children make progress in their personal and social relationships with other children in the school.”

My staff have also gained enormously both personally and professionally. They have had the opportunity to expand in their professional expertise and to work more flexibly in the classroom. There is so much satisfaction in seeing the children make progress in their personal and social relationships with other children in the school. As a result, many staff have furthered their professional development by taking on additional courses or work in the area of special educational needs. The children who came here have developed their personal and social skills and are firmly part of the school. They have great friendships as a result. The other children have gained immensely from the interaction and contact with children with disabilities and it has raised their awareness of the concept of difference in positive and beneficial ways.

NOTICEBOARD

PUBLICATIONS

Consulting with children and young people on accessibility strategies - a good practice guide

During 2002 Children in Scotland carried out a consultation with children and young people to find out how they felt they could be best involved in the preparation of accessibility strategies. The resulting good practice guide is intended as a tool for Scottish local authorities and schools to use in preparing accessibility strategies that will truly meet the needs of disabled pupils and prospective pupils. To obtain a copy of the report, contact Children in Scotland 0131 222 2410 or e-mail: publications@childreninscotland.org.uk or www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

Let me read it ! - Planning accessible information for pupils with visual impairments

RNIB Scotland has produced a new document for education authorities to help them improve the accessibility of information for children with visual impairments within schools. The document is a practical guide to planning groups outlining the legal issues, suitable alternative formats, technology solutions, case studies and a directory of relevant suppliers and organisations. To order this document, telephone 0845 702 3153 or e-mail: cservices@rnib.org.uk.

EVENTS

re:solutions 2003

Working towards child-focused mediation

Stirling Royal Infirmary

Monday 23 June 2003

A national conference by **Enquire**

This conference is essential for all those working with or for children, young people and families, with additional support needs. The conference will examine benefits of mediation/conflict resolution in additional support needs, explore current guidelines and good practice and will raise awareness of the benefits of using mediation in an educational setting.

For booking information contact:

Alison Rowan, Children in Scotland, Princes House,
5 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RG. Tel: 0131 222 2405
or e-mail: arowan@childreninscotland.org.uk.

Scottish Support for Learning Association

HELPING HANDS National Conference

10.30am-3.30pm, Sat 26 April 2003

Fort William Milton Hotel and Leisure Centre

For further information contact Bill Sadler on 01479 872
480 or e-mail info@ssla.org.uk.

Legal Subscription Service

For an annual fee of £45.00, this service offers:

- an adviser's guide;
- a directory of solicitors;
- updates on legislative changes;
- legal briefings;
- key contacts in local areas;
- Enquire factsheets.

To subscribe to the service please contact Lynsey Adams on
0131 222 2425 or e-mail: ladams@childreninscotland.org.uk.

TRAINING

Training materials

Enquire will launch a training pack in Spring 2003. The pack will support the involvement of parents in determining SEN provision. The materials will be adaptable in order to provide one day learning sessions. It will cover areas such as:

- involving parents in identification and assessment;
- involving parents in decision making;
- developing skills of parent members on SEN forums;
- promoting dispute resolution skills.

For more information please telephone Lynsey Adams on 0131 222 2425 or e-mail: Enquire.SENinfo@childreninscotland.org.uk.

Workshops

Children in Scotland has drawn up an additional support needs programme drawing on the experience of Enquire and other work in the agency. Workshops currently being offered are:

- Involving parents in identification and assessment,
23 April, Edinburgh; 10 June, Stirling
- Involving parents in decision making,
25 April, Glasgow; 21 May, Edinburgh
- Consulting with children and young people who have complex needs,
29 April, Edinburgh
- Therapeutic play with children with disabilities,
9 May, Dundee; 26 June, Edinburgh

For further details phone Alison Rowan on 0131 222 2405 or arowan@childreninscotland.org.uk.