

Accessibility in Schools Policy

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Purpose

Schools have a duty to plan increased accessibility to the curriculum, the physical environment of the school and improve the delivery of written information to disabled pupil/students. This policy outlines NAS schools' approach to this duty.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff who work in National Autistic Society Independent schools.

Approach

Improving access to education and educational achievement by disabled pupil/students is essential to ensuring equality of opportunity, and full participation in society. This needs to be in a planned and strategic way.

All autistic pupils are considered to have a disability as a consequence of their autism. The Equality Act 2010 emphasises the requirements for all schools to promote accessibility for those pupil/students with physical and sensory disabilities. The NAS accepts and endorses these intentions and therefore for the purpose of this policy document pupil/students with a disability will mean those who have physical and/or sensory impairments in addition to their core autistic disorder.

The NAS SPELL Framework emphasises structure, positive approaches, empathy, low arousal and links for understanding and responding to the needs of people with an autistic spectrum disorder. Using SPELL small alterations to the physical environment and teaching approaches can vastly increase the capacity and accessibility for children with autism or related disorders to learn more effectively.

For autistic pupils seemingly, incidental environmental factors will greatly increase stress levels, potentially leading to challenging behaviour and reducing their opportunity for learning. Consequently, buildings will be audited in line with SPELL to ensure acoustics, lighting, smells, signage and classroom organisation are calm and ordered in such a way to reduce anxiety and aid concentration.

In accessing the curriculum autistic pupils including those with additional sensory and/or physical disabilities will have full access to all areas, provided at a suitable level and differentiated according to need. All staff will be trained in autism and positive behaviour support.

All schools have written three-year accessibility plans in place that form part of the annual School Improvement Plan. These plans focus on:

- Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum;

- Improving the physical environment of schools to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can take advantage of education and associated services and;
- Improving the delivery to disabled pupils of written information which is provided to pupils who are not disabled.

Operational Delivery

1. Accessibility plans are reviewed regularly. Each school must have a locally produced accessibility plan that at least meets the requirements of Part 3 of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
2. Plans will assess current accessibility to the school and curriculum, and identify barriers to access or inclusion. A review of access should cover the physical environment, the provision of auxiliary aids and services, teaching and learning practices, the curriculum, staff training, the culture and ethos of the school and the provision of written information. Data on current and likely pupil/student population will also be considered.
3. Measures to eliminate barriers will be written into the plan and include staff training, teaching and learning practices, refurbishment and maintenance, minor and major capital expenditure. These will be prioritised into short, medium and long-term aims with clear implementation arrangements and time frameworks.
4. All new school buildings will comply with the Building Regulations and the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 and part five of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014.
5. Plans will be developed through:
 - Access audit and review of current activities
 - Identifying and devising actions
 - Setting of goals and targets which are measurable
 - Consultation with staff, parents, pupils and other bodies
 - Publication of the plan
 - Implementation and allocation of adequate resources
 - Evaluation
6. Accessibility should be considered in the purchasing of all resources. For example, the installation of bar taps in science, food and art rooms, and low pile high density carpet to assist wheelchair users.

Plans will include three areas:

Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum

- This should not only cover teaching and learning but the wider curriculum such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities or school visits.
- Schools will use a variety of approaches when planning and delivering the curriculum to draw upon the different strengths and aptitudes of pupils. This might include using flexible grouping arrangements where pupils with disabilities can work with their peers, and encouraging peer support.
- Access should be considered at a 'whole school' level.

Improving the physical environment of the schools (and where appropriate residential units).

- This will include steps, stairways, kerbs, exterior surfaces and paving, parking areas, building entrances and exits (including emergency escape routes), internal and external doors, gates, toilets and washing facilities, lighting, heating, ventilation, lifts, signs, interior surfaces, floor coverings, room décor and furniture. Improvements to physical access may include – ramps, handrails, lifts, widened doorways, electromagnetic doors, adapted toilets and washing facilities, adjustable lighting, blinds, induction loops, well designed room acoustics and way-finding systems.
- Physical aids to access education might include ICT equipment, enlarged computer screens and keyboards, switches, photocopying enlargement facilities, specialist desks and chairs and portable aids for children with motor coordination and poor hand/eye skills such as extra robust scientific glassware and specialist pens and pencils. These lists are not exhaustive.

Improving the delivery of information to disabled pupils

- Information should take into account pupils' disabilities, pupils' and parents' preferred formats and be made available within a reasonable time frame. Examples include handouts, timetables and information about school events. Alternative formats will be used such as large print, pictorially, a recognised symbol system, Braille, by use of ICT, providing the information orally, lip speaking, sign language or other appropriate means.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Principal, along with all staff and governors are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

The Principal in consultation with staff, pupils, students, parents and any other relevant party will review and revise the Accessibility plan

Evaluation of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years with regard to its effectiveness and to ensure it takes account of current legislation.

Equality Impact Assessment

In the design of this policy we have considered the complex inter-relating elements that impact on the effective support and identification of those with SEN. This policy seeks to promote the rights of people who have one or more of the protected characteristics (of which everyone does). This policy also seeks to focus on the impact of factors such as EAL and particularly the impact on staff, children and families. We alert users of this policy to the need to consider these specific factors alongside SEND. This policy aims to support equality and inclusion both within our schools and communities. Effective SEND provision will ensure any adverse impacts are identified and actions are taken to remove or mitigate.

Through the implementation of this policy we seek to lessen some of the known inequalities that exist in society, including, but not limited to race, disability and gender, through carefully designed provision and support that affords opportunities for people with those protected characteristics to excel.

Legal Framework

The Education Act 2005

Equality Act 2010

Children and Families Act 2014

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004 & 2009

The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999

Part five of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010

DFE 2021 Keeping Children Safe in Education

DFE SEN code of practice 2015

Related Documents

NAS SEND and Inclusion policy

Local accessibility plans

Local SEND information reports