

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Agenda
Item No.**

DATE: 7 SEPTEMBER 2006

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**VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOLS' ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT SUMMARY AND
ACTION PLAN**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's Services
Councillor Adrian Andrew, Regeneration and Enterprise

Summary of report:

During the 2003-04 academic year, an access audit of all schools in Walsall was commissioned by Walsall Metropolitan Council's Access Officer.

Following this audit, the schools were ranked in order of accessibility with indicators of what work was required in order to bring each school up to the nationally agreed minimum accessibility standard.

This information was used by the Capital and Asset Management team to set an action plan.

Targets for bringing Voluntary Aided schools up to the minimum standard were set and are included in both the Disability Access Strategy and Plan and the Excellence in Walsall Plan.

Background papers:

Disability Access Plan
Excellence in Walsall Plan 2004-5 and 2005-6
Accessible Schools (DFES guidance July 2002)

Reason for scrutiny:

Scrutiny requested a report on the plan to bring all Voluntary Aided schools up to the agreed minimum standard of physical accessibility.



Signed:

**Helen Denton, Managing Director
Date: 21 August 2006**

Resource and legal considerations

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act sets out the legal requirements placed on schools in terms of accessibility. LEA's and Schools are required to prepare accessibility strategies and plans (respectively) for increasing over time the accessibility of schools for disabled pupils.

Schools' access plans cover curriculum access and information access, in addition to physical access. There are no legal requirements upon schools to submit their access plans. Education Walsall has provided a comprehensive pro-forma for schools' use and questions about the school's access plan are raised at the regular inclusion planning meetings. Additionally, Education Walsall has offered a number of training and consultation events in order to support schools in their production of an access plan and provides information and updates regarding legal requirements.

Citizen impact

Increasing the accessibility of schools will help to ensure the positive inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in Walsall schools.

Environmental impact

There are no direct impacts as a result of this report.

Performance management

There will be an annual increase in the number of Voluntary Aided schools which meet the nationally agreed minimum accessibility standards.

Equality Implications

Increasing the accessibility of schools across Walsall will provide greater opportunities for inclusion and enable more children and young people with special needs to access a place at their local school.

Consultation

Contact Officer

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1. Accessibility Requirements

- 1.1 The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act sets out the legal requirement of schools in terms of accessibility. LEAs and Schools are required to prepare accessibility strategies and plans (respectively) for increasing over time the accessibility of schools for disabled pupils.
- 1.2 Schools' access plans cover curriculum access and information access in addition to physical access. There are no legal requirements upon schools to submit their access plans. Education Walsall has provided a comprehensive pro-forma for schools' use and questions about the school's access plan are raised at the regular inclusion planning meetings. Additionally, Education Walsall has offered a number of training and consultation events in order to support schools in their production of an access plan and provides information and updates regarding legal requirements.
- 1.3 **Access to the Curriculum**
The Accessibility Strategy offers information on and access to training opportunities for schools to enhance their skills in including children and young people with disabilities. Training events have included 'Making Reasonable Adjustments' and 'Disability Equality'.
- 1.4 **Access to Information**
Education Walsall provides information for schools on the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and organises a programme of training events for school staff and governors. Information booklets including 'A Guide to Services for Children with a Disability' and parents' guides have been produced. Consultation and information events for parents and young people have been well attended.
- 1.5 **Physical Access into properties**
This report deals with progress on this issue to date and the plan for ensuring compliance with the Act.

2 Physical Access

- 2.1 In order to exercise its duty under the Act, the Council appointed an external consultant to carry out access audits at all schools to identify works that were required. The appointment of one consultant for all of the audits ensured consistency of approach across all schools.
- 2.2 Upon receipt of the completed audits, all schools were assessed against level 1, the minimum standard, as detailed in Building Bulletin 91 – Access for Disabled People to School Buildings - published by the DfES.
- 2.3 The minimum standard for all school buildings (level 1) comprises:
 - Provision of disabled car parking
 - Accessible main entrance with level or ramped access
 - Handrails on ramps, steps and stairs if required
 - Accessible toilet
 - Good written evacuation procedures in place to ensure safe evacuation from the building

- 2.4 Following collation of the information from all Voluntary Aided schools' access audits, a plan was developed to bring all Voluntary Aided schools up to the minimum standard (level 1) within three years. This was produced following consultation with the LEA Controlled VA Programme [LCVAP] Group and is in line with the Accessibility Strategy.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Schools Access Initiative budget can only be used to improve access at community, controlled and foundation schools; it cannot be used to support improvements at Voluntary Aided schools. Funding cannot be used to improve facilities at special schools unless it can be demonstrated that this increases access to education.
- 3.2 Voluntary Aided schools also need to be accessible to the same minimum standard. Funding to commence this work has been identified from the LCVAP allocation and a programme for this work is being developed with the diocesan authorities and aided schools.
- 3.3 An initial allocation of £100,000 was set aside from the 2006/07 LCVAP allocation to commence the programme. This allocation was approved at cabinet on 22 March 2006.
- 3.4 The funding arrangement for each scheme will be 90% from the LCVAP programme and a 10% school contribution through Devolved Formula Capital [DFC] or other available school resources.

4 Programme

- 4.1 It is intended to carry out access improvements at schools in accordance with minimum standards on a phased programme as funding allows.
- 4.2 The programme is intended to ensure that if funding can be identified from the LCVAP allocation for 2007/08 all of the Voluntary Aided schools will meet the agreed minimum standards by the end of that financial year.

5 Progress to Date

- 5.1 All Voluntary Aided schools were written to at the end of the summer term with details of what action is required to upgrade their individual school to meet the minimum standard.
- 5.2 Included in the correspondence was guidance on the proposed process for instigating the works.

- 5.3 Each school has been asked to obtain quotations for the required work through their own property consultants and report to the Capital and Asset Management Team at Education Walsall for final approval of the scheme and the associated costs prior to commencement of works.
- 5.4 It is envisaged that final approval to a number of schemes will be given in the autumn term to ensure that expenditure can be realised before the end of the current financial year.
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