

**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION, LEISURE AND CULTURE
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Agenda
Item No.**

DATE: 2 FEBRUARY 2006

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SCHOOLS' ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr EF Hughes – Children's Services

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 successive numbers of 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:

Following consideration of the Strategic Review of Disability Working Group Report, the Community Organisation, Leisure and Culture Scrutiny and Performance Panel requested a physical access audit summary report including details of the process for monitoring schools' access plans.

Signed:

Helen Denton, Managing Director, Education Walsall

Date: 19 January 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.

Progress on the Accessibility Strategy is detailed in this report.

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 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 schools' access audits, a plan was developed to bring all schools up to the minimum standard (level 1) within three years. This was produced following consultation and is in line with the Accessibility Strategy.
- 2.5 In addition to upgrading schools to the minimum standard, further provision is made to ensure that statemented children in the mainstream sector have access to the curriculum. This may include the provision of specialist toileting facilities or specialist furniture/equipment that is essential to deliver the curriculum.
- 2.6 All works identified as necessary for an individual child are referred to the Physical Access Sub Group (which includes Head teachers, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists etc) for consideration to ensure that requested works appropriately meet pupils' needs.
- 2.7 All nursery schools and schools with a nursery class will be provided with changing facilities (where possible) to assist pupils requiring toileting support.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 The programme of works will be funded by a combination of Schools Access Initiative Funding (SAI) and from individual schools' Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) when only minimal works are required.
- 3.2 Access improvement works are included in other schemes being undertaken by the Council and/or schools which primarily address other types of issues but offer an opportunity to provide facilities for pupils with disabilities. These elements of ongoing schemes will be funded from the Schools Access Initiative.
- 3.3 The Schools Access Initiative budget can only be used to improve access at community, controlled and foundation schools, it cannot be used for 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.
- 3.4 Voluntary Aided schools also need to be accessible to the same minimum standard. Funding for this work has been identified from the LEA Co-ordinated VA Programme (LCVAP) allocations and a programme for this work will be developed with the diocesan authorities and aided schools.

4 Programme

- 4.1 It is intended to carry out access improvements at schools in accordance with minimum standards on a phased programme.
- 4.2 Each phase of schools to be upgraded will be completed prior to commencement of the next phase. The number of schools in each phase will be determined in the light of available financial resources. This will be managed in conjunction with ongoing works to ensure individual statemented pupils have access to the curriculum and will also allow the most efficient and cost-effective use of limited resources.

5 Progress to Date

- 5.1 Currently, 24 schools are either fully compliant with the minimum agreed standard or will be brought up to this standard within the next few months following the completion of schemes by Walsall Council's Establishment Team/Building Design Unit.
 - 5.2 It is intended that a further 34 schools will be brought up to the minimum standards over the next financial year.
 - 5.3 A further assessment will then be made of the remaining schools to complete the phased programme to bring all schools up to the minimum standard.
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