

ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to:
 - update schools on outcome of the Accessibility Strategy consultation key messages
 - to outline the training offer to maintained schools and a traded service for Academies
 - to request a school representative for the Accessibility Strategy group.

Background

2. Under the Equality Act 2010 (schedule 10), the Local Authority has a duty to the settings for which it is responsible to produce an Accessibility Strategy. The Strategy sets out how the Local Authority will work with schools to:
 - increase the extent to which disabled children and young people can participate in the schools curriculum
 - improve the physical environment of schools
 - improve delivery of information to children and young people with disabilities and/or learning disabilities.
3. All schools have a statutory duty to develop and implement their own Accessibility Plans written as a document in its own right, to include within the School Improvement Plan or linked to the SEND Information Report. Through the development of the strategy all schools have been consulted and training has been developed in order to meet schools' needs.

Strategy Consultation

4. A number of schools were able to attend a Strategy consultation meeting and returned questionnaires. Generic comments included:
 - The strategy is best practice and is an important document for all schools to use as a baseline for their own policies/strategy and the provision of a template Accessibility Plan has given schools added confidence they are 'on the right track'.
 - To reflect the growing needs in Darlington in Special Educational Needs, especially ASD, and the reasonable adjustments that should be made to assist pupils to access the curriculum; this will be reflected in the data and Equality Impact Assessment.
 - Examples of best practice have been identified which can be disseminated to other schools.
5. Key messages for the School Forum to note concern the use of single equality schemes and 'pupil voice' in developing school strategies/plans as explained below.

6. Some schools continue to produce single equality schemes, despite the fact that under the specific duties there are no statutory requirements to do so. This was replaced with the need to publish equality objectives and annually demonstrate how they are meeting the aims of the equality duty. Schools should note that equality information is required to be reviewed every four years, whereas Accessibility Plans, every three years therefore there is a risk that schools may miss the statutory review of Accessibility Plans.
7. A meeting with the Darlington Youth Partnership was held in association with the Local Authority (LA) Participation Officer. The young people raised some interesting ideas as to how schools could improve the Pupil Voice in involvement of children and young people in their accessibility planning. Schools could consider how to involve students in preparing their Accessibility Plans.

Children and Young People (CYP) Scrutiny – Meeting update

8. The Strategy was taken to the CYP Scrutiny meeting on 20th February. Members questions related to the involvement of the academies in the development of the Strategy and Members were advised that all schools had been made aware of the Strategy through Schools Governing Bodies and given the opportunity to comment during the consultation period and academies will be able to access the final training plan that will be put in place. In the case of academies the consultation has informed requirements for support or other training needs.
9. Members also questioned how the local authority can ensure that all young people under their responsibility are getting quality of care from the academies and how this can be monitored. I informed Members of the the SEN Disability and Inclusion Commissioning Strategy, which is linked to the Accessibility Strategy which covers the duty on all children and that accessibility planning was very specific to schools.
10. Members also referred specifically to the high percentage of SEN children in Darlington receiving SEND support or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or Statement of Special Educational Need; and the percentage of all children in the area that were living in poverty and questioned the reasons as to why the number of children entitled to free school meals in nursery and primary schools and in secondary schools was above the national average. It was agreed that the Assistant Director of Children's Services would carry out a benchmarking exercise with the neighbouring authorities and report back to Members.
11. It was also agreed that although the statutory responsibility is for this authority to support all its maintained schools it should be stated in the Strategy that as well as maintained schools and Academies, sixth-form colleges and further education (FE) colleges with 16 to 19 provision are likewise required to produce Accessibility Plans, and that the best practice outlined in the Strategy will support them to do this.
12. The development of the Strategy has been overseen by an Accessibility Strategy group. The group will monitor the implementation of the Strategy and report to the CYP Scrutiny at least annually. To strengthen the group we would like to invite a representative from a maintained school. The terms of reference for the group are attached at Appendix 1.

Training Update

Maintained Schools

13. Darlington Borough Council is committed to ensuring that the Council meets and, where practicable, exceeds its requirements. In addition to the Strategy, the intention is that the Local Authority guide schools through the necessary steps to achieve legal compliance (Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010) in the completion, monitoring and publicising of their individual Accessibility Plans through training.
14. The training will be rolled out as soon as the Strategy is agreed by Cabinet, ie in Summer term 2016/2017. A small fee of £50 per school will be required. The schools would, in advance, use an audit tool as a checklist against which to identify actions to be encompassed within their plans. The completed plans will be checked for omissions and compliance, and schools will be invited to an appropriate level of training.

Academy Training

15. It has been identified through the Strategy consultation that schools expressed an interest in training and support to audit their accessibility plans.
16. To this purpose a traded service has been developed. This takes the form of :

- An Accessibility audit tool – which will be provided for the School which must be completed in order to identify training requirements.
- Delivery of an accessibility training session to support implementation of accessibility planning. Based on the response to the audit tool, one of three packages have been developed and will be offered to the school. The training offer will be composed of 2.5-hour twilight sessions on a pre-booking basis. The general outline of these sessions are below, and training will be tailored according to need.

Bronze – for those schools who on completion of the checklist, have identified significant gaps which indicate potential non-compliance and for which they require guidance.

Silver – for those schools, who on completion of the checklist, have identified some gaps which would benefit from further guidance to achieve compliance.

Gold - for those schools who, on completion of the checklist, have identified potentially minor gaps which, when addressed, would support the schools in exceeding compliance.

- It is expected each school will undertake one of the above accessibility sessions during the Academic year and that the trained member of staff will cascade to all school staff.
- An annual on-site meeting with the school management team to pro-actively monitor and assist in the development and implementation of agreed accessibility action plans.
- An annual audit of the action plan, providing a written report and action points or recommendations where necessary. Ad-hoc advice and guidance eg in relation to complaints relating to accessibility.
- Bespoke training can be developed and provided to meet specific needs. The

charge applicable will be agreed depending on the training requirements prior to the services being provided. For example, training such as delivery staff training per year (examples could be Equality Act, DFE guidance support, risk assessment support).

17. This traded service will be at a cost of £1300 per school with one staff member in each setting participating in the training. If an Academy wishes to send more than one delegate then an additional payment of £50 will be required.
18. The above includes the provision in advance of resources to achieve legal compliance, including the Strategy, an audit tool and accessibility plan template.
19. The cost has been compared to similar LA traded services as a benchmark, therefore it is considered to be a good value service offer.
20. The consultancy day rate is excellent value for money, for example, the Diversity Trust works on a training day rate of £700.
21. Sign up will be required as soon as possible to allow time to procure a provider for delivery throughout Academic Year 2017/18. The service will be included in the bulk traded services contract for academy schools on an academic year basis.
22. All schools will be sent the specification and contract by legal services however in the meantime in order to ensure a supplier is procured schools are asked to express interest in the service. The specification is attached at Appendix 2.

Recommendation

23. To note the development of training for both maintained and Academy schools, and for Academy Schools to express interest in the traded service by 31st March 2017 to education.servicesadmin@darlington.gov.uk.
24. To nominate a maintained setting/school representative to sit on the Accessibility Strategy group.

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