



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Cabinet – 21 March 2024

Accessibility Strategy for Schools

Purpose:	To seek approval to undertake a public consultation on the draft Accessibility Strategy for Schools 2024-2027. The Strategy sets out the Education Directorate's plans for progressively increasing the accessibility of the local authority's schools to disabled learners.
Policy Framework:	Equality Act 2010
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Human Resources, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) A consultation is undertaken to collect the views of stakeholders on the draft Accessibility Strategy to ensure that disabled pupils have increased accessibility to all maintained schools in Swansea. 2) Following the consultation, a further report will be prepared for Council with the results of the consultation, and a final version of the Strategy to be adopted.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010, directs that "A local authority in England and Wales must, in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body, prepare... an accessibility strategy". It goes on to describe an accessibility strategy as a strategy which:

- increases the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in a school's curriculum (inclusion);
- improves the physical environment/facilities (physical access); and
- improves equality of access to information.

1.2 In recent years, Swansea Council's strategy has been reactive; addressing individual needs as they are identified, through reasonable adjustments. Whereas a new Strategy will provide a clear direction of travel to improve the educational offer to all disabled learners and their families.

2. Swansea's Approach

2.1 Swansea Council has adopted the Social Model of Disability which recognises that it is society that creates attitudinal and physical barriers which disable people, rather than their physical or mental impairments. The Social Model is a positive approach to disability, which focuses on removing barriers to equality. The Council is committed to the removal of all such barriers to its services.

2.2 The Education Directorate's vision is for an inclusive, equitable and positive education experience for all disabled learners. This is underpinned by the belief that all children are different, learn differently, and should have full access to the same curriculum.

2.3 Learners with disabilities are not expected to adjust to a fixed education structure. The structure should be adjusted to ensure everyone's learning styles and needs are met. Barriers to learning are removed to allow each learner to participate fully in the curriculum and school life and to feel equally valued.

2.4 The Education Directorate recognises:

- that disabled learners face particular challenges which risk their marginalisation from education and their local community, from future employment opportunities and from enjoying a social life;
- that disparities remain between the attainment of disabled people and non-disabled people;
- the impact of intersectionality where people who share more than one protected characteristic are at risk of multiple disadvantage, inequity, discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- entrenched, systemic, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours can present the greatest challenge;
- the need for an assets-based approach that values the knowledge and lived experience of the child and family alongside the expertise of the school, where together positive change can be achieved;
- the connection between disability and poverty; and
- that disabled children are more likely to be victims of crime.

2.5 The overarching aim of this Strategy is therefore to improve the levels of presence, participation and achievement of children and young people

with disabilities in Swansea. This aligns with the Swansea Council Vision and the associated well-being objective for education.

3. Swansea's Draft Strategy

- 3.1 The draft Accessibility Strategy 2024-2027 has been developed through a co-production approach. The views of learners and parents have been incorporated as well as the views of education and other local authority officers and groups who have a specific interest. The draft Strategy is now subject to wider, public consultation before final publication.
- 3.2 The Strategy sets out the vision, values and roles and responsibilities of the local authority and schools in respect of planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils. The document also identifies some priorities for improvement during the timespan of the Strategy.
- 3.3 These improvements are specifically linked to the three planning duties, however, there were also some general issues that were identified, mainly around compliance.
- 3.4 The three planning duties focus on increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum, improving the physical environment of schools for disabled learners and improving access to written information provided by the school for disabled learners.

4. Priorities for Improvement

- 4.1 The priorities for improvement set out clearly within our draft Strategy are listed below with further detail available in the main document.
- 4.2 General compliance:
 - Produce comprehensive guidance for schools on developing accessibility plans that: affirms the definition of disability; clearly outlines statutory responsibilities; puts children's rights at the centre and ensures improvements are based on the views of those with lived experience.
 - Review and improve the information and training available to governors, headteachers/senior leaders, premise managers and ALNCOs with respect of the above.
 - Seek to improve attitudes towards disability through promoting an assets-based approach, that also tackles discrimination and ableist microaggressions.
 - Widen the scope of the 'diversifying governing bodies' workstream to incorporate increasing the number of governors who identify as disabled.
 - Continue to facilitate effective and meaningful participation of disabled learners and their parent carers in shaping accessibility improvements.

- 4.3 Planning Duty 1: Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school curriculum:
- Review and further expand the professional learning offer to ensure it meets the wide scope of training needs for all groups of staff.
 - Develop guidance for schools on reasonable adjustments for trips and residential.
 - Develop guidance, including examples of good practice, for inclusive PE/sport.
 - Enhance the knowledge and use of assistive technology through implementation of the Digital Strategy.
- 4.4 Planning Duty 2: Improving the Physical Environment of Schools for Disabled Learners:
- Develop an easy-to-use audit tool for all schools to use to support their proactive planning for improvement of the physical environment, include accessibility at kerbside.
 - Improve the system for identifying and prioritising accessibility improvements across the school estate that uses the access audit as a basis and has specified timescales to support a more strategic use of smaller capital grants.
 - Explore the potential for improving accessibility at kerbside with the Highways Team.
 - Build a new build special school with 21st century specialist facilities, improved learning environments and increased places.
 - Consider incorporating a central equipment repository into the new special school build that supports a more cost-effective re-use/recycling of equipment.
- 4.5 Planning Duty 3: Improving Access to Written Information Provided by the School for Disabled Learners:
- The key issues identified indicate a need for further teacher training which has been identified as a priority under planning duty 1.

5. Preparation and Consultation

- 5.1 A core group of education officers was established to plan and develop the draft strategy which has been largely informed by the outcome of an initial scoping exercise.
- 5.2 The purpose of the scoping exercise was to identify views, issues and barriers from a range of key stakeholders in order to identify areas for improvement. The views of disabled learners and parent carers have been central to shaping this strategy.
- 5.3 Information was gathered from:
- schools via submission of their current accessibility plan or completion of a questionnaire;

- disabled learners via completion of a Word or Microsoft Forms questionnaire either independently or with support, eg from an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo);
 - parents of disabled learners via the Parent Carers forum via a small focus group and completion of a Word or Microsoft Forms questionnaire; and
 - education Officers via completion of a Word or Microsoft Forms questionnaire and through more informal discussion.
- 5.4 Once approved by Cabinet a full statutory consultation will take place on the draft Strategy.
- 5.5 The full strategy will be available in Welsh and English as will be an Easy Read version. In addition, the Easy Read version will be translated into around 10 community languages.
- 5.6 The public consultation will be promoted through schools, headteacher groups and to other key organisations/forums particularly those with direct links with disability. It will also be available on the Council's website.
- 5.7 The Easy Read version will be used to develop a questionnaire for learners. ALNCOs will be encouraged to feedback and to also support the voice of disabled learners within their schools.
- 5.8 A small focus group will be held with the Parent Carer ALN forum and the questionnaire/consultation distributed through this group.

6. Timeline

- 6.1 Subject to the agreement of Cabinet it is proposed that the consultation on the draft Accessibility Strategy will commence on Monday 8th April 2024 and conclude on Friday 24th May 2024.
- 6.2 A report would then be prepared for further consideration and the Accessibility Strategy would be taken to full Council for approval in July 2024.

7. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 7.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

7.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

7.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

7.2 In order to comply with the relevant regulations an IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required because at this stage the report is seeking permission to consult.

7.3 The UNCRC is relevant to this report as the Strategy will be a key driver for improving the lives of disabled children and young people. It is considered that the improvements this Strategy advocates for will support the Council's commitment to the UNCRC.

7.4 Welsh Language Standards have been considered and any improvements resulting from this consultation and subsequent strategy will aim to strengthen the Council's commitment to the Welsh language.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the report at the present time. However, revenue and capital improvements, if implemented, could fall to future schools', education or wider local authority budgets and will have to be considered within the context of the overall financial envelope.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report at the present time. The draft Accessibility Strategy for Schools has been prepared in accordance with the Council's statutory duty under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010. Cabinet is being asked to approve the draft strategy

for consultation at this stage, in accordance with Welsh Government statutory guidance 'Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils' 2018, to ensure that the views of key stakeholders are properly taken into account before the final strategy is adopted by Council. The strategy will provide a framework for meeting the Council duties under the Equality and Education Acts to ensure that the accessibility and inclusion needs of disabled pupils are being properly met.

Background Papers:

[planning-to-increase-access-to-schools-for-disabled-pupils.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Accessibility Strategy

Appendix B – IIA Screening Form

Appendix C – Draft Accessibility Strategy Easy Read Version