

Dorset Children's Services Accessibility Strategy

2022-2025



Introduction

This is our Children's Services Accessibility Strategy for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025.

It sets out our vision for children and young people with disabilities and what we will do to help make our schools and educational settings more accessible for them.

The Accessibility Strategy links closely to our [SEND Strategy 2021 – 24](#) and our [SEND Capital Strategy 2020 - 2025](#). It sits under our [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020 – 23](#).

As part of this strategy, we will also look at what we can do to influence accessibility considerations in the wider community of Dorset for our children and young people with disabilities.

Our vision for children and young people with disabilities

Our vision for children and young people with disabilities is clear and focused.

We want them to be healthy, happy, and safe and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life.

We want to raise their aspirations, and for them to have, and to expect the same opportunities in life as other children and young people.

We also want them to be aware of and understand their rights under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and for these rights to be met.

This all stems from our wider vision which we set out in our [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020 – 23](#). **We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where our:**

- communities thrive
- families are supported to be the best they can be
- children and young people receive the best education
- young people are prepared for independence and adulthood
- children and young people experience the best possible health and wellbeing

Read our [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020 – 23](#) to find out more about our vision for children and young people in Dorset.

How we developed this strategy

In Dorset, we put children and families at the heart of everything we do. This is one of our shared values and principles. Read our [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020-23](#) to find out more about our shared values and principles.

To develop this strategy, we:

- asked our children and young people with disabilities what they feel is working well and what is not working so well in education
- asked their parents and carers for their views via surveys and online forums
- asked staff in early years settings, schools and colleges for their views about making education more accessible
- looked at national research about the issues that children and young people with disabilities and their families face when trying to access education
- looked at the data we hold about our children and young people with disabilities and what this tells us, so that we can focus on the right areas going forwards
- worked with colleagues across Children's Services to gather information about what we currently offer and what we are developing for the future
- consulted with our partner agencies, such as the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the voluntary and community sector



What accessibility means

In general, accessibility is about making sure a person is not excluded from something because of their disability.

It is about removing barriers so that someone with a disability can do what they need to, in a similar amount of time and effort as someone who does not have a disability. **Barriers might include:**

- physical barriers, such as buildings not having ramps or a lift
- other people's attitudes, for example, assuming people with disabilities can't do certain things
- systemic barriers, such as policies which result in people with disabilities being treated differently or sometimes excluded altogether
- communication barriers, for example, not being able to receive or understand information that is available to others

Removing barriers empowers people with disabilities and helps them to be as independent as possible.

In this strategy, we are primarily focusing on accessibility within education. We want to remove any barriers so that our children and young people with disabilities are fully included and involved in their school or setting, and able to take part in the wide range of activities on offer. We will also look at how we can influence accessibility considerations in the wider community of Dorset.

What disability means

The Equality Act 2010 says that someone has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Disability is a **protected characteristic** under the Equality Act. This means that the Local Authority and education settings have legal obligations towards disabled children and young people. **We:**

- must not directly or indirectly discriminate against, harass or victimise disabled children and young people
- must not discriminate for a reason related to a child or young person's disability
- must make **reasonable adjustments**, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services

Links to special educational needs

The definition of disability is different to that for special educational needs.

The Children and Families Act 2014 says that a child or young person has special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

Some children and young people may have a disability without having special educational needs. Others may also have special educational needs.

You can find out more about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) on our [Local Offer](#).

Why we have an Accessibility Strategy

We have a duty under the [Equality Act](#) to write an Accessibility Strategy in relation to our schools. It must focus on how we will:

- a) increase the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can take part in the curriculum
- b) improve the physical environment so that children and young people with disabilities can take advantage of the education, benefits, facilities, and services offered
- c) improve the delivery of information for children and young people with disabilities

Schools also have a duty under the [Equality Act](#) to write an **Accessibility Plan** which covers the same points as above. This can usually be found on the school's website or by asking the school for a copy.

Early years settings and Further Education (FE) colleges do not have to write an Accessibility Plan, but they do have to make reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disabilities.



Reasonable adjustments

If the Local Authority or an education setting does something that places a child or young person with a disability at a substantial disadvantage to others, we must take reasonable steps to overcome this. This is known as our duty to make reasonable adjustments. **Examples include:**

- providing worksheets in a larger font for a child with a visual impairment
- rest breaks for a young person who experiences fatigue
- extra support from a Teaching Assistant or Specialist Teacher
- a specialist chair or IT equipment
- allowing extra time to complete tasks

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory. This means thinking in advance about what we can do to help children and young people with disabilities.

Overall, there are three key requirements of the duty to make reasonable adjustments, relating to:

- provisions, criteria, and practices, for example, the way things are done, how resources are allocated and day to day practices
- physical features, for example, the building or environment
- auxiliary aids and services, for example, equipment or people that provide help

The physical features element does not apply to schools because they must already consider this through their Accessibility Plan. However, it does apply to early years settings (which are not part of a school) and FE colleges.



What we hope to achieve

Through the work of this Accessibility Strategy, we hope that in the future, our children and young people with disabilities, and their families will say:

- we are welcomed and included in our school or setting and the wider community
- we can access the full curriculum, including additional activities and trips
- the physical environment is suitable for our disabilities
- written information is provided in a format that is accessible to us
- reasonable adjustments are provided in advance
- we are involved in discussions about the support we need
- we feel comfortable asking for help and know who to go to
- we are listened to and respected
- our needs are understood, acknowledged, and provided for
- we have access to good quality and impartial information, advice, and support
- we have regular communication that is tailored to our specific needs
- we can access a variety of activities in and outside of education
- we can access more social and leisure opportunities within our local community



What our children and young people have told us

Our support and advisory teams regularly use surveys to ask our children and young people with disabilities about their experiences at their school or setting.

Our children and young people with disabilities told us that having staff who were trained and understood their needs was important. They also said having a chance to talk about what they need and to talk through any concerns was helpful. **Other things that were helpful included:**

- adapting teaching to accommodate their disability
- being seated in a good position in the classroom for their disability, for example, close to the whiteboard or near the door
- appropriate technology or equipment to support their needs
- good teachers and support from specialist teachers who understood their disability
- having a supportive friendship group and a place to 'hang out'
- materials being provided in an accessible format for them
- being able to take part in social activities and after school clubs
- exam preparation and knowing about adjustments for exams



We also asked our children and young people with disabilities what isn't working so well at their school or education setting. **Some of their comments included:**

"I can hear loud and clear over noise but only if the teacher wears the radio aid properly. I find it distracting if it is not muted at the right times"

"I don't like going to the canteen; when it's busy, I feel vulnerable and I am small. I can't always see where I am going"

"With the classrooms the door is really close to the tables; it's hard to get in with my chair and even harder to get out. I have to move a chair for my wheelchair – all of this is hard work and very embarrassing"

"I hate the fact there is no menu and I can't plan my day - this makes me anxious"

"They don't tell me which Teaching Assistants are going to be helping in what class and sometimes I don't have one at all"

Some of our children and young people with disabilities told us that they found crowds difficult

and outside of school, they liked venues that offered quiet times, for example, at the cinema.

We asked our children and young people with disabilities what they would like in the future.

They suggested:

- more staff being aware of their disability
- other pupils understanding their disability
- other accessible formats, for example, large print books and music braille
- more trips and activities and for these to be better advertised
- opportunities to learn independent living skills, such as such as buying food, cooking and storing food and cleaning and washing clothes

In November 2021, Healthwatch Dorset published a Young Listeners report, [Bringing positive change to young people's health and care services](#). Young people in Dorset told the researchers about their experiences of using health and social care services, and the barriers and challenges they faced. **The findings of this report are helpful for this Accessibility Strategy, particularly the recommendations which include:**

- improving communication
- providing more information and promoting this widely, including in schools
- using clear and appropriate language
- listening to young people
- personalising services to the individual
- training for staff

Through our [Children, Young People and Families Plan 2020 – 23](#), our children and young people have also told us that they want opportunities to get involved in positive activities in their communities. They want access to play opportunities, outside spaces and outdoor learning. Young people with physical disabilities have told us that they can miss out on accessing Dorset's countryside and beaches and can find it difficult to get around.



What our parents and carers have told us

We conducted a SEND survey in spring 2021 which asked parents and carers what they would like to see in place to help them and their children in the future. **Responses included:**

- more support from schools to have equal access to an education
- specialist support, especially for mental health
- help to know what support is available
- more opportunities and activities
- more staff training to understand needs and conditions

Read our [Parent and carer SEND survey findings and next steps](#) for more information.

We also conducted an accessibility survey in spring 2022 to help inform this strategy. Of the parents and carers who took part, 56% were not aware that the Local Authority had to write an Accessibility Strategy or that schools had to produce an Accessibility Plan.

Parents and carers were most confident that schools and settings delivered information in a way that their child understood. But they were least confident that schools and settings helped children and young people to access the curriculum.

When asked how well disability is represented and celebrated at their child's school or setting, the average score was 3.56, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). However, 53% of parents and carers scored either 4 or 5 on this scale.

55% of parents and carers felt their child was given regular opportunities to provide feedback to school or setting but 28% of these same parents and carers felt such opportunities could be improved.

65% of parents and carers said that they knew who to ask for help about making their child's school or setting more accessible.

We asked what works well to help their child take part and feel included in their school or setting. We also asked what is not working well. **Parents and carers told us:**



Parent and carer views on inclusion in school or setting life

What works well	What is not working well
Welcoming and inclusive attitudes where all achievements are celebrated	Not always feeling welcome
Knowledgeable and trained staff	Concerns about staff awareness and training
Differentiated class work and different learning opportunities	Worries about whether differentiation and reasonable adjustments are made
Good communication and planning	Concerns around communication and planning
Opportunities to take part in all activities	Worries about the support available
A suitable environment	Concerns about environments and facilities not being suitable
Good friendships	Worries that their views or those of relevant professionals are not heard

We also asked what works well and helps their child to get involved and take part in activities in their local community. We also asked what is not working well. **Parents and carers told us:**

Parent and carer views on inclusion in the local community

What works well	What is not working well
Good communication, e.g. regular emails and newsletters about what is available	Not knowing where to find information about what is available or who can access this
Staff being patient and understanding	Concerns about people not understanding different disabilities and how to support these
Suitable short breaks	Feeling that there is a limited choice of activities in Dorset or that activities are unsuitable for their child
Having community groups that their child can attend	Activities being too far to travel and/or being held at an unsuitable time
Availability of holiday clubs and activities	Concerns that facilities are not available for children and young people with disabilities
Friendly and welcoming attitudes	Concerns about written information not being accessible

We also asked parents and carers for their views about changing places toilets, as part of a bid process, in August 2021. Changing places toilets are larger accessible toilets for people with severe disabilities. We asked what more public changing places toilets would mean for families in Dorset. Responses included:

"It would mean the possibility to go to more places for longer with my child. It would mean not having to change him in the back of our van or on the ground outside where every member of the public can watch and stare."

"Having changing places toilets would mean that disabled people, young and older, could enjoy something as simple as going to shops in town or out with their family without the real worry if they need to use the toilet, which often prevents people from going out or where they can go. So, it would hugely improve quality of life for the disabled person and their family too and make going to places accessible."



What schools, early years settings and colleges have told us

We also undertook an accessibility survey of Dorset schools and settings, for this strategy, in spring 2022. Of the schools and settings who took part, 76% were aware that the Local Authority had to write an Accessibility Strategy and that schools had to produce an Accessibility Plan.

Schools and settings felt most confident in being able to increase access to the curriculum for children and young people with disabilities. But they felt least confident at making written information more accessible. This was followed closely by their confidence in improving the physical environment.

When asked how well disability was represented and celebrated at their school or setting, the average score was 3.41, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). 43% of schools and settings felt disability was well represented and celebrated at their school or setting (scoring this 4 or 5) and 48% indicated that this was fair (scoring 3).

We asked what our schools and settings what they feel is working well to help child and young people with disabilities take part and feel included at their school or setting. We also asked what is not working well. **They told us:**

Views from schools and settings about inclusion

What works well

Inclusive attitudes, ethos and culture - children and young people having full access to school or setting life and high aspirations for all

Making sure the child or young person is involved and their voice is heard

Knowledgeable, trained staff and raising awareness of disability amongst pupils through assemblies

Adaptations, adjustments and equipment are provided when needed

Good links with professionals and regular meetings with parents

What is not working well

Inaccessible environments, especially in older buildings and particularly around wheelchair access and poor acoustics

Financial challenges

Making sure that all staff are aware of different children and young people's needs

Difficulty finding appropriate trips and outings and knowing how to adapt certain lessons, for example, PE for pupils with physical difficulties

Difficulties accessing support from professionals, or having to wait a long time for this

Our schools and settings told us that they would like more clarity around funding to support children and young people with disabilities, more training courses for staff and help to build awareness of disabilities.

Our data

We regularly gather data about children and young people with disabilities in Dorset. This helps us to reflect on our performance and consider how we can improve services.

For this strategy, we looked at data from the annual school census, national statistics for [SEND in England](#) and our own reports and records. Much of this data reflects the number of children and young people in Dorset with SEND. This is because schools and education settings do not have to report separately on disability.

Children and young people who have SEND are normally supported at SEN Support and sometimes through an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan.

SEN Support is a category of support. Children and young people in this category are identified by their school or education setting. They receive extra help called special educational provision. Most children and young people with SEND have their needs met through this category.

An Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is for the smaller number of children and young people who need more help than can be given at SEN Support. The EHC Plan describes their special educational, health and care needs. It sets outcomes to help the child or young person learn and be ready for the next stage of education, or adulthood.

You can read more about SEN Support and EHC Plans on our [Local Offer](#).

Some of the terms used for our data reflect those that are widely used in education. Parents and carers may use different terms. Use the [SEND Family Support Jargon Buster](#) to help you understand some of the terms people might use when talking about SEND.



What our data tells us

We know that approximately 8% of children and young people in the UK have a disability. This figure was reported in the Family Resources Survey 2018/19 which was carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office for National Statistics.

In Dorset, just over 1,100 children up to the age of 18 years, were registered as having a disability on [The Xchange](#), in March 2022. The Xchange is a news and information network for families with children and young people who are disabled in the Dorset Council area. However, this figure only represents the number of families who have signed up to The Xchange.

The families who have signed up to [The Xchange](#) live across Dorset but the largest proportions are in our Chesil Locality (covering Weymouth and Portland) and our North Locality. This is followed by families living in our East Locality.

The types of disabilities experienced by children and young people registered with [The Xchange](#) are broad and varied. They include learning difficulties, physical difficulties and hearing and visual impairments. Many have an Autistic Spectrum Condition and a slightly smaller number have behavioural, or social, emotional and mental health needs.

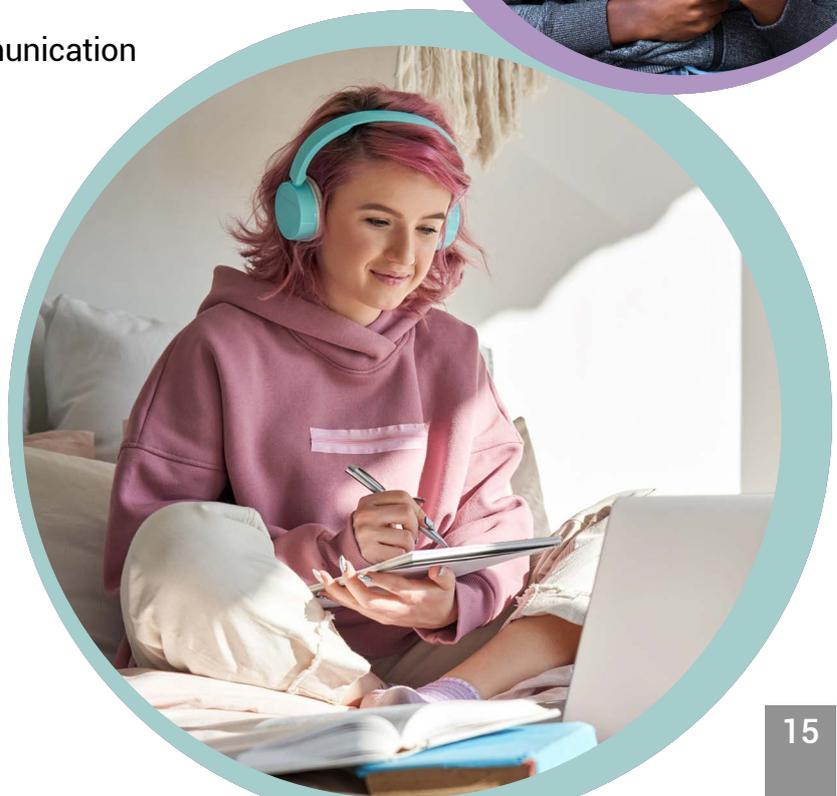
Children and young people aged 0 – 19 years represent 20% of the total population of Dorset. Approximately 14% of our children and young people access SEN Support and nearly 4% are supported through an EHC Plan at their school or education setting.

In Dorset, the most common types of need at SEN Support are:

- Specific Learning Difficulties
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

In Dorset, the most common types of need with an EHC Plan are:

- Autistic Spectrum Condition
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs



The age group with the largest proportion of children and young people at both SEN Support and an EHC Plan, is 7 to 11 years. This is followed by those aged 16 to 25 years, and then 11 to 14 years with an EHC Plan. At SEN Support, the second largest group is those aged 11 to 14 years.

Our Chesil Locality has the largest proportion of children and young people at SEN Support or with an EHC Plan; this is followed by our North Locality and then our East Locality.

In the 2020/21 financial year, 276 Dorset children and young people attended targeted **short breaks** activities and 44 received specialist short breaks, including overnight stays.

Targeted short breaks are for children or young people who need additional support. Families can self-refer for targeted **short breaks**.

Specialist short breaks are those where specialist groups or activities are provided to help children and young people with disabilities take part. Specialist short breaks can usually only be accessed through a referral process.

Of the short breaks provided during this period, 43% of the targeted short breaks and 38% of specialist short breaks were provided for children and young people with an Autistic Spectrum Condition.



Our schools and educational settings

We have over 320 early years providers in Dorset. These include nurseries, pre-schools, and registered childminders. Some of our nurseries and pre-schools are run by the private, voluntary, or independent sector whilst others are managed by a school.

We have 159 schools in Dorset. They are made up of a mixture of first, infant, junior, primary, middle, secondary, and upper schools. We also have one all through school.

We have two Further Education (FE) Colleges based in Dorset and 15 of our schools offer sixth form provision.

We are committed to inclusion in mainstream settings. We firmly believe every teacher is a teacher of SEND. As such, most children and young people with a disability will attend a local mainstream school. **Our SEND Strategy 2021 – 24 has a focus on:**

- building the capabilities of our mainstream schools to support more children and young people with SEND
- making sure more children can attend a local school

However, we also recognise that some children and young people with SEND require more specialist provision. In Dorset, we have four pupil referral units and six special schools. We also have 12 specialist resource provisions for children and young people with specific SEND, attached to a mainstream school. They cover a range of needs including complex communication needs, physical difficulties, and social, emotional, and mental health needs.

We are continuing to develop local SEND provision so that we can provide the best education for Dorset children and young people. **Our plans include:**

- creating new special schools
- expanding our existing special schools
- developing new facilities in our mainstream schools

You can read more about these plans in our [SEND Capital Strategy 2020 - 2025](#).



What we have done so far and the impact of this

In autumn 2021, we launched our guidance for schools about how to develop a good quality Accessibility Plan and keep this under review. This highlighted the need to involve children, young people and their families, and wider school staff, in this process. It also advocates:

- increasing staff awareness of disabilities
- promoting the participation of pupils with a disability in school life - including extra-curricular activities and school trips
- thinking about how the school is organised impacts on pupils with a disability
- considering outcomes for pupils with a disability
- the use of disabled role models in the curriculum

The guidance also included an accessibility audit pro-forma and a template Accessibility Plan for schools to use. It is available on [Nexus](#).

Examples of other work we have undertaken in line with the Accessibility Strategy can be found below:



Increasing access to the curriculum - Outreach Service

We fund our special schools to provide an [Outreach service](#) to our mainstream schools. An experienced special school teacher will support the mainstream school on how best to meet a child's needs. This service has been well received by mainstream schools. All reported an increase in knowledge and confidence and stated that this would have a positive impact on the child or young person, and the staff supporting them. **Mainstream schools commented:**

"There is no doubt that Outreach support benefits the individual child but also that it is more far reaching in building capacity to support other children in the future."

"The child is much happier coming into school. They have been bouncing in, in the mornings rather than dragging their feet as before. They are much happier to engage in group learning and are pleased with their own success."

"I think he now feels understood and supported and not singled out."

Increasing access to the curriculum - AV1 Distance Learning Robots

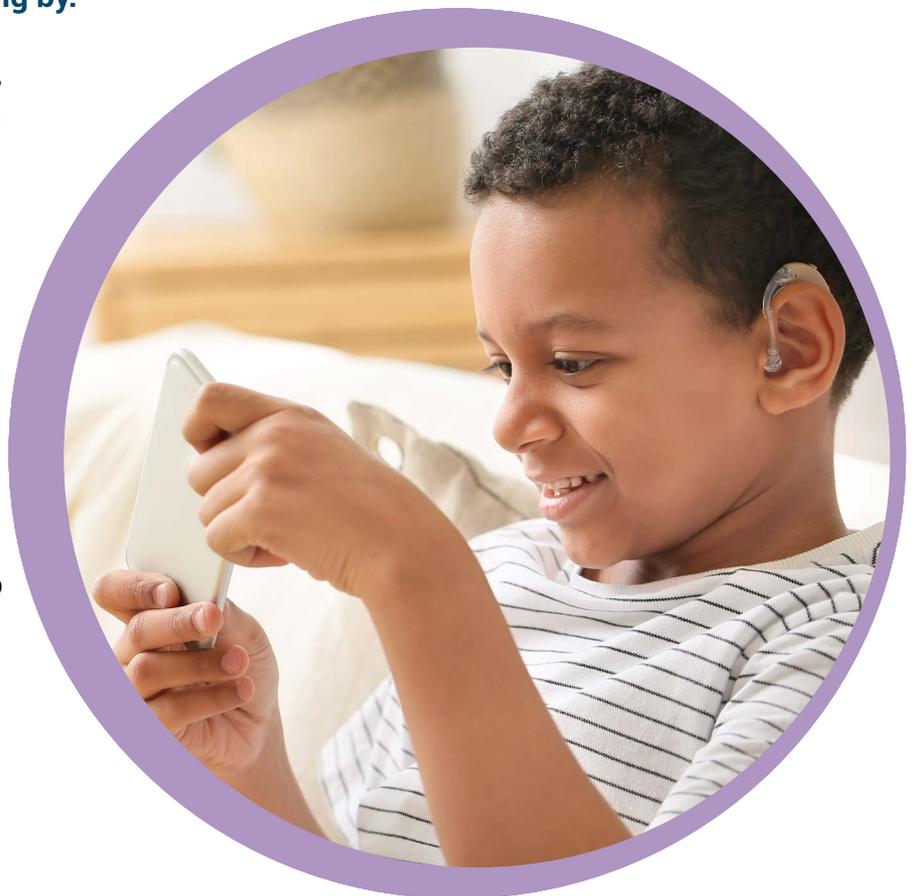
We have purchased several **AV1 distance learning robots** which are available for schools to hire. They sit in the classroom in the place of a child or young person and live stream the lesson to a device in the home. This means that children and young people can continue to take part in school life, even when they're physically unable to attend, for instance, when they are recovering from illness or surgery. **The AV1 robots are receiving positive reviews, with one school saying:**

"It allows students working from home to receive the same learning as students in the classroom in real time. They feel engaged with, and not removed from the traditional classroom environment. In turn, this makes a move back to the classroom at an appropriate time a smoother transition."

Improving the physical environment - Hearing Support Service Webinar

During the summer 2021, our Hearing Support Service held a deaf awareness webinar for schools and other educational settings. Improving the listening environment was a key topic. **Many of those who attended were keen to implement practical ways to make their classrooms more accessible following the training by:**

- introducing a quiet desk policy, for example, using cotton pads in pencil pots and equipment trays
- providing better lighting
- reducing echoes
- protecting chair legs to minimise environmental disturbance
- shutting windows and doors to reduce background noise



Improving the physical environment - Assets and Property Service

Our Assets and Property Service work with Dorset maintained schools to organise higher cost accessibility adaptations. **Recent works include:**

1. Installing a changing facility within a primary school for a child with physical difficulties. This involved repurposing an area of the school to create a fully accessible changing space, with adequate room for staff to support the child
2. Fixing acoustic panels to classrooms and common areas of a first school, to minimise background noise and create a good listening environment for a child with a hearing impairment
3. Adding an external ramp to a modular unit at a primary school to ensure a child who is a wheelchair user can access the lessons that take place in that classroom

These adaptations have all meant that the individual child can attend their local school and have their needs met. It has also resulted in the schools being more accessible for future pupils and staff.

Making written information more accessible - Vision Support Service

Dorset Council's **Vision Support Service** work with children and young people with moderate to profound vision impairments. They offer advice and support to children and young people, their families, and schools and other settings.

They have recently been working with a child in Year 3 who is registered as partially sighted. He attends his local primary school. The school sought their advice as they wanted to know more about modifying his work and resources.

The Vision Support Service loaned the school a visualiser (a desktop magnifier). This allowed the child to view things in the distance on a screen on his desk, to access his learning electronically and in the correct format to meet his needs. Training was also provided for staff at the school. The school were signposted to providers of resources such as adapted exercise books and large font reading books.

As a result of this, the child is now accessing appropriate resources, is independently using his visualiser, and is keeping up with the pace of lessons, which he was finding difficult before. He is also making academic progress.



Making written information more accessible - Specialist Teacher Training Sessions

Our Specialist Teachers offer a variety of training opportunities to schools from webinars to twilight sessions. These cover a range of disabilities such as autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, behaviour needs and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

They also provide whole school training days to schools setting up resource provisions. A recent training day focused on complex communication needs. Many of those who attended were keen to adapt their written information and provide visual aids following the training.

They advised they would:

- use symbols on worksheets
- create daily visual timetables
- simplify resources when planning lessons
- speak to children and young people to plan which visual aids to use
- add icons on 'to do' slides in presentations
- use more visuals in displays



What we are going to do

We have identified four key priorities within this Accessibility Strategy that we will focus on over the next three years:

1. Increase the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can take part in the curriculum
2. Improve the physical environment of schools and other education settings so that children and young people with disabilities can take advantage of the education, benefits, facilities, and services offered
3. Improve the delivery of information for children and young people with disabilities within schools and other education settings
4. Work with the wider council, partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector to:
 - a) raise awareness of barriers to accessibility
 - b) promote equity of opportunity for children and young people with disabilities
 - c) encourage building good relationships between children and young people who are disabled and those who are not

However, it should be noted that these priorities sit alongside and complement those that are set out in our [SEND Strategy 2021-24](#).

Read on to find out how we plan to meet our priorities.



Priority one: Increase the extent to which children and young people with disabilities can take part in the curriculum

To achieve this priority, we will:

- promote the local authority guidance for schools about how to develop good quality Accessibility Plans, which include a focus on increasing access to the curriculum
- ask our support and advisory services to refer to the school's Accessibility Plan when discussing how to meet the ongoing needs of individual children and young people with disabilities
- promote an inclusive and flexible response to SEND through the [Dorset Graduated Approach](#) in all our work with schools and settings
- use a person-centred approach in our work to focus upon the child or young person's gifts and skills as well as their needs, which helps to promote choice and control
- support our children and young people with disabilities and their families using a rights-based approach, ensuring consistency across services, and using a rights-respecting framework
- build accessibility planning into our Education and Inclusion Strategy
- provide support and advice services through local multi-disciplinary teams who can wrap around the child, young person, family, school or setting, to achieve the very best outcomes. These Locality Teams will include an Educational Psychologist, Specialist Teacher, SEN Provision Lead, SEN Family Worker and Inclusion Lead. This model allows us to be flexible so that we can deliver the support that is needed, where it is needed
- ensure our Locality Teams include an Early Years Support and Advice Officer and Portage Consultant to support our youngest children before they start school
- provide support for children and young people with hearing, vision, physical and medical needs through specialist services who can offer a range of interventions such as direct teaching, guidance on adapting the curriculum, developing communication skills, assistive technology, training and habilitation and mobility support
- develop Inclusion Hubs within mainstream primary and secondary schools to support children and young people with either communication and interaction needs or Social, Emotional and Health (SEMH) difficulties. Inclusion Hubs are Specially Resourced Provisions (SRP) which provide additional specialist facilities on a mainstream school site

- increase the number of young children with SEND accessing good quality early years and childcare places, so that they are ready to thrive when they move onto school, through our work with [Dingley's Promise](#)
- offer and/or promote training for schools and settings to help them better support children and young people with disabilities
- provide a consistent offer and range of services and interventions for emotional health and wellbeing, applying the [iThrive Framework](#)
- ensure our Outreach offer remains fit for purpose and has a positive impact on children and young people with disabilities being able to access the mainstream curriculum
- allocate funding for ICT and specialist equipment for individual children and young people with disabilities and ensure that schools and settings are familiar with the process for this, and their own responsibilities to provide auxiliary aids
- provide opportunities for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) to meet regularly, share good practice and keep up to date with new developments

Priority two: Improve the physical environment of schools and other education settings so that children and young people with disabilities can take advantage of the education, benefits, facilities, and services offered

To achieve this priority, we will:

- promote the local authority guidance for schools about how to develop good quality Accessibility Plans, which include a focus on improving the physical environment
- offer and/ or promote training to schools and settings to help them better support children and young people with disabilities by improving the physical environment
- provide recommendations on an individual case basis about how to improve the physical environment of the school or setting. This will be undertaken by our specialist teaching and advisory services and/ or in liaison with colleagues from NHS Children's Therapy Services
- provide clear guidance for all schools and settings about financial responsibilities for funding adaptations to accommodate children and young people with disabilities (see [Appendix A](#))
- work with the schools for which we are responsible, via our Assets and Property Services, to plan and procure any individual accessibility adaptations costing more than £2,500

Priority three: Improve the delivery of information for children and young people with disabilities within schools and other education settings

To achieve this priority, we will:

- promote the local authority guidance for schools about how to develop good quality Accessibility Plans, which include a focus on delivering information in a range of ways
- offer and/ or promote training to schools and settings to help them better support children and young people with disabilities by providing information in a range of ways
- provide specialist advice and guidance on an individual case basis (and where referral criteria are met) about delivering information in a range of ways to children and young people with disabilities
- publish an Education Services Brochure to provide a reminder to schools and settings about the advice and support services provided by the council, and how to access these
- use plain English in our communications and invest in accessible formats for future communications with children and young people and their families. We will also encourage our schools and settings to employ these formats
- provide an improved [Local Offer](#) which will support children, young people and their families to understand and navigate information to help support their needs
- monitor and adapt advice and support services for parents and carers of children and young people with emerging SEND, for example the [Dorset Education Advice Line](#) (DEAL) telephone advice line
- promote online services for children and young people to support good physical and mental health, for example [KOOOTH](#) and [ChatHealth](#)



Priority four: Work with the wider council, partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector to:

- a) raise awareness of barriers to accessibility
- b) promote equity of opportunity for children and young people with disabilities
- c) encourage building good relationships between children and young people who are disabled and those who are not

To achieve this priority, we will:

- share 'five principles to guide accessibility planning' (see [Appendix B](#)) with the wider council, our partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector
- encourage welcoming and inclusive communities, services, and businesses, where children and young people with disabilities can make friends and be included in community life
- promote a rights-based approach when working with children and young people with disabilities and their families, ensuring services are consistent in their offer and that they use a rights-respecting framework
- advocate for accessible parks and leisure facilities, beaches and countryside walks
- promote national disability campaigns through our media communications both internally and externally
- represent children and young people with disabilities in our communications and publications
- create training opportunities for our workforce to build skills and confidence to support children and young people with disabilities, and monitor uptake



- support our partners to offer consistent levels of training to their staff, particularly in the areas of autism and learning disabilities
- support our partners to create a suitably trained workforce to enable staff to make instant and reasonable adaptations to their behaviour and surroundings which will help a child or young person with a disability to feel included, welcomed, understood and supported
- provide input to the [All Age Autism Review](#) which aims to strengthen health care pathways and support for children and young people with neurodevelopmental disorders
- ensure that information on facilities, activities and opportunities for children and young people with disabilities is easily accessible and promoted well, including through social media, our [SEND newsletters](#) and partner or voluntary and community sector providers, for example, [Help and Kindness](#), a local community interest company
- encourage our post-16 providers, the supported employment service, and apprenticeship and traineeship providers, to learn about accessibility issues and how they can provide training opportunities and workplaces which offer meaningful work for young people with disabilities
- advocate for ensuring that children and young people's education, wellbeing and leisure needs are considered in any building and future housing developments
- publish more opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to get involved in their communities and to develop the skills to create change on issues that are important to them



Our expectations of schools and settings

Our expectations of schools and settings in relation to this Accessibility Strategy is that they:

- follow national and local guidance on meeting their duties as set out in the Equality Act towards children and young people with disabilities
- ensure their Accessibility Plans are forward thinking and relevant to their school and that they cover increasing access to the curriculum, improving the physical environment and improving the delivery of written information
- keep their Accessibility Plan under review and publish this on their school website
- make reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disabilities where they would otherwise be at substantial disadvantage
- undertake appropriate accessibility adaptations in liaison with their Property Surveyors (if a maintained setting) or Estates Manager (if an academy or voluntary aided school) and adhere to building regulations and Health and Safety requirements
- follow the advice set out in [Appendix A](#) regarding the funding of accessibility adaptations
- implement the recommendations of Accessibility Audit Reports conducted by NHS Children's Therapy practitioners, Hearing or Vision Support Officers, and other relevant services or professionals
- involve children and young people, and their parents and carers in decision making and keep them informed of progress
- implement the [Dorset SEN Graduated Approach](#)
- promote the view that SEND is everyone's business
- provide an inclusive and respectful culture within their setting, by raising awareness of disability issues amongst all children and young people, to better foster understanding and support for diversity
- are proactive in researching and using a range of accessible formats and communication techniques or technologies, seeking the advice of relevant professionals where necessary
- ensure staff undertake professional development training opportunities to better support children and young people with disabilities and actively seek these out
- ensure transitions are well planned for children and young people with disabilities
- apply funding fairly to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are appropriately supported
- actively promote and signpost families to events and activities in the community

How we will know if we have made a difference

We will use a range of measures to check whether this Accessibility Strategy is having a positive impact on children and young people with disabilities. **These measures include:**

- using surveys to ask children and young people about their views and levels of satisfaction on accessibility within their school or education setting
- using surveys to ask children and young people about their experience of accessibility within their community and about growing up in Dorset
- surveying awareness of the Accessibility Strategy and Accessibility Plans amongst parents and carers, and those working in schools and settings
- undertaking audits of school Accessibility Plans, to ensure that they are relevant and of high quality
- surveying confidence levels in our schools and settings about supporting children and young people with disabilities
- surveying the confidence levels of our parents and carers, about how well they feel the school or setting can meet their child's disability
- surveying how well disability is represented and celebrated in education, and whether this measure is increasing
- surveying whether children and young people with disabilities have regular opportunities to provide feedback about accessibility issues in education, and whether this is improving
- seeking the views of parents and carers, and schools and settings about what is working well to support children and young people with disabilities in education and the wider community, and what is not working so well
- assessing the impact of Inclusion Hubs on the child or young person's ability to remain in mainstream education, achieve the best possible outcomes and go on to a successful next step
- evaluating training provided to schools and settings about supporting children and young people with disabilities and whether this is likely to result in a positive impact on them
- investigating whether there are improvements in the employment and training opportunities for young people with SEND; we will do this by measuring a reduction in the number of young people with an EHC Plan who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

It should be noted that some of the above measures will also be reported on, in line with our [SEND Strategy 2021-24](#).

Monitoring and reviewing the Accessibility Strategy

The Accessibility Strategy falls under the responsibility of the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team.

An Action Plan will be developed to check progress on the measures outlined above. This will be reported on every six months.

The progress of this strategy will be reviewed at the Strategic Alliance Board for Children and Young People.

The information will be collated and presented by the Senior Advisor (Physical and Medical Needs Service).

The Accessibility Strategy will be kept under regular review and revised if necessary. It will be updated after 3 years.

Appendix A: Funding for adaptations to the physical environment of schools and other settings

All schools and settings – adaptations costing up to £2,500

In Dorset, all schools and settings are expected to fund accessibility adaptations to accommodate children and young people with disabilities, which cost up to £2,500.

Schools and settings should arrange for these adaptations to take place prior to child or young person's admission to the school or as soon as possible if they are already on roll.

If a school belongs to the Building Maintenance Indemnity Scheme (BMIS), their Dorset Council Regional Property Surveyor will be able to advise and help with these works.

Dorset maintained schools – adaptations costing more than £2,500

If the school is a Dorset Council maintained school, including a maintained foundation or voluntary controlled school, the council is financially responsible for the full costs of adaptations which cost more than £2,500. The council will usually organise these on behalf of the school.

Dorset Council will use the Schools Access Initiative (SAI) budget, which is part of the council's capital budget, to fund these works.

Where works are agreed as appropriate, the Dorset Council Assets and Property Team will usually lead on the project and liaise with the school or setting to agree what will happen and when. Works are typically undertaken during a school holiday period.

Academies and voluntary aided schools – adaptations costing more than £2,500

If the school is an academy or voluntary aided school, the academy trust or diocese is responsible for funding and organising accessibility adaptations that cost more than £2,500.

Department for Education (DfE) advice is that academies and voluntary aided schools may use their School Conditions Allocations (SCA) funding, bid for funding via the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) or use their Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) funding for this purpose.

The school's Estates Manager or equivalent person should be able to manage this process on behalf of the school.

Early years settings

Dorset Council has no responsibility to fund adaptations at early years settings unless they are a statutory part of a maintained school.

FE colleges

Dorset Council has no responsibility to fund accessibility adaptations at FE Colleges.

FE Colleges are responsible for the buildings and space they use for education and training and their governing bodies are responsible for the management of their estates.

FE Colleges can use capital funding to repair, upgrade or expand their buildings, facilities and equipment.

Process

All schools and settings are expected to undertake general accessibility audits themselves; this is not the role of the Local Authority. The Dorset Council guidance for schools regarding Accessibility Plans contains an includes an audit tool for this purpose.

Where an individual child or young person with a disability requires adaptations in order to access a school or setting successfully, a site visit will normally be undertaken by someone already working with them.

This might be someone from NHS Children's Therapy Services, the Hearing Support Service, the Vision Support Service or the Physical & Medical Needs Service. A representative from the Assets and Property Team may also attend.

An Accessibility Visit Report will be written by the relevant service following the visit. This will be shared with the school and the Assets & Property Team.

For maintained and voluntary controlled schools, the Assets & Property Team will determine whether the recommended works can be undertaken. **Factors considered during this decision-making process include:**

- evidence of need
- how effective the adaptation would be at overcoming disadvantage
- cost
- feasibility
- other alternatives
- whether it is the catchment school
- proximity of alternative accessible schools
- the impact on others

If SAI funding is agreed, the Assets & Property Team will manage the works and keep the school and relevant services informed of when these are due to take place.

If funding is not agreed, the Assets & Property Team will liaise with the services working with the child or young person about next steps.

Decisions for academies and voluntary aided schools will be made by the academy trust or the diocese.

Appendix B: Five principles to guide accessibility planning

1. **Increase awareness of disabilities and remove barriers to accessibility** by providing training and regular updates for all staff; this could be online or in-person training and could involve local disability groups or representatives
2. **Involve those with disabilities in the work that you are doing or the services you offer;** listen to their views about what works well and what does not and ask for their views on how to make improvements. Use their lived experience to inform your work or services
3. **Ensure that children and young people (or adults) with disabilities have access to the right support and/ or aids** in order to access your service, whether this be in the form of specialist equipment or help from a member of staff. Be willing to adapt for individual circumstances
4. **Communicate in a manner which everyone can understand;** use simple and clear language in written communications, provide text to speech options and consider the use of pictures and symbols to aid communication. Advertise services as widely as possible using forums which those with disabilities, or their families, regularly access
5. **Represent children and young people (and adults) with disabilities** in any resources or materials you provide; this helps those with disabilities to feel included and increases awareness amongst those who do not have a disability

