REPORT TO: **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE –
18 AUGUST 2003**

REPORT ON: **ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

REPORT NO: **549-2003**

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report seeks approval for the Education Department's first Accessibility Strategy, covering the period 2003-2006. The preparation of the strategy is a duty placed on all education authorities under the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

    i.   approve the Accessibility Strategy for implementation in all Dundee schools; and

    ii.   instruct the Director of Education to monitor carefully the implementation of the strategy, ensuring that it remains compatible with other corporate and health plans.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The Scottish Executive included within its 2003/04 Finance settlement an unhypothecated sum of £9m and therefore no specific provision was made in the Education Department's 2003/04 Revenue Budget. For the financial years 2004/05 and 2005/06, the Scottish Executive increased the Accessibility monies within the Finance Settlement by £8m and this was ring-fenced and has been included as new monies, and will be included in the Education Department's 2004/05 and 2005/06 Revenue Budget. The Executive has however made clear that other sources of funding must be identified to assist implementation. These will include the planned maintenance programme for schools, and other government monies such as the National Priorities Action Fund.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 These developments will extend support to improve access to the skills, knowledge and information needed to enable pupils with disabilities to play a full part in society.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 These developments will improve the quality of access to educational opportunities for pupils with disabilities in Dundee.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Education authorities have a duty under the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002 to prepare and implement accessibility strategies to improve, over time, access to education for pupils, and prospective pupils, with disabilities. The first strategy covers the period 2003-2006.

6.2 The Education Department set up a planning group comprising staff and pupil representatives from the department and schools, from other relevant departments in the Council, and from appropriate external partners representing health and parent groups, to develop the first strategy.

6.3 The overriding goals of the legislation are to ensure that disabled pupils, irrespective of their disability, are treated no less favourably in schools, and that all reasonable steps are taken to avoid placing them at any disadvantage. It is the aim of the Accessibility Strategy to achieve these goals in three distinct areas: access to the physical environment; access to the curriculum; and communication with pupils with disabilities.

6.4 Since 1996 the Education Department has audited provision for disabled pupils in all mainstream primary and secondary schools, and as a result has had a rolling programme of adaptations to ensure barrier-free or accessibility status. At April 2003 25% of mainstream establishments, including the nursery sector, were deemed to be barrier-free, i.e. the buildings were fully accessible.

6.5 In addition strategies and policies in recent years have been approved which have greatly improved access to the curriculum for pupils with disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorder and sensory impairments. These strategies have included the provision of necessary resources, including staff and specialist equipment.

7.0 PROPOSALS

7.1 The Executive fully recognises the enormity of the task facing Councils in fully achieving the goals of the legislation, and therefore expects Councils to put in place both short-term and long-term action plans.

7.2 It is proposed that the planning group should remain established to monitor the implementation of the first strategy and simultaneously to plan the succeeding strategy for the period 2006-2009.

7.3 The Department has prepared a Good Practice Guide to accompany the strategy, which will assist property officers and school managers by establishing the criteria to be considered in any maintenance or repair discussions.

7.4   As well as ongoing school audits the Department will continue to take account of the needs of individual children from their earliest contact with education, and will endeavour to ensure that they are able to attend their community school at all stages.

8.0   CONSULTATION

8.1   This report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive (Finance), and the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services).

9.0   BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

Anne Wilson
Director of Education

31st July 2003

Dundee City Council Education Department

Accessibility Strategy

2003-2006

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   This document is the first Dundee City Council Education Department's Accessibility Strategy. It has been developed in response to new legislation and spans the three-year period from April 1st 2003 to March 31st 2006. The strategy has been developed by a multi-agency Accessibility Strategy Planning Group:

Moira Bissett, Parent to Parent
Yvonne Carling, Education Officer (Chair)
Derek Currie, Property Services Co-ordinator
James Currie, Planning Officer, Social Work Department
Maria Docherty, Head Occupational Therapist
Bernadette Farquharson, Pre-School Home Visiting Service
Gavin Heron, Head Boy, St John's High School
John Hunter, Head Teacher, Grove Academy
Margaret McBennett, Head Teacher, Our Lady's Primary School
Ann Miller, Support for Learning Officer
Don Ritchie, Assistant Property Services Co-ordinator
Dorothy Wilson, Architect/Access Officer, Architects' Department
Margaret Wilson, Head of Multi-Sensory Service
Gail Young, Development Manager, Local Health Care Co-operative

1.2   On-going review and evaluation by the planning group between 2003 and 2006 will form the basis of the development of Dundee City Council Education Department's Accessibility Strategy for the following three-year period from April 1st 2006 to March 31st 2009.

1.3   The Accessibility Strategy is in place so that the planning and implementation processes of the local authority and education department meet the requirements of sections 1 to 3 of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002. The Act also requires that there are mechanisms in place for long-term strategic planning to improve access in schools for all pupils with disabilities. The Accessibility Strategy will:

- improve access to education for its present and prospective pupils with disabilities in mainstream schooling;
- outline the planning, targets and expected outcomes over the next three years with regard to accessibility for pupils across its schools; and
- assist with the authority's obligations to provide equality of employment to disabled staff under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part II as well as improve access under Part III of the Act where schools' premises are used to provide public services as opposed to school education.

1.4   The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) Act expects all authorities to have plans in place for their pupils with disabilities to meet the duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The two key duties of this legislation are:

- not to treat disabled pupils less favourably; and

- to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage.

1.5   The Accessibility Strategy encompasses these two duties within three main elements:

- access to the physical environment
- access to the curriculum
- communication with pupils with disabilities

1.6   The Accessibility Strategy covers pupils with different types of disabilities and not only those defined by the Disability Discrimination Act. It includes the following broad groups of disabilities:

- communication difficulties
- hearing impairments
- specific learning difficulties
- visual impairments
- specific language impairment
- physical disabilities /motor impairments
- autistic spectrum disorder

2.0   DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

Definition of 'barrier-free'

2.1   For the purposes of this strategy the term 'barrier-free' refers to the access to the physical environment of the school. This includes the accessibility of school buildings, and entrances to the school outdoor facilities such as playing fields, to pupils in wheelchairs. Where a school is described as barrier-free the architectural planning for accessibility has included: the installation of ramps; handrails; widened doorways; lifts; automatic doors; accessible toilets, showers and changing areas; adapted/adjustable furniture and equipment ensuring sufficient space for manoeuvring and storing equipment; floor coverings; and evacuation procedures.

2.2   The barrier-free school is fully physically accessible to all pupils in wheelchairs. These include pupils who are non-weight bearing and require significantly adapted toilet facilities involving hoists and plinths, and where the assistance of two adults is necessary. Pupils with visual impairments access the physical environment in barrier-free schools by means of appropriate signage and route-finding systems, etc, while the installation of induction loops, adjustable lighting and sound insulation assists those with hearing impairments.

2.3   Education Department Development Plans since 1996 have had a rolling programme of improving the delivery of services to, and integrating, all pupils with disabilities. This has been done within the Special Educational Needs planning framework, and in line with Scottish Executive advice on national priorities for training professionals who work with pupils with special educational needs. While this has impacted on many areas of school activity,

there has been specific work around the three main elements of the legislation outlined in para. 1.5 above.

Access to the Physical Environment

2.4   Access audits of all Dundee City Council primary and secondary mainstream schools were undertaken in 1996, and determined to what extent schools were barrier-free within the terms of the definition.

2.5   The following schools in 1996 were judged to be fully barrier free: Craigie High School, Grove Academy, Menzieshill High School and Morgan Academy, all in the secondary sector; and Brackens, Newfields and Our Lady's primary schools.

2.6   A planned rolling programme of adaptations since 1996 has included: upgrading existing amenities; the installation of accessible toilets; ramping and therapy suites; and the installation of stair climbers. This has further improved the accessibility status of St John's High School and Lawside Academy to barrier-free for the full range of pupil disability.

2.7   Health professionals and specialist advisors undertake ongoing access audits of mainstream establishments in order to assess the accessibility of school premises for individual pupils, and these assessments continuously inform the department.

Access to the Curriculum

2.8   There has been significant progress in recent years in facilitating participation in the curriculum for various pupil groups with different types of disability. Strategies for the greater integration of pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, sensory impairment and English as a second language, have been developed over a period of several years. In particular, within the Departmental Development Plan, 1999-2002, these included:

2.9   Autistic Spectrum Disorder

• the establishment of 'autistic specific' environments in the primary and secondary sectors, which have enabled attendance and integration wherever possible into a mainstream school's curriculum and social programme; and
• the increased availability of auxiliary aids.

2.10   Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

• the appointment of specialist behaviour support staff to all schools;
• as part of a rolling programme, the provision and accommodation of a pupil support base for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in 50% of primary schools; and
• the establishment of School Referral Teams and the provision and accommodation of pupil support bases to maintain pupils in all secondary schools.

2.11   Sensory Impairment

- the development of team teaching in the nursery, P1 and P2 classes in the primary school Resourced Location for children with hearing impairment;
- the upgrading of specialist software to ensure the compatibility of home and school IT systems, and to facilitate the transfer of homework from school to home for visually impaired children; and
- the funding of IT licences for pupils' homes.

2.12   Out-of-school care clubs are supported by the Early Years and Child Care Partnership to increase their capacity to support pupils with various types of disability. Funding has been made available to voluntary groups in 2002-2003 to allow 55 pupils with varying disabilities to have access to a mainstream out-of-school care club.

Communication with Pupils

2.13   Individualised Educational Programmes are in place for all pupils with SEN, and wherever possible the pupils themselves discuss and agree targets and outcomes.

2.14   For pupils with English as an additional language the support of bilingual assistants in minority ethnic pupils' homes and schools is improving access to the curriculum for pupils and their parents. These bilingual assistants speak the main minority ethnic languages and are available to work with teachers, parents and pupils within and outwith the classroom.

2.15   Pupils in the authority who are hearing impaired now benefit from the use of sign language in their SQA exams.

2.16   A Deaf Resource Worker operates across the service with pupils, delivers sign language courses to staff and works with families in their homes.

2.17   All of these initiatives are supported by a comprehensive staff training and development strategy.

3.0   ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR THE ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY, 2003-2006

3.1   Priorities were established by the Planning Group following:

- consideration of the access audit of all schools (1996) and professional access audits of provision in secondary schools (2001);
- consideration of the individual needs of pupils and planning for improving their access to their community school;
- consideration of how planning for refurbishment of schools is presently undertaken as part of ongoing day-to-day repair and maintenance work, and whether improvements to access are carried out as part of this process;

- collation and analysis of appropriate information from the following groups through consultations both formal and informal:

  ➢ pupils and parents/carers
  ➢ Head Teachers
  ➢ health professionals
  ➢ social work services
  ➢ voluntary organisations
  ➢ architects and other design professionals and sources
  ➢ disabled staff group

4.0 SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR THE ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY, 2003-2006

Access to the physical environment

Short Term

4.1 A 'Good Practice Guide' is to be prepared for use between property and schools personnel, which will ensure audit criteria for physical access to schools are considered in discussions and decisions about maintenance, repair and alterations to premises.

4.2 The present school audit documentation will be enhanced, and improved specifications applied to include detailed aspects of accessibility to school premises.

4.3 A selective programme of installation of equipment in named schools will be established, determined by pupils' needs and their improved opportunities for local school attendance. Such equipment can include induction loops, adjustable work stations for practical subjects, and IT equipment for pupils with sensory impairment and learning difficulties.

Medium Term

4.4 In line with pupil need and destination forecasts the department should ensure building adaptations for identified schools. This will extend the existing complement of barrier-free schools and allow a broader range of opportunity for pupils to attend their local school.

Long Term

4.5 The proposed inclusion of professional Access Appraisals at Scheme and Detailed Design Stages of the PPP process will ensure 'Good Practice Guide' parameters are implemented.

Access to the curriculum

Short Term

4.6   The planned extension of 'autistic specific' environments in the mainstream primary and secondary sectors will be completed, offering specialist resources in three primary schools and two secondary schools.

4.7   A staff development programme is delivered to mainstream staff, strengthening the opportunities for curriculum access for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

4.8   The authority will develop further alternative means of access to curricular materials and information items for pupils.

Medium Term

4.9   The authority will ensure that all primary schools have the provision and accommodation for a pupil support base for pupils with SEBD.

Long Term

4.10   SEN support in schools will be extended to enable pupils with a greater range of disabilities to access the mainstream curriculum. It is intended that this development will complement the specialist provisions for supporting pupils via the forthcoming Coordinated Support Plans.

Improving communication

Short Term

4.11   Consideration will be given to establishing the post of Education Communication Worker within the sensory service staff complement for hearing impaired pupils.

4.12   Annual parental surveys will be translated into minority ethnic languages, ensuring improved access to communication and information for parents.

Medium Term

4.13   The authority will continue to support Pupil Councils as a feature of communication for all pupils in primary and secondary schools.

Long Term

4.14   The Department's Development Plan proposes that buddying and mentoring schemes in schools will develop over the next three years. We will ensure the inclusion and representation in these schemes of pupil groups with disabilities.

5.0   SPECIAL PROJECTS

5.1   A number of projects are in place as part of a drive to support the inclusion of pupils with disabilities:

'Understanding Disabilities'

5.2   Menzieshill High School has run this highly successful pilot programme, aimed at raising awareness among all school staff and pupils of the issues and challenges facing people with disabilities in many day-to-day situations. The programme is a result of professional collaboration between education and health colleagues, and the authority hopes to run it in other schools from session 2003-2004.

'Circle of Friends'

5.3   This is a group of volunteer pupils who have regularly met a pupil with disabilities, in order to plan and focus on ways to improve his experience. Obstacles and difficulties around inclusion are discussed and ways explored to overcome them.

5.4   Some schools presently have this kind of supportive pupil network in place, and we expect mechanisms such as Circle of Friends to feature within the person-centred planning approach, about which staff, parents and other professionals are currently receiving training.

6.0   LINKS WITH OTHER PLANS

6.1   The Accessibility Strategy is being developed in collaboration with other professional colleagues where partnership planning and delivery are essential. The context of this strategy is shared with other planning frameworks such as:

- Education Department Development Plan
- Authority and School Improvement Plans
- School Development Plans
- Children's Services Plan
- Child Health Strategy
- Community Plan
- Equality Action Plan
- 'Involved and Informed', the Department's Consultation and Communication Strategy

6.2   There is a specific amount of funding for the Accessibility Strategy available directly to each local Council. However the Scottish Executive is clear that Councils must look to other potential sources of departmental and partnership funding to aid implementation of the strategy. The following potential sources of collaborative funding have been identified:

- grant-aided expenditure
- National Priorities Action Fund, Inclusion Programme
- resources within existing local authority revenue expenditure set aside specifically for Special Educational Needs
- Children's Services Plan
- Public/Private Partnerships

- SEN In-Service training grant
- planned maintenance programme for schools

7.0   CONCLUSION

7.1   This strategy has been prepared by and for an Education Department that has been planning with a determined focus over the last eight years in the area of inclusion of pupils with disabilities.

7.2   Much good work is continuing with staff, children and their parents to support pupils with more complex difficulties into a mainstream school placement and curriculum. The planning and implementation of this strategy will greatly facilitate this process.

7.3   Equally, longer-term planning and linking with PPP will allow for a considerable increase in barrier-free schools, thus enabling a greater range of pupils with disabilities to benefit more from their attendance in mainstream schools in all sectors.