

# SEND FAMILY VOICES

I just want  
to be like  
everyone  
else

**A guide to reasonable adjustments**  
for families of children and young people in education





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For children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/ or a Disability, attending school is more than just learning to count or completing written work. There are the additional challenges of getting around the school, using the equipment and being equal to their peers.

This is termed 'Accessibility' and a school can make **reasonable adjustments** to make things easier.

Accessibility means different things to different people. It could be about ramps for a wheelchair, a classroom on the ground floor, brightly coloured strips on steps and stairs, a quiet route to a classroom or perhaps sports day activities that include everyone equally.

Do schools have to make **reasonable adjustments** by law?

Yes, the Equalities Act 2010 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments; the duty is 'to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the substantial disadvantage to a disabled person caused by a provision, measure or practice applied by or on behalf of a school, or by the absence of a supportive aid or service.'

...simply put, what does that mean?

Usually this means a change to support, or perhaps extra equipment that allows the child or young person to be able to take part in a lesson or activity in the same way as their peers. The best way to explain this is through real life examples.

SEND Family Voices and Achieving for Children have worked together with schools, parents and young people to explore best practice and get examples that work within the law, and sit well with the idea of 'I just want to be like everyone else'. These are the principles that emerged from this work:

- Ask... what do we have to adjust so that the child or young person can go to school and learn like other children their age?
- Think about the views and feelings of the child/young person
- See accessibility from the child's/young person's point of view
- Decide with the child/young person what is socially appropriate for them
- Avoid heightening the child/young person's sense of difference
- Make accessibility a matter of routine when planning trips, hiring and buying equipment (in the same way as Health and Safety is routine)
- Discuss with the family, the practical implications of school trips, the timetable, everything...
- Consider appropriate sports and games that include all children/young people

On the following pages you will find some 'real life' examples offered by teachers, children, young people and their families from Kingston and Richmond.

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# MOBILITY

This can include wheelchair or walking frame users, those with a condition that limits movements, or perhaps one that causes tiredness.

## Problem

### Independence getting around primary school

## Solutions

Adjustments made to the width and surface of pathways. A portable ramp that is moved outside the classroom each year (primary school). Separate fire evacuation policy that all staff are aware of. Teaching staff provide an accessible space within their individual classrooms. All lessons and classroom downstairs.

## Problem

### Independence getting around secondary school

## Solutions

Young person is given their own set of lift keys and has a friend to accompany them (rather than the being shadowed by a Learning Support Assistant). Young person has a walkie-talkie with them. Adjustments made to width and surface of pathways. Separate fire evacuation policy that all staff are aware of. Teaching staff provide an accessible space within their individual classrooms. Young person leaves class five minutes early to avoid rush between lessons. All staff are required to let young people know in advance of any change of classroom/s. All lessons and form room downstairs (when possible).

I found crowds difficult so I asked to leave five minutes early, before the end of lessons. Otherwise I would wait for the corridors to empty before I moved

**Young person**

It is often about getting, versus letting, the child go to a lesson

**Parent**

# SENSORY - OVERLOAD

This may include all children and young people, and especially those with autism or ADHD.

## Problem

**Sensory stimulus (or lack of) needed for calming and focusing**

## Solutions

Large cushion in (primary) school to squeeze or hold when getting nervous. Line painted on walls that the child can trace when walking between classrooms and activities. Sensory circuit to be followed before or after lessons. Exercise breaks between classes. Safe, quiet area and route to classes. Some classes taken in own room. Wobble cushion, fiddle objects. Child given regular jobs to do in class or errands to run. Card for time out 'I need to leave for a few minutes'. Ear defenders.



My son finds it difficult getting around school because of the noise

Parent



# SENSORY- VISUAL & HEARING

This can include children and young people who are born with impairments, also those whose condition is degenerative; in which case a school is also teaching the young person to manage independently as they lose their sight or hearing. Some conditions (eg albinism) also come with sensitivity to sunlight and glare.

## VISUAL

### **Problem**

**Independence getting around school (obstacles)**

### **Solutions**

Painted yellow lines on all steps and stairs. Contrasting colours on doors, stairs, rails etc. Have an additional adult to support child/young person learning their way around school. Brightly coloured mats (clutter free) in base areas for free play activities. Seating plans for lessons and classrooms.

### **Problem**

**Unable to read printed materials**

### **Solutions**

Adjust all texts by enlarging print and/or minimising the amount of text on a single page. Use the electronic white boards to enlarge test papers. Install a large screen computer in the computer room. Large screen laptops and Kindles bought. Learning Support Assistants undertake Braille training and school has a Braille machine.

## HEARING

### **Problem**

**Can't hear instructions or communicate with friends**

### **Solutions**

Attach a long ribbon to tambourine or rainmaker (primary school) so that child can see the end of the lesson/playtime. Use visual timetables. Install Soundfield systems in the classrooms; staff wear 'radio aids' to connect to the child's hearing aid. Personal iPad used by child for when verbal communication becomes difficult. Carpet classrooms to minimise echo.

# GETTING THE WORK DONE

Young people with learning difficulties must have the work adjusted to suit their needs. The law is clear that *all* schools must do this. Taking time to listen to the young person and understand them makes the world of difference and affects lifelong outcomes.

## Problem

**Difficulty with note-taking, slow writing. Weakness in hand or hands. Dyslexia. Organisation skills.**

## Solutions

A Dictaphone to record the teacher. A laptop/tablet to type any notes and complete work; also, specialist software. The support teacher can also make notes (but this can reduce the child or young person's independence). Additional time for classwork and homework. Visual timetable at the front of the class; print outs as aide memoir.

It's embarrassing to say 'I'm struggling with this' ... it's difficult to do that

**Young person**

The teacher would be chatting on for 10 to 15 minutes, then expect you to remember all they said and do it all in the next 25 minutes. Half of the time, I was struggling, so I just sat there and didn't do the work

**Young person**

My LSA takes notes but I want to be more independent. My writing is faster than my typing. If I could have more worksheets, I could do more independently.

**Young person**



# SCHOOL TRIPS & SPORTS DAYS



Schools must be creative with where they go [for school trips], instead of going to the same place year on year

**Parent**

These subjects prompt more discussion with families and young people than any other. As a result, Achieving for Children has produced their own model School Trips Policy to support schools, children and young people. This can be found on the Local Offer website.

## **School trips**

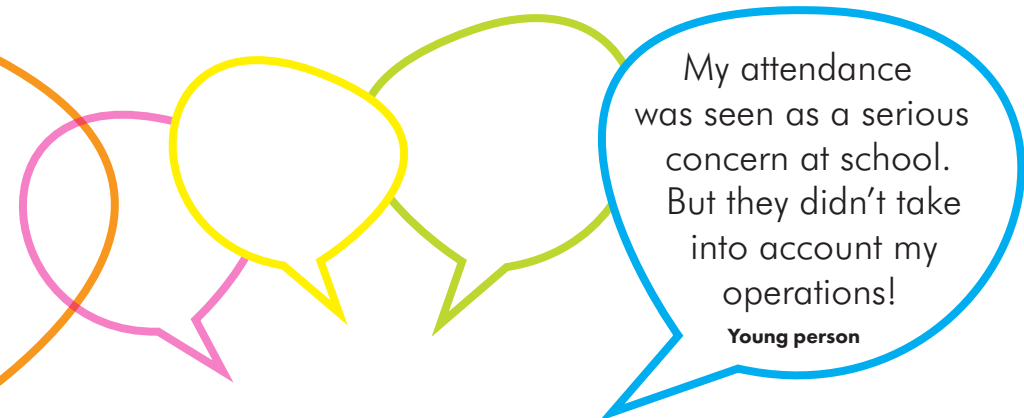
Discuss possible barriers and opportunities with the family and young person. Ensure a risk assessment and accessible route have been done before confirming and publicising the trip. Ensure that all transport is equal; that a child or young person will be travelling with their peers (not in a separate vehicle with an adult). For residential trips, ensure the venue is fully accessible and welcomes children and young people with additional needs.

## **Sports days**

Discuss possible barriers and opportunities with the family and young person. Ensure that there is an equal number of inclusive activities that all children and young people can enjoy (ever thought of crawling?) For children and young people with sensory overload, try to find an appropriate route to participation (it may be that sports day is simply too much).



# REWARDS AND SANCTIONS



My attendance was seen as a serious concern at school. But they didn't take into account my operations!

**Young person**

Rewards for getting things right, doing the simple things cannot be underestimated. What might be easy for many, can be very hard for some children and young people. Sanctions too need to be appropriate.

## **Rewards**

Success books – mark each and every success, however tiny.

Whilst any absence, including surgery and medical appointments must, by law, be counted as absence, if a child or young person is absent due to necessary medical appointments or surgery, please be sensitive to this and recognise that they've achieved what is full attendance for them – and apply school rewards accordingly.

Attending a pre-school class in typing skills, or social skills can result in a child or young person being late. Schools should not record this as lateness; especially if a school rewards promptness.

## **Sanctions**

Even though a child or young person wants to be treated 'like everyone else', sanctions must be appropriate.

An internal exclusion in a noisy room is a far more extreme sanction for the child or young person with sensory overload or limited mobility, and can easily result in an increase in anxiety and related behaviours. Whilst it is appropriate to apply sanctions when required; these must be tailored to suit children and young people with additional needs.

# REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND THE LAW

The Equalities Act 2010 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils so they are not at a substantial disadvantage and covers the provision by a school of auxiliary aids and services. The object of the duty is to avoid as far as possible by reasonable means, the disadvantage which a disabled pupil experiences because of their disability.

In some cases the support a disabled pupil may receive because of their special educational needs may mean that they do not suffer a substantial disadvantage and so there is no need for additional reasonable adjustments to be made for them. In other cases disabled pupils may require reasonable adjustments in addition to the special educational provision they are receiving. There are also disabled pupils who do not have special educational needs but still require reasonable adjustments to be made for them. If any of the following apply it is likely that a reasonable adjustment is required to prevent a substantial disadvantage:

- a disabled child would need to expend extra time and effort to participate when compared with a non-disabled peer
- a disabled child or young person would suffer inconvenience, indignity or discomfort if a school did not make an adjustment
- a disabled child or young person would lose an opportunity or make diminished progress when compared to non-disabled peers

In law reasonable adjustments are different from expensive projects like installing a lift or building an accessible toilet. Schools still have a duty to do this kind of improvement work in a planned way with support from the local authority but these actions are not reasonable adjustments. Cost is a factor when considering whether or not a suggested adjustment is reasonable or not in law.

Schools should not expect disabled pupils or their families to suggest adjustments but if they do schools should consider whether those adjustments would help to overcome the disadvantage and whether the suggestions are reasonable. It is good practice for schools to work with pupils and their parents in determining what reasonable adjustments can be made.

# SOME GOOD QUESTIONS

## **How do we know the adjustment is reasonable?**

The Equalities Act 2010 does not specify what is 'reasonable'; thus allowing flexibility for different sets of circumstances.

The core of the reasonable adjustments duty is not whether something is a supporting aid or whether it's an adjustment to a practice, but whether it is something that is reasonable for the school to have to do.

## **What if there is no money to make the adjustment?**

Cost and resources are factors that are taken into account in determining what is 'reasonable'. It is important for a school to document carefully any decisions taken on reasonable adjustments so that these can be justified. For example, moving a young person's classroom to the ground floor is considered reasonable.

## **Whose responsibility is it to look after the 'reasonable adjustment' equipment?**

It is the school's responsibility for maintenance and repair of any equipment used as a reasonable adjustment.

## **Can a school charge parents or carers any extra for the purchase of equipment?**

No - costs should not be passed onto families (this is laid out in law).

## **Does the reasonable adjustments duty apply to independent schools?**

Yes, the duty applies to all schools in England and Wales (and Scotland – there is separate guidance for Scotland) irrespective of how they are funded or managed.

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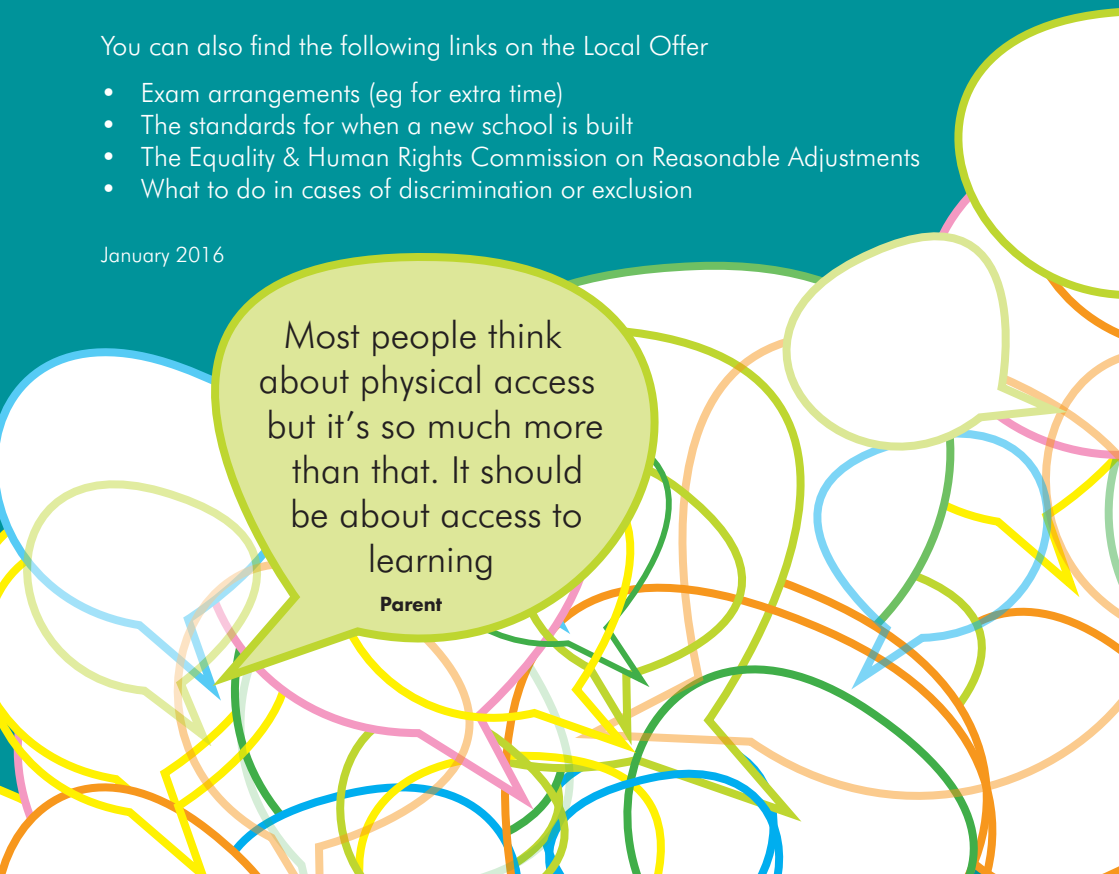
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The Local Offer website pages on Accessibility provide details of the Strategy, the Action Plan, Inclusive Sports, the full Model School Trips Policy and many more examples of real life reasonable adjustments. Go to the Local Offer home page and search for 'reasonable adjustments'.

You can also find the following links on the Local Offer

- Exam arrangements (eg for extra time)
- The standards for when a new school is built
- The Equality & Human Rights Commission on Reasonable Adjustments
- What to do in cases of discrimination or exclusion

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Most people think  
about physical access  
but it's so much more  
than that. It should  
be about access to  
learning

**Parent**