

EDUCATION

*Following on from the, ' 20 Questions to ask when visiting a school', published in the Autumn 2004 newsletter, I have looked at what the government in England says **should** be happening in schools to make them fully accessible to children with disabilities. Members in other countries may find the questions equally relevant when looking at their local schools. If your child is approaching 13 yrs old you will need to start thinking about Transition Planning. If you thought getting a statement for your child was like wading through thick mud in Wellington boots, be warned! This time you're wearing flippers and the mud is much deeper. At the end of May the UK government released the results of a study into how the transition from child to adult services is the key point where service provision fails. Problems arise through lack of co-ordination between Education, Health and Social Services, funding restrictions, lack of procedures and the way organisations are structured. Fairly depressing reading which you can enjoy at your leisure if you go to <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep204.asp>*

Is your school ACCESSIBLE?

And I don't mean, ' Does the bus go past the front gates?' The UK government has made it very clear that schools and LEAs must have plans to ensure that disabled pupils are not treated less favourably than non-disabled pupils. (See article in the last newsletter). How can you tell if the school you are considering or your child's current school is ' fully accessible'? The Department of Education and Skills (DfES) has suggested a checklist that parents can use as an aid. The list is not exhaustive but you could use it in conjunction with the list published in the Autumn newsletter 45.

Section 1: How does the school deliver the curriculum?

Question	Yes	No
Does the school ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have the necessary training to teach and support disabled pupils?		
Are the classrooms optimally organised for disabled pupils?		
Do lessons provide opportunities for all pupils to achieve?		
Are lessons responsive to pupil diversity?		
Do lessons involve work to be done by individuals, pairs, groups and the whole class?		
Are all pupils encouraged to take part in music, drama and physical activities?		
Does the staff recognise and allow for the mental effort expended by some disabled pupils, for example using lip reading?		
Does staff recognise and allow for the additional time required by some disabled pupils to use equipment in practical work?		
Does staff provide alternative ways of giving access to experience or understanding for disabled pupils who cannot engage in particular activities, for example some forms of exercise in physical education?		
Does the school provide access to computer technology appropriate for students with disabilities?		
Are school visits, including overseas visits, made accessible to all pupils irrespective of attainment or impairment?		
Are there high expectations of all pupils?		
Does staff seek to remove all barriers to learning and participation?		

Section 2: Is the school designed to meet the needs of all pupils?

Question	Yes	No
Does the size and layout of areas, including all academic, sporting, play, social facilities; classrooms, the assembly hall, canteen, library, gymnasium and outdoor sporting facilities, playgrounds and common rooms - allow access for all pupils?		
Can pupils who use wheelchairs move around the school without experiencing barriers to access such as those caused by doorways, steps and stairs, toilet facilities and showers?		
Are pathways of travel around the school site and parking arrangements safe, routes logical and well signed?		
Are emergency and evacuation systems set up to inform ALL pupils, including pupils with SEN and disability; including alarms with both visual and auditory components?		
Are non-visual guides used, to assist people to use buildings including lifts with tactile buttons?		
Could any of the décor or signage be considered to be confusing or disorientating for disabled pupils with visual impairment, autism or epilepsy?		
Are areas to which pupils should have access well lit?		
Are steps made to reduce background noise for hearing impaired pupils such as considering a room's acoustics, noisy equipment?		
Is furniture and equipment selected, adjusted and located appropriately?		

Section 3: How does the school deliver materials in other formats?

Question	Yes	No
Does the school provide information in simple language, symbols, large print, on audiotape or in Braille for pupils and prospective pupils who may have difficulty with standard forms of printed information?		
Does the school ensure that information is presented to groups in a way, which is user friendly for people with disabilities e.g. by reading aloud, overhead projections and describing diagrams?		
Does the school have the facilities such as ICT to produce written information in different formats?		
Does the school ensure that the staff is familiar with technology and practices developed to assist people with disabilities?		

Schools must be prepared to make **reasonable adjustments** to ensure that disabled pupils are not put at a substantial disadvantage. Sometimes it is not possible for schools to make certain adjustments due to costs and practicality, healthy and safety issues or the effect on other children. Schools and LEAs must plan to improve physical access to schools and are required to make their plans publicly available as follows: -

- **Maintained** schools have a duty to publish information about their accessibility plans in their governors' annual report to parents;
- **Non-maintained special** schools are required to reproduce their accessibility plan in their annual prospectus;
- **Independent** schools have to make their accessibility plans available to interested parties on request at reasonable times; and
- **LEAs** are required to make their strategies available for inspection to interested parties at reasonable times.

Schools **do not have to** alter any physical features of their buildings. They **do not have to** provide 'auxiliary aids and services' – these should be considered within the Special Educational Needs framework such as a Statement. There is a Code of Practice that gives examples of how schools can help disabled pupils in schools. You can get a copy from the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) by contacting 08457 622633 or e-mailing enquiry@drc-gb.org.