



# One minute guide

## Making schools accessible

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### What do we mean by making schools accessible?

When making schools accessible, this refers both to accessing the school premises and accessing appropriate curriculum and learning opportunities. It is about considering the changes schools may need to make to their premises in order to provide an inclusive education for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or offering additional support to them.

Under the Children and Families Act (2014), there is a presumption in law regarding decisions about where children and young people with SEN should be educated, and the Equality Act (2010) provides protection from discrimination for disabled people. This legislation represents a commitment to inclusive education and the removal of barriers to mainstream education for children and young people with SEND, as described in the [SEN Code of Conduct \(2015\)](#).

### What adjustments might schools need to make?

There are two main categories of adjustment that schools are expected to make for children:

- **Building adaptations** - changes to the building or school premises, for example, ensuring that doorways are wide enough for wheelchairs, installing lifts to access different levels within the building, and providing care suites with hoists; and
- **Equipment support** - specialist equipment required to meet the needs of individual children and young people; for example, specialist software for students with visual or hearing impairments, specially adapted seats, and standing or walking frames for students to use in school. This does not include the provision of wheelchairs as this is the responsibility of the NHS wheelchair service.

Any adjustments required are identified on an individual basis. SEN Casework officers assess the support needs of individual children and young people, as well as taking into consideration what the school has in place already.

### What advice is available to schools?

Leeds has an Access Officer who provides support and advice on making educational settings accessible for children aged 0-18. Referrals are received in a number of ways, including directly from a school, from a SENSAP casework officer involved in developing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP); and from health colleagues either through occupational therapy or following a paediatric medical. The Access Officer receives notifications from Early Years practitioners and settings about the likely access needs of very young children on beginning primary school.

### How are children, young people and families included?

In order to understand what is needed for the child and what equipment and locations they will be comfortable using and accessing, the Access Officer consults with children and young people as well as their parents and families. They then put packages of support in place for the child.

On visits to educational settings, the Access Officer will take the opportunity to catch up with children or young people to ask their views on what has been put in place and about any improvements which could be made.

When families are looking to apply for new schools, their casework officer can help them to understand the accessible facilities that are already in place in schools across Leeds from comprehensive information which is maintained and updated by the Access Officer.

### How do other practitioners contribute to this work?

The Access Officer works closely with SENSAP casework officers and health and social care colleagues to understand the access needs of individual children and young people.

When assessing what a child might need in a school, the Access Officer visits school premises and takes advice from colleagues with expertise in health and safety, building, occupational health and physiotherapy.

There is also a multi-agency group in place, which includes colleagues from health and from education, to review the cases of children and young people with access needs when: they are making transitions into new settings or key stages; they are moving into school from an early years setting; when they are new to Leeds; or are returning to school after a period of missing education.

### Who are the key contacts?

The Access Officer for Leeds is Julie Lewis. Julie has a city-wide remit, and can be contacted on tel: 0113 3786902 or by email at: [julie.lewis@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:julie.lewis@leeds.gov.uk).