

Disability equality

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Since October 1999, when the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) came into force, service providers have had to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them.

In 2004, a further stage of duties under the DDA came into force requiring service providers to consider making permanent physical adjustments to their premises to afford disabled people access. Schools are required to produce accessibility plans and local authorities are under a duty to prepare accessibility strategies covering the maintained schools in their area.

The Disability Equality Duty places a new positive duty on all public bodies not just to make facilities and services accessible but also to promote disability equality.

All primary and secondary schools maintained by a local education authority, and all local authorities themselves, are covered by the Disability Equality Duty. This means that, alongside their existing duties, schools and local authorities have to take proactive steps to promote disability equality for pupils, employees, and service users – including community users – and document these steps in a Disability Equality Scheme. Secondary schools in England should have put their Disability Equality Scheme into action by December 2006 and primary schools by December 2007.

Key principles

The key principles underlying a school's Disability Equality Scheme are to –

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate disability-related harassment
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage disabled people's participation in public life, and
- Take steps to take into account people's disabilities, even where that involves more favourable treatment.

In terms of planning your project, it is important to remember that promoting disability equality is not just about ensuring physical accessibility for people with different forms of disability and compliance with the relevant Building Regulations to ensure access for all (sources of guidance on these physical aspects are given in the design section above). Disability equality is also about being proactive and promoting opportunities to disabled people within your management and marketing strategies, and evaluating success.

case study: Highbury Community Campus, Birmingham

This new development is home to Queensbridge Fox Hollies Performing Arts College – awarded the Gold Arts Mark Award in 2002 in recognition of the cutting edge work of these two schools (one a special school) in the arts. It is supported by a number of professional partners including the Birmingham Royal Ballet and, latterly, the Freefall Dance Company which has modern studio and performance facilities within the College and provides opportunities for dancers of school leaving age with severe learning disabilities.

case study: The Manor Sports College, Nottinghamshire

The Manor Sports College in Nottinghamshire has been a big hit with disabled sportsmen and women since the extended facility opened in April 2002. In addition to many other individuals from the local community, over 2,600 disabled people visit the facility annually to enjoy a whole range of sports and activities made possible by investment of £1.4 million of funding by Sport England and The Big Lottery Fund towards total project costs of over £1.9 million. The facility is also used as a 'world class cell' by the county badminton association and the Nottinghamshire Youth Games have also been held there.

Sources of guidance

Best for...	Who/what...	How to find...
How to prepare a Disability Equality Scheme for your school	Schools and the Disability Equality Duty in England & Wales – Guidance for Schools	Disability Rights Commission website www.drc-gb.org
Guidance on achieving the Equalities Standard in sports services (NB Generic guidance not limited to disability and equality)	'The Equality Standard: a framework document for sport', Sport England & sportscotland September 2004	The Equality Standard framework document and guidance is available to download as a pdf file at: http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_resources/resource_downloads/club_resources.htm

