Education Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy

Introduction

Torbay Council is committed to creating an education system where every child and young person can thrive, achieve their potential, and feel a genuine sense of belonging.

We recognise that children and young people with disabilities bring unique strengths, experiences, and perspectives to our schools and communities. However, we also acknowledge that barriers continue to exist which can limit their participation, achievement, independence, and wellbeing.

This Strategy sets out how Torbay Council will work with schools, academy trusts, families, health partners, and the voluntary and community sector to improve accessibility, strengthen inclusive education, and ensure that all children and young people can participate fully in school life.

It recognises that accessibility is not solely about buildings but is about ensuring that pupils can access learning, information, opportunities, relationships and experiences that enable them to thrive, achieve and belong.

This Education Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy fulfils Torbay Council's duties under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and builds on the foundations established through Torbay's previous Accessibility Strategy, SEND arrangements and Local Offer.

Torbay Context

We recognise that there is significant overlap between disability and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), but these are not interchangeable concepts. Some children with disabilities will not have SEND and some children with SEND may not be disabled under the Equality Act.

We also recognise that disabled children and young people can experience additional barriers including:

- reduced participation in school activities;
- barriers accessing information;
- challenges navigating educational transitions;
- lower attendance;
- increased risk of exclusion; and
- poorer wellbeing outcomes.

The Council is committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and ensuring that they can access high-quality education, participate fully in school life and prepare successfully for adulthood.

This Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy supports and complements Torbay's wider SEND improvement programme. Following the 2025 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of the Torbay SEND Local Area Partnership, several priority areas for improvement were identified, resulting in the development of a co-produced SEND Priority Impact Plan. The Priority Impact Plan is being delivered through the Torbay SEND Local Area Improvement Partnership and sets out the actions required to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

Many of the priorities identified through the SEND improvement programme align closely with the objectives of this strategy. These include strengthening communication and engagement with families, improving the quality and timeliness of support, increasing the inclusiveness of mainstream education, improving transitions and preparation for adulthood, and ensuring that children and young people can access the right support at the right time. Improving accessibility is an important enabler of these ambitions, helping to remove barriers to participation, learning, communication and independence.

The Torbay SEND Strategy 2023 sets out a shared vision across education, health and care services and is underpinned by the principle that "SEND is everyone's business", recognising that responsibility for supporting children and young people with SEND extends across the whole system rather than being the responsibility of specialist services alone. The Strategy highlights the importance of early identification and intervention, ensuring that children and young people receive

support as soon as needs emerge. Children, young people and families have consistently told partners that they want needs to be recognised earlier, support to be delivered more effectively, and services to work together more closely around the child or young person.

Legal duties

Under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, local authorities are required to prepare a written Accessibility Strategy for the schools they maintain. The purpose of the strategy is to:

- Increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum.
- Improve the physical environment of schools.
- Improve the availability and accessibility of information for pupils with disabilities.

The strategy recognises that disability can include:

- Physical impairments
- Sensory impairments
- Learning disabilities
- Neurodivergent conditions
- Mental health conditions
- Medical conditions
- Hidden disabilities
- Speech, language and communication needs

Many children and young people with a disability also have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), although the two are not synonymous.

For the purposes of this strategy, disability is defined as set out in the Equality Act 2010. A person with a disability is someone who has:

> **"a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."**

This strategy covers all maintained schools within Torbay and provides a framework that can also support academy trusts and other educational settings in developing inclusive practice. Maintained schools are required to develop and publish their own Accessibility Plans which contribute to these objectives.

Vision

Torbay Education leaders will work together on shared priorities, in an inclusive, place-based way from early years to further education, so that every child and young person in Torbay can achieve, thrive, belong and improve life chances, with no one left behind.

This vision builds upon the principles established within Torbay's previous Accessibility Strategy, which recognises that:

- All learners should have access to high-quality learning experiences;
- children and young people with disabilities should be able to participate in the same opportunities as their peers;
- parents, schools, the local authority and partners share responsibility for improving outcomes; and
- barriers to participation should be actively removed

We want Torbay to be a place where all children and young people can learn, belong, participate and thrive. Accessibility is fundamental to inclusion, educational achievement, wellbeing and preparation for adulthood.

This strategy should be read alongside the Torbay Education Strategy and the following;

- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Families Act 2014
- SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 Years
- Torbay SEND Local Offer
- Torbay Special Educational Needs and Disabilities policies and guidance
- School Accessibility Plans
- Torbay Autism Action Plan
- The Big Plan
- Torbay Education Strategy 2026-2029

Our principles

Our approach will be underpinned by the following principles:

Inclusion by Design

Accessibility and inclusion should be planned from the outset rather than introduced as an adjustment later.

Participation

Children, young people and families will be actively involved in decisions that affect them.

Equity

We recognize that different pupils require different support to achieve equitable outcomes.

Early Intervention

Needs should be identified and addressed as early as possible.

Partnership

Improving inclusion is a shared responsibility between schools, families, health services, community organisations and the Council.

Rights-Based Practice

We will ensure that the voices, rights and aspirations of disabled children and young people are central to service design and delivery.

Our principles

Inclusion by design; participation; co-production; early intervention; partnership working; continuous improvement; equity and belonging.

Wider partnership context

Torbay has a diverse education system comprising early years settings, mainstream schools, specialist provision and post-16 providers. Torbay Council recognises the significant overlap between SEND and disability and the importance of ensuring that children and young people receive timely and appropriate support within educational settings.

The Local Authority works in partnership with:

- schools and academy trusts;
- early years and post 16 providers;
- SENDIASS;
- health services;
- specialist education services;
- parent and carer representatives; and
- community organisations.

These arrangements support early identification of needs, effective transitions and inclusive educational provision.

Understanding Need in Torbay

Torbay is a place of significant strengths, opportunity and community spirit. However, too many children and young people continue to face barriers associated with deprivation, vulnerability, special educational needs, poor health outcomes and unequal life chances.

The most commonly used measure is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which ranks areas relative to one another rather than producing a percentage rate. The latest English Indices of Deprivation show that the South West is generally one of the less deprived regions of England, with most neighbourhoods falling in the middle to less deprived deciles rather than the most deprived deciles. However, Torbay remains one of the more deprived local authorities in the South West, ranking among the most deprived authorities in the region.

Educational outcomes remain strongly linked to where a child lives, their level of disadvantage and whether they have identified additional needs. This strategy represents a collective commitment from education leaders to work together to reduce those inequalities and ensure that every child can thrive, regardless of circumstance.

Strategic Priorities

Achieving our vision requires a sustained focus on removing barriers that prevent children and young people with disabilities from participating fully in education and school life.

Through engagement with schools, alongside analysis of local accessibility plans and wider evidence, three priorities have been identified where collective action can make the greatest difference. These priorities reflect the statutory requirements of the Equality Act 2010 while also responding to the practical challenges experienced by children and young people in Torbay. Together, they provide a framework for improving participation, belonging, independence and educational outcomes across our education system

Priority One - Increasing access, participation and achievementWhat we already do:

- Provide specialist advice, outreach and support to help schools identify and remove barriers to learning and participation.
- Promote early identification, reasonable adjustments and inclusive practice through the Local Offer, SEND services and partnership arrangements.
- Support access to specialist equipment, assistive technology and multi-agency advice where this is required.

We will:

- Develop and share practical guidance and examples of effective curriculum adaptations, based on practice across Torbay schools in our Ordinarily Available and Inclusion Provision framework.
- Increase workforce development on disability awareness, neurodiversity, sensory needs, communication, medical needs, reasonable adjustments and inclusive teaching across the full primary and secondary curriculum.
- Promote accessible educational visits, enrichment, clubs, physical education, leadership opportunities and transition activities so that disabled pupils can participate alongside their peers throughout primary, secondary and post-16 education.
- Use pupil and family feedback, attendance, exclusion and participation information to identify where further support is required.

- Support schools to develop approaches that build pupils' independence and resilience while ensuring timely access to pastoral, learning, sensory and communication support.

Schools already:

- Plan and deliver high-quality teaching across a broad and balanced curriculum, adapted to pupils' strengths and needs, with in-class support and targeted small-group or individual intervention where appropriate. Make reasonable adjustments to teaching, assessment, routines, educational visits and the wider curriculum.
- Work with pupils, families and relevant professionals through coordinated, Team Around the Child approaches where appropriate, to identify barriers and agree effective support.

Schools will:

- Review curriculum accessibility regularly and record clear, time-bound actions within their published Accessibility Plan.
- Ensure all staff understand individual needs and can use reasonable adjustments, relevant aids, equipment, communication approaches, assistive technology and quality-first teaching strategies.
- Monitor whether disabled pupils are taking part in lessons, clubs, trips, cultural activities, sport and leadership opportunities, and act where participation is unequal.
- Ensure pupils can access appropriate breaktime, lunchtime, study and regulation support, including quiet or safe spaces where these are needed to sustain participation.
- Build accessibility, growing independence and preparation for adulthood into transition planning between classes, phases, schools and post-16 destinations.

Priority Two - Improving the Physical Environment

We already:

- Provide advice to schools on accessibility duties, reasonable adjustments and the prioritisation of improvement works.
- Consider accessibility within capital planning, condition work and the development of education provision through SEND capital grant projects.

- Work with schools and partners to understand where the physical environment restricts access, safety, dignity or independence.

We will:

- Encourage consistent use of accessibility audits covering routes, entrances, parking, reception areas, classrooms, toilets, changing facilities, dining areas, playgrounds and emergency evacuation.
- Develop a clearer overview of significant access barriers across maintained schools and use this to inform future capital priorities.
- Promote low-cost and anticipatory improvements, including signage, lighting, colour contrast, acoustics, handrails, quiet or safe spaces, sensory environments and accessible furniture.
- Ensure that the views and lived experience of disabled children, young people and families inform planning and improvement.

Schools already:

- Maintain safe and accessible routes through the site, including level or ramped access where reasonably practicable.
- Provide and maintain appropriate facilities such as accessible toilets, changing arrangements, parking, lifts, evacuation equipment, sensory spaces and calm or safe areas where required.
- Complete regular premises checks and respond to access needs through reasonable adjustments and risk assessment.

Schools will:

- Keep an up-to-date accessibility audit and a costed, prioritised programme of physical improvements.
- Consult pupils, parents, staff and specialists before significant building, refurbishment or room-use decisions.
- Plan for the needs of current and prospective pupils, staff and visitors, including safe arrival and movement around larger or more complex secondary sites, rather than waiting for barriers to arise.

- Ensure personal emergency evacuation arrangements, site information and staff training support safe access and egress.
- Review how arrival, movement between lessons, social times and access to specialist rooms affect disabled pupils, particularly on larger secondary sites.

Priority Three - Improving Access to Information, Communication and Participation

We already:

- Publish information about SEND, accessibility and support through the Torbay Local Offer and Council communication channels.
- Work with SENDIASS, schools, health partners, specialist services and our parent-carer forum to improve the clarity and accessibility of information.
- Promote participation and co-production so that disabled children, young people and families can coproduce and influence decisions.

We will:

- Increase the use of plain English and accessible formats, including Easy Read, large print, audio, British Sign Language, translated community languages and accessible digital documents.
- Improve the accessibility of websites and digital content and promote alternative and augmentative communication methods.
- Develop expectations for timely access to information in a pupil's or family's preferred format.
- Create regular opportunities for children, young people and families to express their views and demonstrate how feedback has influenced action.

Schools already:

- Publish their Accessibility Plan, SEND information and relevant policies in a clear and accessible location.
- Provide information in alternative formats within a reasonable timeframe and respond to pupils' and parents' communication needs.

- Use appropriate visual, sensory, signing, symbol-based, digital or assistive communication approaches across lessons, pastoral support, examinations, transitions and wider school life where required.

Schools will:

- Audit the accessibility of letters, forms, reports, learning resources, signage, websites and digital platforms.
- Record and share communication preferences appropriately so that adjustments are consistent across the school.
- Involve disabled pupils in school councils, reviews, transition and post-16 planning, and decisions affecting curriculum access, support and wider school life.
- Monitor complaints, feedback and engagement to identify barriers to information, communication and participation.
- Ensure information about curriculum choices, examinations, careers, transition and post-16 pathways is accessible to disabled pupils and their families.

How we will know if we have made a difference

We will use a range of measures to check whether this strategy has a positive impact on children and young people with disabilities. These include:

- Talking to our children and young people about their experiences and following our ‘Pledge’.
- Listening to the views of our parents and carers by building accessibility discussions into future events and engagement activities.
- Having open and honest accessibility discussions with our schools and settings
- Monitoring school Accessibility Plans to ensure that they are relevant and of high quality
- Evaluating training provided to schools and settings, and to our workforce to ensure this is relevant and makes a difference to our children and young people
- Reducing the number of pupils with ASD and SEMH who are out of school - either due to exclusion or emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).

Governance and accountability

Strategic oversight of this Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy will be provided through Torbay Council's Children's Services Directorate, which will be responsible for:

- Monitoring progress
- Reviewing impact
- Ensuring that accessibility remains a key component of educational inclusion and improvement.

Delivery of the strategy will be supported through partnership working with; schools, academy trusts, the Torbay SEND Team, SENDIASS, our Integrated Care Board, SEND Family Voice Torbay and the Torbay SEND Local Area Partnership.

Working together, these partners will help ensure that children and young people with disabilities and SEND can access high-quality education, participate fully in school life and achieve positive outcomes.

Progress against this strategy will be considered alongside wider SEND improvement activity to ensure a coordinated and joined-up approach across education. An annual report will be produced to review delivery, assess impact and identify future priorities for improvement.