

Accessibility Strategy

(Education)

2023-2026

SUMMARY

This Strategy sets out on behalf of Reading Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children, the steps to be taken to ensure pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) can fully participate in the education provided by their Reading community school, and to ensure that pupils with SEND can enjoy all other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides for its pupils. This strategy succeeds the previous Strategy agreed by ACE Committee in July 2020.

OWNER

Brian Grady, Director of Education

VERSION

V1.0

DATE

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UPDATED

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REVIEW DATE

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Brighter Futures for Children is the Directorate of Children's Services at Reading Borough Council

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Background

1 Legislation

The requirement to write an accessibility strategy is set out in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and specifically relates to pupils with a disability.

Unlike the rest of the Equality Act which has a focus on equal treatment, the sections relating to disability in addition recognise that a person with a disability may have to be treated more favourably than someone who does not have a disability, in order to avoid substantial disadvantage.

Where a school in its normal practice does something that might put a disabled child at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, they must take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.

2 Reasonable adjustments

Taking reasonable steps to avoid substantial disadvantage is often known as a 'reasonable adjustment'. Both local authorities and schools must adhere to the reasonable adjustment duty. The Strategy sets out the steps that need to be taken to ensure pupils with a disability can fully participate in the education provided by a school and that they can enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides for its pupils.

Disability in its broadest sense covers:

- physical impairments
- learning difficulties
- sensory impairments
- mental impairments

Under the Equality Act, a person has a disability 'if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

Whilst the accessibility strategy relates to maintained schools, many of the support arrangements made by the local authority will also benefit disabled pupils attending academies and free schools in Reading

Local Context

3 Reading Accessibility Strategy

All local authorities must therefore have an accessibility strategy for the schools it's responsible for. This is a requirement of law, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Accessibility strategies don't apply to academies or free schools. However, all schools, including academies and free schools, must have an accessibility plan which is based upon the same principles as an accessibility strategy.

The Local Authorities accessibility strategy explains how over time, it will support the schools it's responsible for in order to:

- increase access to the curriculum for disabled pupils
- improve the physical environment of schools to increase access for disabled pupils
- make written information more accessible to disabled pupils by providing information in a range of different ways

4 Refreshing the Strategy

The current strategy has been refreshed and will be presented to the ACE Committee in July this year for sign-off.

Vision

Our strategy for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) is rooted in our vision for Reading's children and young people. It reflects the outcome of the June 2021 local area inspection and the key areas for development identified through that report:

All children and young people with SEND will be supported through the provision of the right support at the right time to be as independent as possible and have their emotional, social and physical health needs met. They will have choice and agency as they grow into adult life and be able to access and navigate services to lead rich and fulfilling lives and flourish in a healthy, thriving and inclusive borough.

We will do this by ensuring:

- *SEND is everybody's business, embedded in the practice of all those that work with children, young people and families.*
- *"Co-production" happens at every level - "working with" children and families not "doing to". Co-production at the heart of what we do: changing the way in which we work together with families operationally and strategically.*
- *We deliver the right support in the right place at the right time, ensuring the availability and development of high quality universal and specialist provision to meet needs locally.*
- *We improve outcomes for children and young people. We focus on working together to identify and assess needs early, and through transparent and evidenced based decision making, ensuring equitable resource allocation to meet agreed outcomes and support aspirations.*
- *Unlocking all the resources in the borough of Reading*

Delivering on the SEND strategy vision to safeguard and protect those that are most vulnerable, providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living, our Accessibility Strategy demonstrates our continued commitment to provide the best education possible to all children and young people with SEND in Reading - to enhance their life chances, prepare them for adulthood and enable them to contribute to their community. To achieve this vision, we will:

- Work in partnership with the schools for which we are responsible, and with those we aren't, to meet the legal duty and to ensure they do not disadvantage or discriminate against a disabled pupil,
- Work with other services to identify and plan for the needs of disabled pupils more generally,
- Work with schools and school governors to agree reasonable adjustments and to improve the physical environment of schools to allow disabled pupils full access to school facilities, activities and to participate fully in the school curriculum.

What does the Accessibility Strategy cover?

This Accessibility Strategy addresses the parts of the Equality Act 2010 relating to children and young people with disabilities and their access to:

- Maintained schools, including maintained nursery schools
- Early years settings that receive funding via Brighter Futures for Children.

Local Authority Accessibility Strategies do not apply to academies or free schools (mainstream or special), although many of the support arrangements made by Brighter Futures for Children and Reading Borough Council for maintained schools will also benefit disabled pupils attending academies and free schools. Academies and free schools are responsible for developing their own strategies.

All schools, including academies and free schools, must have an accessibility plan which is based upon the same principles as an accessibility strategy

Definition of Disability

Under the Equality Act (2010), a person has a disability, 'if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

A disability can arise from a wide range of impairments including:


- physical impairments;
- learning disabilities;
- sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing;
- impairments with fluctuating or recurring effects such as rheumatoid arthritis, myalgic encephalitis (ME), chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia, and epilepsy;
- developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia and dyspraxia;
- mental health conditions with symptoms such as anxiety, low mood, panic attacks, phobias, or unshared perceptions; eating disorders; and some self-harming behaviour;
- mental illnesses, such as depression and schizophrenia.

Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a range of equality duties and requirements within one piece of legislation. The Act introduced the single Public Sector Equality Duty or 'general duty' that applies to public bodies, including maintained schools, academies and Free Schools and which extends to all protected characteristics – race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, and gender re-assignment. The combined equality duty came into effect in April 2011.

Under the Equality Act (2010) Schedule 10 local authorities are required in law to have an accessibility strategy for the schools for which they are responsible. Schedule 10 sets out what must be included in the strategy including the steps being taking to:

- a) increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculum;

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- b) improve the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools;
 - c) improve the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily available to pupils who are not disabled.

Unlike the rest of the Equality Act which has a focus on equal treatment, the sections relating to disability are different and recognise that a person with a disability may have to be treated more favourably than someone who does not, in order to avoid substantial disadvantage.

Where a school does something that might put a disabled child at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, they must take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage. Substantial is anything more than minor or trivial.

Reasonable Adjustments

The law on reasonable adjustments is anticipatory; it requires local authorities and schools to consider the needs of potential disabled pupils in addition to those already attending the school.

Local authorities, schools and settings must take reasonable steps to avoid substantial disadvantage by making reasonable adjustments. This means taking positive steps to ensure that disabled pupils can fully participate in the education provided by a school and that they can enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides for its pupils. Schools have a duty to plan better access for disabled pupils generally through their accessibility plan.

Failure to make a reasonable adjustment is a form of discrimination under the Equality Act.

Pupils with Medical Conditions

Schools should implement the Statutory Guidance: 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions: Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England' (December 2015). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>

Planning Duty

As set out in the Equality Act (2010) Schedule 10 of the Act identifies three strands which schools and local authorities must address in their accessibility plans/ strategies:

1. increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculum;
2. improving the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools; and
3. improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily available to pupils who are not disabled.

Schools must also have regard to the need to provide adequate resources for implementing plans and must regularly review them. An accessibility plan may be a freestanding document or may be published as part of another document such as the school development plan.

Local authorities must prepare accessibility strategies based on the same principles as the accessibility plans for schools.

Further Guidance

Guidance on the planning duties and wider compliance with the Equality Act as applicable to both schools and local authorities can be found in “Equality Act 2010: advice for schools” which was published in February 2013.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

Reading Local Area SEND Strategy: Vision for SEND

The Local Area Vision for SEND is set out in the Area SEND Strategy 2022/2027, which was agreed by all partners in January 2022. This Accessibility Strategy supports delivery of the SEND Strategy which is being delivered through the following work strands:

- Strand 1: Improving communication
- Strand 2: Early intervention through to specialist provision
- Strand 3: Consistent approaches to emotional wellbeing
- Strand 4: Preparing for adulthood
- Strand 5: Support for families / short breaks

Our Priorities

Our vision is further expanded in our priorities:

- **Making SEND Everybody’s Business** – we will work together to embed the SEND Strategy into the practice of everybody who works with children, young people and families, thinking about the implications on SEND in everything we do,
- **Embedding co-production at every level** – we will work with all partners to ensure children, young people and their families participate fully in decisions at an individual level as well as in the development of services,
- **We will work together to identify and assess needs early**, with a focus on developing preventative and early intervention approaches and a graduated approach to meeting needs,
- **We will work together to deliver support in the right place at the right time** - being clear about our expectations of high quality universal and specialist provision and working together to support this being delivered, enabling the majority of individual needs to be met locally and achieving best possible outcomes,
- **Resources will be allocated fairly, transparently, and kept under review** – we will make sure they are used effectively and lead to improving outcomes.

Implementing the Accessibility Strategy

Our Graduated Response Guidance provides guidance to schools and settings on inclusive practice against the 4 areas of need set out in the SEND Code of Practice (2015). This aims to support consistent practice across schools and settings.

There are a number of Accessibility Audit Tools that are accessible to schools (for example through ‘The Key’ and which they are encouraged to use to assess their inclusivity and inform their SEND Information Report and Accessibility Plans. An example Accessibility Audit Tool is available on the Local Offer and BfFC website.

1 Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools and early years curriculum

All children and young people should have access to high quality teaching that focuses on inclusive practice and breaks down and removes barriers to learning.

Schools should:

- have regard to national and local guidance on meeting the duties set out in the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014;
- provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and increase access for pupils with SEND through:
 - quality first teaching,
 - relevant and challenging adapted learning opportunities that take account of the pupils' needs,
 - enabling participation in after school, leisure, sporting and cultural activities / school visits organised by the school.
- include improvements that increase access to the curriculum in their accessibility plan and ensure this is published on their school website;
- plan for and teach children with SEND through a range of interventions and teaching strategies, including implementing the Reading Graduated Response Guidance;
- establish effective ways of assessing and monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND as well as other vulnerable groups;
- evaluate outcomes for pupils with SEND and adapt provision to ensure these are improved;
- implement the statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of Academies in England on Supporting pupils with medical conditions (December 2015);
- make sure there's effective and tailored support for pupils with SEND in transition;
- apply school budget and SEND funding appropriately, making sure pupils with SEND are not disadvantaged in comparison to non-vulnerable groups;
- monitor and review the skills and expertise of staff to support pupils with disabilities and provide effective professional development for staff and governors;
- involve parents and carers in decision making and keep them informed of progress;
- comply with the statutory duty set out in the Exclusion Guidance (September 2017): "not to discriminate against pupils on the basis of protected characteristics, such as disability or race. Schools should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion". The Therapeutic Thinking Schools approach is supportive of this duty,
- provide access to full time education and ensure that children are not missing education.

Brighter Futures for Children works with partners to:

- build capacity in mainstream schools and settings through the provision of specialist advice, services and access to training, for example Sensory Consortium Service, and NASEN. This may be provided from internal or commissioned services, commissioned outreach from special schools. Where specific expertise is not available through these means, this will be sought externally,

- support school leaders, including Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), in relation to expected practice (the Graduated Response Guidance) and support available through BFFC and partners, including providing an example inclusion audit tool,
- provide a Local Offer of services and provision that is available and accessible to children and young people with SEND,
- keep the SLA and service specification for therapy services under review through monitoring arrangements to ensure it meets the needs of the Local Area,
- offer and facilitate CPD opportunities for school staff to support and enhance the understanding of accessibility in the curriculum,
- provide opportunities for governor training in relation to increasing access to the curriculum,
- facilitate outreach support from special schools and schools with specialist provision to enable mainstream schools to better support children with disabilities, learning through the experience of special schools and other SEND specialists,
- ensure schools implement the DfE guidance (2015) for all schools about supporting pupils with medical conditions, including services available from Cranbury College.
- provide opportunities for SENCOs to regularly meet, share good practice and keep up to date with new developments,
- provide clarity on guidance for statutory education, health and care needs assessment,
- make sure that education, health and care (EHC) plans are specific about the provision required to make the school curriculum more accessible for individual pupils with a disability,
- encourage liaison between early years settings and schools to ensure good transition,
- encourage high aspirations for the most vulnerable learners,
- keep local provision under review so that it meets the changing needs of Reading Borough pupils.

2 Improving the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools

All children and young people should be able to attend an education setting with an accessible environment that supports their ability to take part in the curriculum and does not put them at a disadvantage compared to their peers. The physical environment includes steps, stairways, kerbs, exterior surfaces and paving, parking, entrances and exits, internal and external doors, gates, toilets and hygiene facilities, lighting, heating, ventilation, lifts, signage, interior surfaces/flooring, décor and furniture.

All new buildings will comply with the latest Building Regulations and Schools Premises Regulations.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have produced guidance for schools which we advise schools to use:

[Avoiding discrimination: The physical environment | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://equalityhumanrights.com)

Schools should:

- keep the physical accessibility of the school building and site under review and make timely arrangements to accommodate access,

- rearrange classrooms to ensure access on the ground floor for pupils with physical disabilities (reasonable adjustment),
- include improvements that increase access to the physical environment in an accessibility plan that is published on the school website,
- comply with the anticipatory duties as set by the Equality Act 2010,
- respond to the expectations set out in local and national guidance on meeting the Equality Act 2010 and Children and Families Act 2014 with regard to SEND,
- fund projects that increase access to the physical environment from their own resources and, where appropriate, to liaise with Reading Borough Council / Brighter Futures for Children,
- give early notification of potential access issues so as to ensure a timely response that meets the needs of both the school and pupil(s) in question,
- adhere to the specific guidance contained within this accessibility strategy,
- undertake any improvement projects in liaison with property surveyors and adhere to building regulations and health and safety requirements,
- apply advice provided by occupational therapists and physiotherapists, Sensory Consortium, and other relevant services or professionals,
- make sure curriculum needs are met by providing access to appropriate classroom facilities,
- carry out risk assessments for school trips to make sure they're accessible for pupils with mobility, sensory or medical difficulties,
- provide effective professional development for staff and governors,
- involve parents and carers in decision making and keep them informed of progress.

Reading Borough Council will:

- Work with the School Admission and/or SEND Teams and other local authority staff to assist with issues regarding individual placements and make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the access of individual children/young people with a physical impairment or complex medical need via the [School Access Framework](#); to help meet the needs of pupils with hearing, visual and physical difficulties in mainstream schools,
- plan new buildings and significant extensions or adaptations that comply with accessibility requirements,
- make sure any new buildings or extensions to buildings are appropriately signed off in line with accessibility and health and safety requirements,
- where possible, liaise with schools to try to secure alternative DfE Capital funding for services beyond reasonable adjustment,
- Work within the BFFC/ RBC agreed Physical Adaptation Framework

Reading Borough Council (Public Health Services) will:

- make sure that the school nursing contract includes reference to what is available from school nurses to schools to support inclusion, and how to access it, and monitors the implementation of this;
- keep the contract under review, working with Brighter Futures for Children to ensure it continues to meet local needs.



Brighter Futures for Children will:

- facilitate / advise on the access of individual pupils with physical or sensory impairments (Sensory Consortium), or complex medical conditions (School Nurse), where required. This may include outreach from special schools or externally commissioned advice or audits,
- make sure education, health and care (EHC) plans are specific about the adaptations required to make the school environment more accessible for individual pupils with a disability, and provide training where required,
- monitor transition arrangements for children with SEND coming into schools for the first time and those moving across school phases, and ensure (where possible) adaptations are in place in time for the child to start at the school,
- liaise with schools, parents and specialists to ensure early notification of any reasonable adjustments which may be required as outlined within the Physical adaptations Framework.

3 Improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily available to pupils who are not disabled

The Local Offer sets out in one place the support available to families of children and young people with SEND in Reading. Peer Reviews have been carried out on the Local Offer and the learning from these used to implement changes. Feedback is continually used to improve access to information. All partners are encouraged to share the Local offer with families.

Schools will:

- include improvements that increase access to information for disabled pupils in their accessibility plan and publish it on the school website,
- make sure they're proactive in researching and using a range of communication techniques and technologies, seeking the advice of relevant professionals where necessary. This may include for example outreach from The Avenue. Schools should seek advice from BfC SEND Service on how to access this,
- monitor and review the skills and expertise of staff to support pupils with disabilities,
- involve pupils and their families in decision processes regarding the accessibility of information,
- inform and signpost parent carers to the SEND Local Offer,
- liaise with NHS providers, school nurses and PHE re infection control procedures.

SEN Information Report/SEND Local Offer for the schools will be updated and reviewed by the schools annually and published on the SEND Local Offer.

Brighter Futures for Children will work with partners to:

- offer governor training that covers the requirements of an accessibility plan and the specific need to increase access to information,
- provide information to pupils and their families in accessible formats whenever needed,
- provide advice to schools and maintained settings about how best to support children and young people with accessing information, for example, the Sensory Consortium offer a range of support from signing to Braille,
- make sure education, health and care (EHC) plans are specific about the provision required to make information to all pupils more accessible for individual pupils with a disability,
- promote the SEND Local Offer to parent carers and professionals,

- make information available through alternative methods and formats, including leaflets, newsletters, regular mailouts, brokerage and access to a dedicated phone service through the Family Information Service.

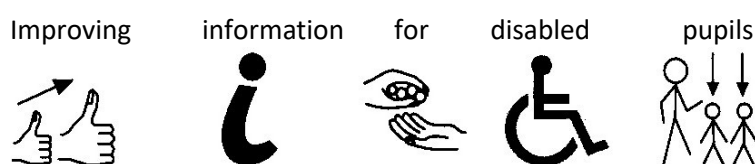
The requirement in the 2014 Children and Families Act to develop a Local Offer has the express purpose of making information more accessible.

The Local Offer is the local area's publication of all the provision, services, pathways which are available across education, health and social care for children with SEND and their families, whether or not they have an EHC Plan. It is a web-based tool and should provide clear, comprehensive, accessible and up to date information about the available provision and how to access it.

In Reading, the Local Offer remains subject to ongoing development, and is co-produced and reviewed by Reading Families Forum (RFF) and Special United (Young Peoples Forum) to ensure it provides good quality information and that the offer itself meets the needs of local families.

The Local Offer can be found here Reading's [SEND Local Offer](#)

Parent carers, children and young people, and professionals tell us that we need to do more together to promote and seek feedback on the Local Offer and we will continue to work with parent carers (RFF), using the Local Offer Parent Champion model, to increase usage of the SEND Local Offer and support its further development. Schools should use feedback to improve their SEND Information and provide feedback from their pupils and parents on the Local Offer to support this work.



Funding


Schools are expected to fund reasonable adjustments in line with their Equality Duty from within their budget. This duty applies to all pupils with a disability, whether or not they have an EHCP.

Schools receive funding through a delegated budget for all pupils in the school according to their characteristics, based on the number at the October School Census. This provides funding for general costs within the school but also provides a notional SEN budget which enables them to provide additional support for those pupils that need it, of up to £6,000 per pupil, per year.

Schools should use these monies to support implementation of the requirements of this Accessibility Strategy, particularly in terms of increasing access to the curriculum and when making written information more accessible.

There is a third element of funding available to schools for pupils who have additional needs; this is known as top-up funding. In most cases, schools receive this funding through the SEND Service for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans, although there are exceptional circumstances. The EHCP will include equipment and communication aids that has been assessed as a need and is beyond what the school can provide within the confines of the SEN budget.

Brighter Futures for Children provides a range of services to work with schools to support pupils with SEN and disabilities. Some of these are funded through a centrally retained budget funded via High Needs Block Funding and aspects are therefore available to schools free of charge. Some are



available on a traded basis and schools should use their existing funding mechanisms to access these, in order to meet the requirements of this accessibility strategy, particularly in terms of increasing access to the curriculum and when making written information more accessible. For example, Educational Psychologists may work with schools to support understanding and meeting needs of pupils with specific disabilities, and Cranbury College provides training on behaviour that challenges.

Examples of work we've undertaken

These are examples of recent works undertaken in line with this accessibility strategy.

Increasing access to the curriculum

- Graduated Response Guidance
- Therapeutic Thinking Schools
- The Schools Link Mental Health Project
- The Mental Health Support Team trailblazer project

Improving the physical environment

Parks and Leisure Directorate are working in liaison with RBC, BFFC and the local communities to improve accessibility for children and young people with SEND to the broader offer which schools may access.

Specialist SEND accommodation for children and young people with autism is in place in specialist resources.

We are working with colleagues to expand access to the joint equipment store to support efficient use of resources to support access needs of pupils with specific disabilities.

Making written information more accessible

Providing information in enlarged print for a pupil with a visual impairment: The Local Offer has the function to enlarge text, this can be printed or emailed to the recipient.

Providing easy-read guidance on the Local Offer: Where possible we will provide easy read documents. There is also a guidance document to help users access the SEND Local Offer.

The SEND Local Offer has Google translate. therefore, all information can be translated into the users' preferred language.

SEN Information Reports are accessible via each school record listed on the SEND Local Offer. Schools review and update their information on an annual basis. Where available, the record on the Local Offer will also link to the school's accessibility plan.

The Family Information Service (FIS) /SEND Local Offer also have a phone service available Monday – Friday 9am -5pm on 0118 937 3777 (option 2). Users can also come into the Civic Office during office hours to see an information officer, alternatively users can email localoffer@reading.gov.uk. Additionally, the FIS attend events, activities, support groups and schools, where users can come and see an information officer, who would be able to assist with the information on services etc.

Monitoring and Review

The Equality Act 2010 requires us to keep the Accessibility Strategy under review during the period to which it relates and revise if it is necessary. Revisions to this Strategy will be informed by feedback from parents / carers, children and young people, voluntary organisations and professionals supporting SEND.

The Brighter Futures for Children Strategic Lead, SEND in partnership with Reading Borough Council Directorate of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, and Reading Borough Council Public Health lead will keep this accessibility strategy under review; updating when required.

It is the duty of all those working within maintained schools, Brighter Futures for Children and Reading Borough Council to ensure that this strategy is implemented and adhered to.

All schools and academies must publish an accessibility plan on their website, which must comply with the statutory duties as detailed in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. A link to the school's accessibility plan will be added to the school's record listed on the Local Offer where available.

School's Accessibility Plans and SEND Information Reports are published through the SEND Local Offer, moderated by the Family Information Service. The content is monitored by the SEND Team. Reminders to review and update their information are sent to SENCOs and Headteachers each year. A template has been developed by the SEND team and SENCOs to support this.