

## **Access Strategy**

### **Introduction**

This Access Strategy should be read in conjunction with the school's Fire Strategy and Health and Safety Policy.

### **Design philosophy**

King Ethelbert School was part of the building schools for the future (BSF) programme. As such there was one completely new building (the blue building) and some building extensions or renovations to existing buildings. In the new constructions, accessible facilities were created to meet the needs of all end users including students, staff and visitors across the wide spectrum of needs:

- Hearing and visual impairments
- Learning disabilities
- Ambulatory disabilities
- Wheelchair users

**The overarching principle is that no student shall be denied access to any part of the school curriculum regardless of his or her disability.**

### **Design elements**

There are various elements of the accessible design of the campus which include:

- Power assisted sliding doors to the entrances of the majority of the buildings
- A long sloping 1:25 gradient path to the blue building with a width of 1.8m to allow two wheelchair users to easily pass.
- Highlighted nosings.
- Warm touch handrails.
- Level access to buildings.
- Visual contrasts to internal surfaces between key elements including walls, doors, floors, WC fixtures and fittings, handrails, lift controls, door handles and light switches.
- Vision panels including, as appropriate, manifestations.
- Acoustic seals.
- Passenger lifts with accessible controls, a voice announcer and inductive coupler to an emergency phone to assist people with hearing aids.

- Accessible WC's of sufficient size and including grab rails, emergency alarms and fittings of the correct height for wheelchair users.
- Sufficiently wide entrance doors to classrooms.
- Hearing enhancement systems.
- Height adjustable tables in every curriculum area and at least one height adjustable workstation or bench per specialist curriculum area.
- Light fittings with diffusers to avoid excessive glare. All new lighting exceeds 2.3m in height to avoid interference with hearing aids.
- Visual beacons linked to the fire alarm system in unsupervised areas (WC's) for people with hearing impairments.
- Visual beacons linked to the fire alarm system in noisy curriculum areas e.g. music and drama.
- Refuge areas.
- Split level reception areas and counters.
- A portable vertical rise lift to access the stage in the main building.
- Tactile paving.
- Two accessible car parking spaces.
- Directional and identification signs with sufficient visual contrast between text and signboard with case sensitive text to enable easier reading for partially sighted people or people with learning difficulties. The signs also incorporate Braille and are within the correct height range of 1400 to 1700 mm above finished floor level.

### **Management and Operational Issues**

There is a wide range of maintenance duties performed either in-house or by specialist contractors to ensure that the school's facilities continue to meet the needs of all users. The duties include:

- External routes including steps and ramps are kept clean, unobstructed and free of surface water, snow and ice.
- Designated car parking spaces are not used by non-disabled drivers and are kept clear of obstructions.
- Door closures and door ironmongery is maintained.
- Spaces required for wheelchair manoeuvres are kept free from obstruction.
- Lifts are checked regularly for proper functioning.
- WC's are not used as unofficial storage areas.
- Regular cleaning and polishing of surfaces whilst ensuring that this does not render slip-resistant surfaces slippery.
- Ensuring that junctions between different flooring materials do not become worn thereby presenting a tripping hazard.
- Windows, lamps and blinds are kept clean to maximise available light.
- Blown light bulbs are swiftly replaced.
- Air conditioning and heating units are regularly maintained to minimise noise due to wear.
- Exit routes are checked regularly for freedom from obstacles (including locked doors) and combustible materials.
- Alarm systems (including those in WC's) are regularly checked.
- Personal Emergency and Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) are provided for all permanent and temporarily disabled students and staff.

In addition to the above the school shall ensure that:

- Staff are trained in evacuation procedures with additional training provided as necessary for staff responsible for evacuating students with particular needs.
- Any changes to the campus comply with the design philosophy as far as is reasonably practicable – repairs will be made on a like-with-like basis, redecorations will comply with colour contrasts, signs will be updated etc.

## Special measures

It is imperative that form tutors notify the Site Manager of any student with a temporary or permanent disability of whatever nature so that the Site Manager can meet the student and devise a PEEP which he will then communicate to the student and all other relevant staff. The Headteacher also needs to notify the Site Manager of any member of staff with a temporary or permanent disability so that a PEEP can be devised.

The passenger lifts in the blue and red buildings are not evacuation lifts and should not be used in the event of the fire alarm sounding. Outside the blue building there are two external staircases for evacuation purposes. The school has not installed the recommended motorised evacuation equipment on these staircases to enable physically disabled students, staff or visitors to evacuate this building in the event of an emergency. This decision was taken due to the extreme likelihood of this equipment being vandalised because of its vulnerable positioning which would have caused more difficulties than it solved. Instead the school has devised an operational system for such an occurrence.

The blue building has two external refuge areas, one to each of the balconies. The design of the building is such that the external walls near these refuge areas are fire resistant for one hour. These refuge areas are identifiable by the emergency communications systems fixed to the outside of the building. This communication system links to the reception in the main building via a phone link and in the event of an emergency those with temporary or permanent disabilities will be evacuated first.

The red building is also two storeys. The designated refuge area is by the lift entrance area.

With the exception of the former health clinic all the alarm system for the campus links all buildings and there is a panel and plan of the site in the reception area of the main building. This enables staff and the emergency services to determine quickly which alarm has been activated and therefore which building is affected. For the purposes of evacuation it is only this building which is relevant.

In the event of the alarm sounding it is the responsibility of the Fire Warden for the blue and red buildings to notify the Site Manager if there is a student waiting by one of these refuge areas. This is more important in the red building as there is no fixed emergency communication system in this location. Instead, the Fire Warden for this building needs to notify the Site Manager via short-wave radio.

As part of the PEEP system and Fire Warden training the means of evacuating students will be continuously reviewed. It may be the case that the Fire Warden can safely evacuate students from a building without compromising the student's or their own safety.

Part of the overall access strategy is that classes will be moved to alternative locations should a student be temporarily or permanently disabled and this disability prevents them from accessing the normal classroom for any period of time. This issue is particularly important as the upstairs area of the main building is brought back into use. This area does not have a lift and therefore it is essential that any classes timetabled for this area do not include any students with disabilities which prevent them from using the area which would compromise their safety but:

1. The timetable must be constructed in such a way that any student with a permanent disability who will be studying a curriculum area due to take place in this area must be able

to access this subject in a part of the campus which does not hinder accessibility or discriminate against them in any way whatsoever; and

2. If a student has a scheduled lesson in any of these rooms but has a temporary disability which precludes him/her from reasonably accessing the room(s) then the whole class must be relocated to an alternative accessible classroom. This must be for every scheduled lesson and shall continue until it is deemed safe for this student to resume accessing the first floor. This judgement shall be made as part of the PEEP process.

## **Conclusions**

King Ethelbert School has an all inclusive approach and will make all reasonable and practical efforts to accommodate all students and staff whatever their disability.

Management and operational systems have been put in place to maintain the systems to optimal efficiency and special measures – in particular PEEPS – have been devised to meet the requirements of those with disabilities.

The school shall continue to comply with its' design philosophy at all times i.e. any changes that are made to the campus shall be made in such a way that no student is discriminated against in any way regardless of their disability.

## **Review**

This Access Strategy shall be reviewed together with the Health and Safety Policy and the Fire Strategy.