



SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL
EDUCATION AND
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Accessibility Design Brief

Revised: August 2026

Review date: August 2031

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1. Accessibility Design Brief

Equity, Excellence, Inclusion and Sustainability are the four aspirations on which Shetland's Learning Estate Strategy has been formulated. Shetland Islands Council's aim is to meet the needs of all our learners by ensuring that barriers to learning are removed and that at least one school in each geographical cluster will be able to meet the aspirations of this brief.

The buildings must be accessible to all children, staff and community, including those with non-physical and physical disability.

This document should not be read in isolation, as this is part of a suite including:

- Accessibility Strategy
- Learning Estate Strategy
- Admissions Policy

Strategy / Policy	Purpose
Accessibility Strategy	Making education accessible to all.
Learning Estate Strategy	Strategic framework for managing and improving the school estate.
Accessibility Design Brief	Guidance for creating accessible and inclusive learning environments.
Admissions Policy	Sets out how children and young people are allocated places in schools.

This document should be referred to during any changes to school facilities to ensure buildings are future-proofed and therefore, negate the requirement for retrofit works.

2. Introduction

Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy: Connecting People, Places and Learning, provides ten guiding principles which each local authority should strive for, in setting out their strategic approach to managing their learning estates. The first two of which are:

- Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners, and
- Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners.

Shetland Islands Council is committed to upholding these principles and in doing so will give all learners access to positive learning environments where their evolving needs can be met and their fullest potential attained.

The standards within this document will ensure that flexible spaces capable of responding to future changes both in the needs of our learners and in educational policy, are provided.

The purpose of this brief is to ensure that learning environments are designed, adapted and improved in ways that support participation, wellbeing, accessibility, communication, sensory regulation and inclusion for all learners.

As a result of the objective information derived from suitability assessments carried out since 2019, Shetland Islands Council's existing learning estate has a range of different facilities which have been designed on an ad-hoc basis to meet the specific needs of young people within the school they attend. The extent of possible alterations to buildings is dependent on several factors and may be restricted due to the configuration of aged buildings. It is anticipated that with a more strategic approach Shetland Islands Council can work in a more proactive way.

The Learning Estate Strategy sets out the aims to achieve specific aspirations, and in order to meet all children and young peoples' needs, to ensure that equity, excellence, inclusion and sustainability is truly achieved, it is important to strategically plan and invest to improve inclusive learning environments across the learning estate.

This brief is being sent out to advise on how to proceed, and the considerations to make, before purchasing any new equipment, embarking upon alterations, decorating or repurposing space.

3. Schools Across Shetland

Shetland Islands Council is committed to creating one school in every geographical cluster that meets the aspirations of this brief and that supports the participation, wellbeing, achievement and independence of all learners. For accompanying information, please refer to Shetland Islands Council's Accessibility Strategy, Admissions Policy and Learning Estate Strategy.

All schools should provide learning environments that are welcoming and responsive to the diverse needs of children and young people. Given the age, condition, layout and geographical location of schools in our estate it is not possible that they can all be made fully accessible. This will mean that the level of provision will vary between settings.

Some schools will provide additional facilities and resources to support a wider range of needs across their school community or cluster. These facilities may include sensory spaces, nurture areas, life skills provision, therapy spaces, changing facilities and specialist equipment.

Geographical factors may also require some schools to be prioritised for additional facilities where access to specialist provision elsewhere would be limited.

The use of space within a school needs to reflect the current cohort and be flexible enough to change when there is a need. It should be recognised that spaces should be used for multiple purposes throughout the school day and beyond (i.e. what may be a history room one term could become a breakout space the following term). Factors such as mobility equipment, specialist resources, staffing ratios and the profile of learners may significantly influence the use of space.

The type and extent of provision should be informed by evidence including suitability assessments, accessibility audits, environmental assessments, Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning Environment (CIRCLE) framework, learner voice, parental feedback and identified learner needs.

For example, one learner using a wheelchair and associated equipment may require significantly more space than an ambulant learner. Similarly, a learner requiring support from a member of staff, specialist equipment or communication aids may require additional space to participate effectively within the learning environment.

4. Inclusive Learning Environments

Children and young people experience school environments in very different ways, and accessibility is about much more than physical adaptations alone. It includes communication, emotional wellbeing, sensory regulation, participation, transitions and how children experience school day-to-day.

4.1 Design Principles

When designing, adapting or improving schools, Shetland Islands Council will seek to create spaces that are:

- **Inclusive** - Spaces should enable all children and young people to participate, belong and learn alongside their peers wherever possible
- **Flexible** - Learning environments should be capable of adapting over time as the needs of learners change
- **Supportive of Wellbeing** - Buildings should help children and young people feel safe, calm and able to engage in learning
- **Accessible** - Learning environments should remove barriers to participation wherever possible and support independence
- **Sensory Aware** - Design should consider sound, light, texture, movement and other environmental factors that may affect how spaces are experienced
- **Communication Friendly** - Environments should support understanding, communication and interaction for all learners
- **Sustainable** - Improvements should make best use of existing resources whilst supporting long-term sustainability

Where schools provide additional facilities and specialist resources to support a wider range of needs, these should, wherever possible, include facilities and equipment on page 11.

4.2 Understanding the Learner Experience

A useful way to consider accessibility is to think about the experience of a child or young person as they move through the school day. When considering improvements to environments Shetland Islands Council should ask:

Arriving at School

- Can learners enter safely and confidently?
- Are entrances welcoming and accessible?

- Are drop-off arrangements manageable?

Moving Around School

- Are routes easy to understand?
- Is signage clear?
- Are quieter alternatives available where required?

Learning

- Can learners access learning spaces comfortably?
- Are classrooms flexible and adaptable?
- Do environments support participation?

Social Times

- Are there spaces for different social needs?
- Are lunch and break areas accessible and inclusive?

Going Home

- Can learners leave safely and independently?

4.3 Identifying Accessibility Improvements

Improving accessibility and inclusion across Shetland's learning estate requires a balanced approach that considers the experiences of children and young people, the condition and suitability of buildings, and the effective use of available resources.

Decisions about improvements will be informed by a range of evidence sources rather than any single assessment or request. This helps ensure that investment is directed towards areas that will have the greatest positive impact on participation, wellbeing, inclusion and learning outcomes. Evidence may include:

- **Suitability Assessments** consider how effectively a school environment supports learning and teaching. They help identify whether spaces are fit for purpose, accessible, inclusive and able to meet the needs of learners and staff.
- **Condition Surveys** assess the physical state of buildings and building elements. They provide information about maintenance requirements, safety concerns and opportunities to improve accessibility as part of planned works.
- **CIRCLE Environmental Assessments** help schools understand how environments, routines and spaces are experienced by children and young people. Assessments can identify barriers relating to sensory regulation, communication, participation, independence and wellbeing, helping inform both small and larger-scale environmental improvements.
- **Accessibility Audits** identify physical, sensory and communication barriers within learning environments and help prioritise actions that will improve accessibility for pupils, staff and visitors.

- **Environmental/Access Audits for Educational settings** improve the accessibility and suitability of the environment for pupils with visual impairments.
- **Learner Voice** children and young people often provide valuable insight into how learning environments feel and function in practice. Their views help ensure improvements reflect the lived experience of those who use the spaces every day.
- **Parent and Carer Feedback** can provide important information about barriers experienced both in school and during transitions into and out of the learning environment. Their views help identify areas where improvements may support participation, wellbeing and inclusion.
- **Staff Feedback** can provide professional insight into how environments support learning, teaching and inclusion, and can help identify practical changes that may improve outcomes for learners.
- **Child Planning Processes** information gathered through Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), Child's Plans, Co-ordinated Support Plans, Individualised Educational Programmes and other planning processes can highlight environmental barriers affecting individual learners or groups of learners. Where themes emerge, these may inform wider improvements across the learning estate.
- **Health and Safety Requirements** Accessibility improvements may also be informed by health and safety considerations, statutory duties and risk assessments to ensure that buildings remain safe, accessible and supportive for all users.
- **Prioritising Improvements** Not all improvements can be delivered at the same time. Priorities will therefore be determined by considering:
 - the impact on children's participation and inclusion
 - health and safety requirements
 - evidence gathered through assessments and engagement
 - statutory accessibility duties
 - the number of learners who may benefit
 - affordability and available resources
 - opportunities to align improvements with planned maintenance or refurbishment projects

This approach helps ensure that accessibility improvements are evidence-based, proportionate and focused on delivering the greatest benefit for children and young people across Shetland.

4.4 Physical Environment Requirements

Access:

- Routes into the school from the bus park and accessible car spaces should have a distinct tactile path
- Areas which children with additional support are accessing are to be made secure as far as practicable
- Dropped kerbs on main routes into buildings and access to playing fields
- Hearing loops should be provided in the reception and public areas. All other areas can be facilitated by mobile systems

Doors:

- Signage should be provided on each side of entrance openings. Signs should have a matte finish rather than gloss
- Coloured manifestations should be applied to doors for access to main school with highlighted door sections
- All doors to have braille labelling
- Provide a smooth contrasting colour panel behind door opening pad
- Revolving doors to have a highlighted edge on each blade, with contrasting colours and manifestations to glass
- All external doors to have coloured manifestations with colour contact strip to leading edges
- Door release panels to be highlighted
- Electromagnetic hold open system on doors to corridors
- Tactile pads to be in place in order that approaching a door is easier to identify
- Width of doors and fire doors to meet required specification

Circulation and Stairways:

- All internal pillars to have highlighted poles with contrasting neutral colours
- Texture change at the top and base of stairs
- Highlighted stair nosing
- Retractable seating to have highlighted step nosing
- Handrails in contrasting colours, textures and at double heights



Double height handrails in contrasting colours with nosings highlighted on stairs along with an accessible lift.

Lifts

- Highlight swipe to activate the lift
- Braille on all buttons
- Lifts should be installed to allow access to all areas where possible
- Tactile pad at entrance to lift

Ramps

- Ramps should be fit to all areas to aid access
- Tactile pad at top and bottom of ramp
- Handrails in contrasting colours and at double heights

Where lifts/ramps and stair lifts cannot be fitted, these areas should not accommodate specific essential learning spaces for pupils, (i.e. science labs, lunch areas).

Decoration and Flooring

Decoration can make a difference to the atmosphere of a building. For those who are visually impaired delineation can assist in their wayfinding. Delineation is a factor to be considered when embarking upon any decorating. It is important when choosing how to decorate to use:

- Plain floor coverings
- Plain walls largely neutral colours
- Delineation between doors, walls, floors and ceilings

A colour palette is available from the Learning Estate Team which should be consulted prior to any decoration taking place.

Furniture

- There should be access to adjustable furniture including desks, sinks and appliances in all main areas and faculties. Soundproof seating pods are useful for tuition and discussion.
- Dining furniture should be adult height and varying shapes with different layouts including higher bistro styles and benches. Fixed button seating should be avoided.
- Furniture should present good contrast between walls and flooring. It should remain as consistent as possible for children and young people with visual difficulties.
- Height at serveries to be considered along with acoustic panels.

Acoustics

There is published design guidance from the Department for Education, which is for use in England and Wales, the principles of this should be adopted. The specific guidance document should be followed however; the following key items have been extracted for guidance:

- Consider room/space size – Reverberation naturally increases with room volume, so large rooms need more acoustic treatment.
- Finishes – use only “Class A” absorptive finishes, where possible.
- Walls – use dry lined walls as these provide some useful bass absorption at no extra cost. The new standard also incorporates the effects of furniture and fittings. Consider application of absorbent wall panels and at least some of these should be at ear height.
- Ceilings – Keep ceiling heights to 2.4m and use conventional “Class A” suspended ceiling tile is most efficient and provides some bass absorption, especially if using proprietary “Bass pads” on top of the tiles. If suspended ceilings are not possible at 2.4m then consider suspended baffles or rafts which will sit at 2.4m from floor level.

Storage

Sufficient storage for specialist equipment – General storage provision to be provided throughout the school, near teaching areas. Depending on the school roll, consideration should be given to increased storage provision to ensure the equipment demand does not reduce the effective use of teaching spaces.

Dining Areas

Dining areas should be able to facilitate everyone, including private dining. Baffle boarding can be used to achieve this.

External Spaces

All external areas should be accessible to all. All surfaces, pathways, seating and designated activity areas are to be inclusive.

- Tactile pads at changes of surface and use of contrasting colour e.g. for drains.
- Handrails at all ramped areas.
- No steps.
- Outside furniture should be adult height and varying shapes with different layouts including higher bistro styles and benches.
- No fixed bench seating to be used.
- Furniture should present good contrast between ground and surrounding area. It should remain as consistent as possible for children and young people with visual difficulties.

5.0 Schedule of Requirements

The Schedule of Requirements represents the Council's aspiration for schools identified within each geographical cluster to support the widest possible range of learner needs. It provides a framework for the facilities, spaces and accessibility features that should be considered when planning future investment and improvement works. The Schedule is intended to guide long-term development and prioritisation across the Learning Estate and should be applied proportionately, taking account of building constraints, learner needs and available resources.

Spaces within each school will vary and some will have more than one designated use. Reasonable adjustments will be made to meet the provision indicated below where possible.
Access to a dedicated teaching area with height adjustable furniture
Low sensory stimulation area
Sensory
Time-out facilities
Small group
Therapy/Medical/Physio
Life skills
Nurture space
Quiet area
Changing facilities
Office
High demand storage provision

Toilets – Changing Facilities, compliant with document M.
Shower (floor drain)
Peninsular toilet (central)
Tracking hoist
Bench (adjustable)
Tear off paper roll
Bin for disposable pads
Accessible adjustable sink (accessible from toilet or walking aid)
Storage for intimate personal care items
Accessibility – Internal Reasonable adjustments will be made to meet the provision indicated below where possible.
Access to all parts of the building
Reception (where one currently exists) at a suitable height(s)
Varying height moveable and fixed seating – some with arm rests
Space for a wheelchair in reception
Accessible servery and return area for dirty dishes/trays
Adjustable height benches, desks and workstations with enough space to access
Ramps where necessary and appropriate
Lifts where necessary and appropriate
Clear distinguishable floor space in front of lifts
Double height handrails where it does not restrict a fire exit or compromise access/egress for other building users
Tactile lift controls – access controls
Tactile surfaces where gradient of floor changes
Ease of grip and appropriate height door handles – one hand operational
Inlaid flush door mats
Seating; both internal and external should be provided where the distance between two points is long or inclined, where it does not restrict a fire exit or compromise access/egress for other building users
Accessible dining furniture
Accessibility – External For mainstream schools reasonable adjustments will be made to meet the provision indicated below where possible.
All exits and entrances to be fully accessible. e.g. no stepped Fire Exits or correct lifting equipment where applicable
Entry systems - situated at a height accessible to all
Doors which open easily - accessible threshold
Fully accessible pathways to all external areas
Accessible outside furniture
Accessible play equipment
Accessible external learning areas - e.g. polycrub
Access to all parts of the grounds – pathways, wild gardens, etc.
Doors of appropriate width (at least 900mm clear opening, can be double doors)