

Physical access to schools

A recent report gives details on how accessible schools are to pupils with physical disabilities in England and Wales and what it would cost to improve access. Coopers and Lybrand did a survey and were able to identify 1534 primary and 571 secondary schools. This sample, of 7% of all schools and pupils, is a reasonable representation of provision throughout the country.

How many schools are fully accessible now? In 26% of primary and 10% of secondary schools the teaching space is already fully accessible. Schools which have over three quarters of their teaching space accessible now, represent 46% of primary and 18% of secondary schools. 16% of primary and 7% of secondary schools consider themselves as completely inaccessible.

Are single floor buildings more accessible than multi-floor ones? Yes. 35% of single-floor primary schools are fully accessible. Only 4% of multi-floor primary schools are fully accessible. 72% of primary schools are single floor compared to 11% of secondary schools.

Are there enough wheel-chair accessible toilets? No. In 65% of primary and 55% of secondary schools there are no adapted toilets.

How easy would it be to make schools more accessible for pupils with physical disabilities? 17% of primary schools are fully accessible already. A further 43% could be improved easily or fairly easily. This means that it would not take much to get to the point where 60% of primary schools are accessible.

For secondary schools the picture is not so good. It would not take much to get 33% to the point of full accessibility.

Improving access would usually be easiest in schools where access was fairly good already. However, for the 228 primary schools who claimed to have no

access to teaching space for pupils with disabilities, 50 (22%) believed that improving access would be fairly easy or very easy. This points to an area where a little investment might bring significant results.

What would a reasonable target be for converting schools for partial access? Given that 60% of the sample primary schools are 'half-accessible' or better already, a target of 'over three quarters of teaching space accessible' may be reasonable. (Plus adequate toilets for pupils with disabilities).

In secondary schools, if access to all teaching space is the aim, 12% meet this criterion.

Should we aim to convert all schools? Some schools will be much more expensive to convert than others. It makes sense to tackle first those cheapest to convert. In primary schools, a target of 75% of schools where pupils with disabilities have access to three quarters or more of the teaching accommodation (and where appropriate toilet accommodation is provided) makes the most effective use of resources. It also provides a model under which most of these pupils are able to attend the primary school nearest them.

For secondary schools a reasonable aim is to provide access to all teaching space in 50% of schools. If one in two secondary schools is fully accessible then no pupil with disabilities should be faced with too long a journey.

Within Reach: Access for disabled children to mainstream education: the school survey. 1993 The National Union of Teachers in association with The Spastics Society. £10 inc p+p from The Spastics Society, 12 Park Crescent, London W1N 4EQ ☎ 0171 636 5020.

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