SUTTON VALENCE SCHOOL
SINCE 1576

Accessibility Policy

(Prep School and Senior School)

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Policy Review Date: September 2025
Approval date by Governors: November 2025
Review Date: September 2026, earlier if required.

This Policy and Plan applies to Sutton Valence School (including as the context requires, the Nursery, the Prep School and the Senior School).

1. Policy Statement

Sutton Valence School (SVS) recognises that the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on it to make reasonable adjustments to policies, criteria and practices to address potential issues of discrimination (including in relation to disability) and requires schools to have a three-year accessibility plan. A person has a disability if he or she has 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. The main duties are not to treat disabled pupils less favourably and to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage. Schools are also required to prepare accessibility strategies and accessibility plans respectively for increasing over time the accessibility of schools for disabled pupils (the planning duty).

This document covers the period 2023 - 2026, identifying our short, medium- and long-term plans for improving accessibility. It covers the following topics:

1. Background
2. History and Current Situation
3. Current Assessment – Senior School September 2023 and Prep School July 2023
4. Current Plan 2023 - 2026
5. Ongoing Review
6. Summary and Conclusions

Progress will be assessed annually and recorded in the "Ongoing Review" section, as well as at the end of the planning period, at which time the next three-year plan will be developed.

2. Background

SVS's approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability are summarised in two published policies Learning Support at the Prep School and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy at the Senior School.

SVS recognises that the Equalities Act 2010 ("the Act") imposes a duty on it to make reasonable adjustments to 'policies, criteria and practices' to address potential issues of discrimination. In addition, SVS recognises that the Act introduces a new aspect to the reasonable adjustments duty: "where a disabled person would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial

disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled, [a duty] to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to provide the auxiliary aid".

A disability will not itself justify the prevention of a pupil joining the School or the recruitment of an applicant for a position in the School. Such reasonable adjustments to the admissions and application procedures shall be made as are required to ensure that applicants – be they pupils seeking admission, or persons wishing employment – are not disadvantaged because of their disability. For example, where written tests are used, alternative arrangements will be made for those who are visually impaired.

Before a pupil or job applicant is judged to have failed to meet the standards required because of a reason related to a disability or, in the case of prospective members of staff, to have been less suitable than other applicants, full consideration will be given to whether reasonable adjustments could be made which would counter the disadvantage.

SVS will make such adjustments to teaching and work arrangements or School premises as are reasonable to enable a disabled pupil or staff member to join the School. They will include, but is not limited to as may be appropriate, consideration of the provision of specialist equipment, flexibility in teaching or working arrangements. SVS is committed to, and recognises the importance of, taking pro-active measures to remove barriers to disabled pupils or prospective staff to enable them to play a full and constructive part in the life of the School.

If, during their time at the School, a disabled pupil recognises a need for further adjustments to be made, they should raise the matter in the first instance with their House Tutor. Similarly, disabled staff members should raise any such concerns with the Deputy Head (Teaching and Learning), Bursar or Assistant Bursar as appropriate. In all instances, the expertise of the disabled person in managing their own disability will be recognised. Where the School does not have the relevant expertise to resolve an identified problem, specialists will be consulted. Once any adjustments have been made, their suitability will be reviewed periodically on an agreed basis to assess continuing effectiveness.

As described above, SVS will make an individual assessment of what "reasonable adjustments" can be made on a case by case basis and will keep a record of each assessment. Considerations are likely to include, but are not limited to: whether the adjustment will remove the substantial disadvantage; the cost of the proposed adjustment; the resources available internally or from external providers (such as the health and education services); the practicability of making the adjustment; the need to maintain academic, musical, sporting and other standards; Health and Safety requirements; the interests of other pupils including those who may be admitted to the School; and the School's charging structure generally.

3. Learning Support and Special Educational Needs

SVS provides an inclusive curriculum, which is designed to meet the needs of all its pupils including those with physical disabilities (within the physical constraints of our environment), those with special educational needs (including social, emotional and mental health needs), those from all cultural backgrounds and pupils with English as an additional language. Pupils may have additional needs at different times and therefore a wide variety of strategies is used to meet these needs as they arise. Learning diversity is recognised and planned for, any barriers to learning and participation will be challenged and removed where possible and all pupils will be provided with equality of opportunity. Parents will be fully informed when special educational provision is made for a pupil.

The revised Code of Practice for Special Education Needs puts emphasis on the fact that every teacher of young people with SEND is responsible for them reaching their full potential. The SEN Department will support teaching staff in their role, helping them with identifying, and differentiating their teaching of, these pupils within the classroom.

The Prep School's Learning Support Policy and the Senior School's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy is available to view on the School's Website.

4. History and Current Situation

At any one time, the Senior School and the Prep School have pupils requiring and receiving individual support either for a Special Learning Disability, as well as a number of pupils with long term medical conditions or physical impairments that require specific provisions to be made.

Improvements to accessibility have been achieved over recent years through small, medium and large improvements to physical facilities at the School and technological improvements including the changes described below.

- **Small Improvements**. The introduction of permanent and temporary ramps at access points to buildings (enabling wheelchair access), as well as the introduction of handrails (for those with more minor disabilities) at key points. The improvement of lighting around the site and the continuation of a programme to improve pathways across the School site.

- **Medium Improvements**. The introduction of a programme of professional development for staff, which already covered SEN and EAL, and has been extended to cover other forms of disability. The development of the School's website to include all relevant academic, admissions, policy and other information so that it is accessible to all via the internet.

- **Large Improvements**. The development of enhanced disabled toilet access, the improvement of access to external sporting facilities (primarily artificial playing surfaces and cricket nets) and the roll-out of site-wide Wi-Fi, along with improved classroom technology, enabling lessons to be streamed live from any inaccessible classroom.

5. Current Assessment – Senior School and Prep School September 2025

Despite the progress made, it is clear that there are further improvements that could be made, despite the restrictions imposed by (1) having very small numbers of disabled pupils applying to the School or at the School, (2) the physical characteristics of the School buildings, many of which are listed and of historic value, and (3) the expansive and complex nature of the School site.

Many disability audits can result in an extensive list of physical modifications that are identified to be undertaken. These can be formidably expensive, take years to implement and cause significant disruption to the very service that the provider is concerned to improve. It is therefore important to consider the philosophy behind the Act, which is that persons with disabilities should be able to use of have access to the service provided.

The Act does not suggest or require that the whole of the premises should be made accessible or that where physical barriers are identified that they must always be removed.

Some physical alterations may be unavoidable but they can be kept to a minimum if a managed approach is adopted and alternative solutions are sought and found. The changes needed to give access must be reasonable and achievable and could include arranging to provide the service at an alternative location on the premises or in a different manner. Moving the service to a different building/location may be possible and could avoid or minimise the need for physical change to the fabric of the buildings.

The summary accessibility evaluation is provided in **ANNEX 1**, a summary of which is:

1. Both the Prep School and Senior School delivers its curriculum very well to current pupils with disabilities (typically ASD & Language Disorders, Dyslexia, DCD, Dyscalculia, ADHD, Emotional Difficulties, Anxiety, EAL or hearing and visual impairments) and provides effective support to pupils with medical conditions or physical impairments, but would need to make further adjustments in facilities and teaching methods to appropriately support pupils with other, more severe disabilities. The School's commitment to, and success in, supporting current pupils with minor permanent or temporary disabilities demonstrates its commitment to making any further necessary adjustments for a disabled pupil. These adjustments could include:
    a. Training staff to teach and support more severely disabled pupils, and to recognise and allow for the mental and physical effort expended by them;
    b. Developing specific programmes of physical activity (using the facilities we already have in place;
    c. Reorganising some classrooms (depending on subjects studied).

2. The Senior School and the Prep School are designed to meet the needs of all current pupils, but, once again, adjustments would be required for more severely disabled pupils; in particular, some classrooms are not accessible for wheelchairs, and navigation around the site for a blind pupil would be problematic. Particular barriers that would need to be removed could therefore include:
    a. Improving "navigation" around and between current School buildings and removing or overcoming barriers that exist (e.g. frequent changes of levels necessitating many stairs);
    b. Revising emergency and evacuation systems and processes.

3. The School can and does now deliver materials in other formats (given the investment in IT infrastructure), but there has been no requirement to produce the material (e.g. on audiotape or in Braille) for pupils at the School or prospective pupils / parents. There remains some doubt as to whether it is possible or practical to adapt the School fully to make it completely accessible for a blind pupil. Adjustments that could be required include:
    a. Investing in additional systems (software and possibly hardware) to produce standardised, bespoke or complex information in a specific format;
    b. Training staff on the technology and practices necessary to assist pupils with disabilities.

The School's plans for 2023-2026 have been developed to take account of the issues detailed above and the action plans highlighted in the Accessibility Audit completed in October 2023.

6. Current Plan

The School's Accessibility Plan for 2023-2026 has the following Targets, Strategies and Outcomes:

Period	Target	Strategy	Outcome & Timeframe
Short Term	Continue to ensure that adjustments are made for any pupils with disabilities	Continue to identify disabilities early in the admissions process, and ensure that appropriate adjustments (to teaching, facilities and communication materials) are made	Ongoing
	Review the effectiveness of new facilities	Ensure lift access in Underhill at the Prep School and Maths and Theatre at the Senior School is working effectively	Ongoing
Medium Term	Refine the priorities for the Accessibility Plan based on an interim review	Complete a review, of the Accessibility of the School to ensure that the priorities identified in this (and the next) plan are the right ones	Audit completed and action plans in place where viable.
Long Term	Improve the physical accessibility to key academic areas of the School	Implement (if feasible) the next stage of the School's Masterplan to improve (amongst other things) physical accessibility	Ongoing

7. Ongoing Review

The plan is formally reviewed annually by Governors. In addition, relevant developments at the School are tracked below not only to provide an auditable trail of actions taken, but also to inform the development of the 2023-2026 Accessibility Plan. Detailed records (referred to below) are held in the Accessibility File in the Bursar's Office.

Accessibility Plan: Review List (Work In Progress)

Date	Area	Review/Action	Documentation (Accessibility File)
Sept 23	Policy and Plan	Updated plan written by Lesley Mifsud from Equality Act Audits	Bursar and Estates Bursar
Sept 23	Accessibility Audit	Updated to include 3 Year Plan	
March 23	Fire Evacuations	New guidance developed to evacuate disabled pupils and visitors from all locations	Fire Procedures Estates Bursar
November 24	Review	Accessibility Policy and Plan reviewed by Governors	This document and the Accessibility Audits for both schools.

8. Conclusion

Whilst we are confident that the School has made all necessary adjustments to ensure that no current pupils are treated less favourably or disadvantaged by physical or mental impairments (typically by making adjustments to support those with ASD & Language Disorders, Dyslexia, DCD, Dyscalculia, ADHD, Emotional Difficulties, Anxiety, EAL or hearing impairments, and by supporting pupils with long term medical conditions or significant physical impairments), we recognise that the School or its operations are not set up to support pupils with more severe physical or mental disabilities. Given our experience to date, we are confident that we could adjust teaching methods, facilities and communication materials to ensure that any pupil applying or gaining entry to the School is not placed at a significant disadvantage. However, we have also identified the most substantial barriers that still exist for current or potential pupils within the School and developed our Accessibility Plan accordingly.

The School's Accessibility Plan 2023-2026 lays out at a high level the short, medium and longer-term priorities for action to help overcome the potential barriers identified. This plan will be reviewed regularly, as summarised in Section 5 above.

ANNEX 1: Accessibility Evaluation 2023 (Part 1)

Section 2: Is your school designed to meet the needs of all pupils?	Not At All	Partially	Mostly	Completely	Key Areas for Improvement
Does the size and layout of areas - including all academic, sporting, play, social facilities; classrooms, refectory, library and outdoor sporting facilities, playgrounds and common rooms - allow access for all pupils?			☒		Most areas have good access; the layout and accessibility of some academic facilities would be a problem for severely disabled pupils
Can pupils who use wheelchairs move around the school without experiencing barriers to access such as those caused by doorways, steps and stairs, toilet facilities and showers?			☒		Wheelchair access has been improved significantly; some areas still would need addressing
Are pathways of travel around the school site and parking arrangements safe, routes logical and well signed?			☒		Pathways are generally suitable.
Are emergency and evacuation systems set up to inform ALL pupils, including pupils with SEN and disabilities; including alarms with both visual and auditory components?			☒		The use of visual alarms needs to be improved
Are non-visual guides used, to assist people to use buildings including lifts with tactile buttons?			☒		Lifts have tactile buttons, but otherwise guides are limited
Could any of the décor or signage be considered to be confusing or disorientating for disabled pupils with visual impairment, autism or epilepsy?			☒		Current signage works for current pupils; a review of signage would be required for more severely disabled pupils
Are areas to which pupils should have access well lit?			☒		Lighting has improved significantly.
Are steps made to reduce background noise for hearing impaired pupils such as considering a room's acoustics and noisy equipment?				☒	Room acoustics have been improved significantly (e.g. with carpets being fitted)
Is furniture and equipment selected, adjusted and located appropriately?			☒		Furniture is currently appropriate, but may need adapting

ANNEX I: Accessibility Evaluation 2023 (Part 2)

Section 3: How does your school deliver materials in other formats?	Not At All	Partially	Mostly	Completely	Key Areas for Improvement
Do you provide information in simple language, symbols, large print, on audiotape or in Braille for pupils and prospective pupils who may have difficulty with standard forms of printed information?			☐		Information for prospective students is on the website
Do you ensure that information is presented to groups in a way which is user friendly for people with disabilities e.g. by reading aloud overhead projections and describing diagrams?			☐		Information is presented appropriately for current pupils; some adaptation would be necessary e.g. for a blind pupil
Do you have the facilities such as ICT to produce written information in different formats?			☐		ICT is strong in the School; assessment of its capability for any specific disability would need to be made
Do you ensure that staff are familiar with technology and practices developed to assist people with disabilities?			☐		Staff are familiar with technology and practices for current pupils