

ST MARY'S COLLEGE

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME 2006-2009

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INTRODUCTION

The College is housed in buildings erected in the 1970s, which were not built with the needs of present disabled users in mind. Over the years, measures have been taken, and continue to be taken, to meet the needs of disabled users; and every reasonable effort is being made to identify and address significant obstacles which are not easily addressed on a responsive basis (eg lift access and alterations to premises). In recent years, progress on adjustments to premises for disabled users was informed by a report prepared by the Cleveland Disability Forum in 2001.

Feedback to date indicates that such needs have generally been reasonably well met; and there are no cases known to the College of potential or actual students or staff having to be turned away because the College was unable to provide for their needs. Feedback to date also indicates that disability has not been a significant obstacle to students' progress.

In the past few years the College has successfully delivered courses to a wheelchair user, a student with profound hearing and vision difficulties and several students with less profound disabilities, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit syndrome and damaged knees (preventing use of stairs). Currently (2006-07), the College has on roll 635 students, of whom 43 have disabilities and 16 have learning difficulties.

The College has 78 staff, none of whom has indicated that he/she is registered disabled or that he/she considers him/herself to be disabled.

There is now wheelchair access to all of the ground floor and first floor and some of the top floor. The only areas without wheelchair access are parts of the top floor. Investigations to date (involving local authority staff, an architect, several lift providers and College management) indicate that it would be difficult to provide appropriate wheelchair access to this area without substantial disruption and major financial outlay which would not be justifiable taking into account the available alternative methods for addressing the issue. These areas include the physics laboratories, chemistry laboratory, lecture theatre (general studies), geography classrooms and an IT room. In all of these cases it would be possible to switch classes to accessible areas of the College if a wheelchair user wished to study one of these courses (IT is also taught on the ground floor already, geography could be moved quite easily, general studies can be delivered without using the lecture theatre, chemistry and physics would be more of a problem but could be delivered elsewhere [this has happened before in the case of chemistry]). The Code of Practice indicates that this approach is reasonable.

Ground floor access for wheelchair users is very good. The College has provided three convenient disabled persons' parking spaces, which are always available, dropped kerbs for all external circulation routes and ramps to all entrances.

Internally, doorways are all sufficiently wide, and all of the corridor doors in student circulation areas have been replaced by sets of doors with an extra-wide opening especially for wheelchair users. The main student entrance has electrically-powered doors.

The first and second floors were not designed with wheelchair users in mind. However, now that electronic combination locks have been provided for access via the normally locked rear LRC doors and doors from the LRC to the main corridor area, the vast majority of the first floor has good wheelchair access. The rest of the floor, which only includes three classrooms, is accessible, but less convenient. However, there is no reason why the classes in these general purpose rooms could not be swapped to more convenient locations if a wheelchair user had difficulty. The IT laboratory on the ground floor was created with a particular view to ensuring wheelchair users could have convenient access to such crucial resources. Access to the top floor is restricted to three rooms, ie two biology labs and the general demonstration laboratory. This could be used to deliver chemistry or physics to a wheelchair user. Access to the existing chemistry laboratory is also possible, but this is not allowed by the fire officer as the distance to the nearest fire refuge is too great.

The College has in place robust liaison arrangements with partner schools and special attention is given to identifying the requirements of potential students with disabilities (or any type of special need) and assessing what preparation the College needs to make to look after such individuals, including giving appropriate information and training to staff. The enrolment process is well geared to encouraging new students to disclose any disability and sound procedures and policies are in place and followed by all staff, covering such disclosures, confidentiality, obtaining consent, referral for support, assessment and recording.

The College has not put in place every possible tool to cater for every possible disability. This is probably impossible and would involve directing time and money into areas where there may be no need. However, every effort is being made to identify and address significant obstacles which are not easily addressed on a responsive basis (eg lift access and alterations to premises).

The College has also taken steps to address the needs of visually impaired users. All staircases have been furnished with tread alert flooring and colour-coordinated stair nosings, and, where appropriate, corridor lighting has been upgraded.

The College does not currently have “auxiliary aids and services” in place (eg flashing fire alarm lights and induction loop systems for deaf students), as we have not as yet had a student or member of staff who would benefit from this provision. However, the College is well placed (in terms of financial resources and knowledge) to provide them promptly when, and to the extent, that they are required.

The College has established fire refuges for wheelchair users in case of fire. There is a wheelchair accessible toilet on the ground floor.

Individual risk assessments are performed for all disabled students at induction.

There are no devices for mechanical door opening other than at the main student entrance. This would be very expensive and probably unnecessary as users to date

have experienced no problems in opening doors. This is kept under review taking account of feedback from wheelchair users in the building.

The College does not have ideal colour contrasts throughout for visually impaired users, but decoration programmes will continue to take this into account in the future.

Disabilities are identified either at initial application stage or before, if coming from a partner school, and appropriate guidance taken and/or information obtained. All staff likely to be in contact with the students involved are made aware of what adjustments they may need and are given appropriate support, time and resources to give this, as far as is reasonably possible.

Records are kept of support provided for disabled students.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (and subsequent amendments effective from October 2004) and the DDA 2005 have brought in measures to prevent discrimination against disabled people in employment and services. The Special Educational Needs Act 2001 (SENDA) amended the DDA 1995 to cover education and has been further amended, effective from 1 September 2006, under the DDA 1995 (Amendment) Act (Further and Higher Education) Regulations 2006.

Discrimination against disabled people can take place by treating them 'less favourably' than other people and by failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' where they are placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' compared with other people for a reason relating to their disability. The DDA introduced a wide definition of a disabled person as having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day duties

The DDA 2005 introduced a new disability equality duty for the public sector, effective from December 2006, to promote disability equality across all functions. This means that we need to ensure that we continue to build disability equality into everything that we do. The general duty requires that every public authority shall in carrying out its functions have due regard to the need to:

- ⌘ promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons;
- ⌘ eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act;
- ⌘ eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities;
- ⌘ promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons;
- ⌘ encourage participation by disabled persons in public life;
- ⌘ take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities even where this means treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons (this principle has always been recognised in the DDA, particularly through the duty to make reasonable adjustments, and, for example, in the provision of dedicated services to enable disabled persons to access mainstream activities on equitable terms).

Under the specific duties, the requirements are:

- ⌘ to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) by 4 December 2006 as a means of delivering the equality duty, and to involve disabled people in the development of the Scheme;

- ✧ to prepare and regularly review an action plan that sets out the steps to fulfil the new duties;
- ✧ to review, revise and publish the scheme every three years.

The Disability Equality Scheme (DES) will inform College documents, notably:

- ✧ The College Prospectus.
- ✧ The College Student Charter.
- ✧ The College Self Assessment Report.
- ✧ The College Equal Opportunities Policy.
- ✧ The College Three Year Development Plan.

All of these documents will be reviewed in the light of the DES over the next three years. This review will take place through the Management Group and at the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the Governing Body.

DISABILITY EQUALITY - VISION, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The College's mission statement is:

'To provide post-16 education of the highest quality in a caring Christian environment.'

As a Catholic College, Christ is the foundation of everything we do and the Gospels provide us with our influence and inspiration. We are therefore committed to promoting:

- ✧ The uniqueness of the individual.

We believe that every person is a unique individual, created in God's image and loved by Him. We are therefore committed to treat every person with equality of esteem and the respect and dignity due to a child of God.

- ✧ The search for excellence.

We are called to seek perfection in all aspects of our lives. We celebrate the enrichment of the total community which flows from diversity of age, gender, racial and social origins, abilities, culture and religion. We are therefore committed to ensure that all are to be given every opportunity to develop their talents to the full.

- ✧ The education of the whole person.

We offer young people the experience of life in a community founded on Gospel values and working in harmony. Through this and a variety of educational experiences and interactions we aim to prepare young people for life working with others in communities which may be diverse socially, culturally and religiously.

- ✘ The education of all.

We have the duty to care for all, with preferential consideration for the poor, and to ensure that we provide for those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged.

- ✘ Moral principles.

Our belief in the Gospel message commits us to be in the forefront of the movement for social and racial justice and harmony. We believe this is fundamental to the common good. We aim to prepare our young people to serve as witnesses to these moral and spiritual values in the wider world.

Consequently, we will strive to ensure that:

- ✘ any person recruited to the service of the College, whether as a member of staff or a volunteer, is made fully aware of our aims and objectives and required to support them;
- ✘ students who are admitted to the College are fully aware of our aims and objectives and undertake to support them;
- ✘ all of our structure and policies are evaluated and kept under constant review in order to see that no individual is subject in any way to unlawful discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, and to ensure that all are enabled to reach their full potential.

We acknowledge that people with disabilities may suffer disadvantage not only through the disability itself, but also through lack of awareness of the limits of that disability and the, often simple, steps which can be taken to minimise its effects. It is all too easy to act out of prejudice or ignorance; and all too easy for the structures of institutions to result in 'inequality by default'. We therefore commit ourselves to take positive steps to examine our policies and practice and to change them where necessary.

St Mary's College subscribes to the social model of disability, which was developed in the 1970s by disabled people who used their personal experiences to show that the disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people are not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions but stem from attitudinal and environmental barriers. The Social Model recognises that while some people may have impairments which affect how they function physically or mentally, they are actually disabled by the barriers in society that prevent proper account being taken of their needs.

St Mary's College is committed to equality of opportunity for all. Our policy is to ensure that no person involved or associated with the College receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of nationality, religion, racial or ethnic origin, language or culture, resources, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability in literacy or numeracy, behavioural or learning difficulties, disability including limitations to physical access taking due note of the physical structure of the College buildings or for any other identifiable discriminatory cause.

We believe in human rights for all those connected with this College community and all members of society. No action shall be taken against them by any person

connected with the College, which would devalue their contribution to society as a whole and to this organisation or lead to a loss of self-respect for them or respect for them from others.

We aim to comply fully with the letter and intention of all statutory legislation, laws and directives. We are committed to the fulfilment of all agreements, regulations and Acts, which may have implications for our role. Amongst these are the:

- ✘ Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- ✘ Race Relations Act 1976 (Amended 2000).
- ✘ Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.
- ✘ Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- ✘ Extension to DDA 2005.
- ✘ Employment Rights Act 1996.
- ✘ Employment Equality Religion or Belief Regulations – December 2003.
- ✘ Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- ✘ Human Rights Act 1998.
- ✘ Data Protection Act 1998.
- ✘ Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999.
- ✘ Part Time Workers Regulations 2000.
- ✘ ACAS code of practice.
- ✘ SENDA 2001.
- ✘ Age Discrimination Act 2006.

The responsibility for compliance and for the positive attitude required to ensure success is laid upon all individuals within the College.

The College has a Bullying and Harassment Policy to ensure that staff and students have redress against unacceptable behaviour.

Over the next three years the College will:

Improve the process of data collection on staff and students with specific reference to the number and type of disability being disclosed.

Improve our ILR data to the point where no student is recorded as 'unknown' in the disability/learning difficulty fields. At present 8.7% are unknown in field 15 (disability) and in field 16 (learning difficulty).

Ensure that 100% of staff receive training on the new DDA duty by July 2007. This will be through PD Days, staff meetings, staff briefings and printed information.

Ensure that all subjects and learning resources at the College are accessible to wheelchair bound students and staff.

Review all relevant policies and documents in the light of the new duty. This will be on a rolling programme as follows:

2006-07 Student Charter, College Prospectus, Equal Opportunities policy, Health & Safety policy, Fire Procedures, College 3 Year Development Plan.

2007-08 Premises Strategy, Staff Handbook, Marketing Policy.

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE

A 'user group' was established to draw up the DES and Action Plan. The group consists of:

- ✧ The Senior Management Team.
- ✧ The SEN Auxilliary.
- ✧ The Examinations Officer.
- ✧ Four students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

This group will meet termly in order to assess the impact of the DES and Action Plan.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

All members of staff have a duty to contribute to the elimination of discrimination and to the promotion of disability equality.

The senior management team of the College will ensure that all staff engage in relevant training and are part of the impact assessments of changes and improvements to policy and procedure across the College. This will be facilitated through PD Days, staff meetings, and staff briefings. A review of the impact of these provisions will be carried out annually in the Self Assessment Report (SAR).

Departmental plans including schemes of work will be revised in light of the new duty. These will be reviewed annually as part of the College's Self Assessment process.

The DES and action plan will be agreed at a full governing body meeting. Reviews of impact assessments and progress against targets will be made to the Quality Assurance and Curriculum Committee (QA&CC) of the governors in accordance with its annual cycle.

CARRYING OUT IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

A disability equality impact assessment is a detailed, systematic analysis of the effects of a current or proposed policy, procedure, plan or practice to see whether it has or will have a differential impact on disabled people. It also finds out whether disability equality can be better promoted in an organisation. It includes, for example, consideration of where different parts of the disability equality duty, such as promoting positive attitudes, might be built into those policies, procedures, plans or practice.

The four 'Ps' - policies, procedures, plans and practice – cover every aspect of an organisation's service and function. 'Policies, procedures and plans' are statements of intent, whereas 'practice' is what actually happens.

When we fail to anticipate the requirements of disabled people, there are often one-off costs each time an individual seeks to be included. The cost effective approach is to design from the outset.

Impact assessments also allow us to step back and evaluate activity, giving us a clear idea of what works, what does not and how we can improve the quality of our service. Very often, improving the experiences of disabled people improves the experience for everyone.

Finally, impact assessments help shift the focus from the requirements of disabled learners and employees to the policies, procedures, plans and practice of the College. As such, the impact assessment process is a key tool to ensure that disability equality is embedded across the whole College.

The College's scheme for impact assessments is detailed in our action plan (see annex). We will engage our 'user group' in assessing the suitability of present policies and procedures in order to inform a series of updates. These will be assessed at the QA&CC.

The mechanism for determining the effectiveness of these policies will be through our action plan which has measurable targets built into it.

The DES and action plan will be reviewed in summer 2007 with an update on targets achieved/pending/amended.

GATHERING INFORMATION

There are five ways in which the College seeks to ascertain the particular needs of students:

- ✧ Students are asked to self-refer either in written format (application form) or during the interview process. Those who do identify such a special need at that stage are then seen individually by a member of the senior management team at enrolment.
- ✧ Parents may bring the attention of senior staff or tutors to their child's needs. This may be done at an early stage, but may occur later, for example at a parents' consultation evening.
- ✧ The partner schools are asked, following enrolment, to identify any students whom they believe to have learning difficulties or disabilities or any other particular need. A list is compiled on this basis and is available to the senior management team, tutors and class teachers.
- ✧ A screening test is given to all students as part of the tutorial induction process, enabling students with literacy and numeracy difficulties to be identified.
- ✧ Individual teachers or tutors may identify particular difficulties in the course of the academic or tutorial programme. In such cases, referral is made to the Vice Principal.

Our information on students is, therefore, at least satisfactory, but does miss some students whose real problems remain 'unknown'. One of our targets is to achieve 0% unknowns in the ILR.

Student achievement is also very well documented. Student pass rate, success rate and value added residuals are all analysed thoroughly at subject, department and whole College level. These figures are scrutinized, at the Management Group and at the QA&CC, by ethnicity and gender. Henceforth, an analysis by learning difficulty will be included.

The College has not so far analysed retention figures by disability and this will form part of our action plan.

A proforma was introduced in 2002, which provides an opportunity for candidates for appointment to the staff of the College to disclose if they consider themselves to be disabled or if they are registered disabled. This information is not available to the short-listing panel or to the interviewers.

In addition, on appointment, staff are asked to complete a medical declaration form, indicating any treatment being undertaken.

PUTTING THE SCHEME INTO PRACTICE

The DES and action plan will be published

- ✧ on the College website www.stmarys-sfc.ac.uk;
- ✧ in the staff room;

and will be available at the reception. A copy will be sent to each partner school head of year 11.

The written scheme will also be available in large print on request from the reception.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The DES and action plan will be reviewed annually through the 'user group' and the Management Group.

The formal review document will be produced annually by the Vice Principal and submitted to the QA&CC.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE

THE DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN: 2006-2009

This Action Plan has been developed to underpin the delivery of the College's Disability Equality Scheme 2006-09 and priorities for action have been identified following consultation with staff and students. Progress will be monitored annually and the Action Plan will be revised in the light of the outcomes of this annual review. Actions are assigned to an accountable postholder, target dates and success indicators.

Target	Action	Who responsible	Date	Progress reviewed by	Success indicator/s
To ensure the College is DDA compliant as far as is reasonably practicable.	To review student access to resources and report to Governing Body.	Finance Manager	By Summer 2007.	Easter 2007	All students able to access all of the College's courses.
To reduce 'unknowns' in ILR data to 0%.	A more rigorous approach at enrolment interviews, ie asking the right questions.	Vice Principal	By Summer 2008.	September 2007	Percentage gradually falls to 0 and is maintained.
To verify the accuracy of staff records.	Staff to be invited to disclose if they are registered disabled or if they consider themselves to be disabled.	Principal	By September 2007.	July 2007	Personnel records amended as appropriate.
To increase general staff awareness of DDA issues.	All staff to receive at least one annual training session on aspects of DDA.	Principal	March 2007 and annually.	December 2007	Staff development records will show 100% of staff received training. Staff evaluation of training is positive.
To encourage greater feedback from staff on DDA issues.	Incorporate pertinent questions into annual staff survey.	Vice Principal	By May 2007	May 2007 and annually.	Analysis of staff responses to show general awareness of major issues and to inform future action plans.
To encourage greater feedback from students on DDA issues.	Incorporate pertinent questions into annual student survey.	Vice Principal	By May 2007	May 2007 and annually.	Analysis of student responses to show general awareness of major issues and to inform future action plans.

Target	Action	Who responsible	Date	Progress reviewed by	Success indicator/s
To improve policies and procedures in line with new DDA duty.	Reassess effectiveness of: Student Charter, College prospectus, Equal Opportunities policy, Health and Safety policy, Fire procedures and College 3 year Development Plan.	Principal	By September 2007	June 2007	Impact assessments documented for first tranche of College policies and procedures. Documents revised and disseminated as appropriate.
To improve policies and procedures in line with new DDA duty.	Reassess effectiveness of: Premises Strategy, Staff Handbook, and Marketing Policy.	Principal	September 2008	June 2008	Impact assessments documented for second tranche of College policies and procedures. Documents revised and disseminated as appropriate.
To improve policies and procedures in line with new DDA duty.	Reassess effectiveness of: Induction/enrolment documentation for staff and students, and the Bullying and Harassment Policy.	Principal	September 2009	June 2009	Impact assessments documented for third tranche of College policies and procedures. Documents revised and disseminated as appropriate.
To improve the DES and Action Plan.	To review the detail of the scheme and Action Plan in the light of the experience over the first two terms and to update the DES and Action Plan accordingly.	DDA user group. QRG, SMT.	Full review by December 2007.	Review in July 2007.	Looking at best practice from elsewhere, the College will update its scheme and Action Plan accordingly.