

Access audit report of St Katherine's Church of England Primary School

14th February 2022



Forward

The aim of this report is to ensure that, as a provider of a service, St Katherine's School provides people with disabilities access to the buildings and facilities on site in Hilton Road Canvey Island. The report documents observations and dimensions recorded by Rob Oakley during an access audit which was undertaken on Monday February 14th 2022.

This access audit report in no way certifies or 'signs off' the specific areas reviewed with regards to meeting the disability provisions of the Equality Act 2010 but rather it describes the positive aspects and the areas of potential concern regarding the physical status, management and operation of the facilities when assessing disabled access provision. Although these issues were identified when the audit survey was carried out it must be noted that this was only a snapshot in time rather than a long-term study of the building, it is therefore necessary to set up and adhere to a strategy to meet the long-term requirements detailed in this report.

It must also be noted that the Equality Act does not override other legislation relating to buildings such as planning permission, building regulations, listed building consent and fire regulations. The Act itself does not include building design guidance and where regulations do not necessarily apply, as is the case with existing building areas, it is advisable to consider and follow best practice design guidance as provided by this report to be able to justify decisions taken.

This report has been prepared with reference to current good practice, which is subject to change. The Equality Act 2010 is not compliance based, and therefore compliance with the advice contained within this report cannot ensure compliance with the Act, or immunity from the award of damages under the Act.

Recommendations

A priority level of either **A, B, C or D** accompanies all recommendations:

- A.** An immediate or urgent access issue. This recommendation should be acted upon without delay.
- B.** An important medium term access consideration. This recommendation should ideally be addressed within 12 months.
- C.** A scheduled maintenance or refurbishment item. This recommendation should be acted upon during maintenance, repair or refurbishment works.
- D.** Subject to Feasibility. This recommendation should be studied and costed before being put into operation.

Following the recommendations contained within this report does not necessarily bring immunity from any legal challenge brought under the Equality Act 2010.

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Arrival and Parking

The school is easily accessible by public transport (bus stop approx. 250m), personal vehicle or on foot. The public walkways immediately approaching the principal building are laid to tarmac which are in very good condition and appropriate drop kerbs are in situ to facilitate wheelchair and mobility scooter use as well as pedestrians with baby buggies.

The exterior signage is suitably prominent (Image A). Signage is very important and, in this instance, could mean that a person with a hearing impairment could manage without having to ask directions, it could also help a person with limited sight more effectively.



A

Site car parking is limited and predominately provided for staff use only, however 2no designated accessible parking bays are afforded (Image B).

Wheelchair access across and around the accessible parking bays is level and both are close to the school's principal entrance. The road paint is in excellent condition

Street parking is available in Hilton Road and the surrounding area.



B

The security gate (Image C) at the head to the pedestrian route to the school's principal entrance incorporates an intercom direct to reception, set at 1450mm above finished floor level (affl); it is a little high for all users and should ideally be 1250mm affl. The gate provides ample through width of 1m thus allowing for easy wheelchair / mobility scooter access.



C

The principal entrance is approached by a single step or an adjacent ramp (Image D).

The step nosing has been highlighted previously however the paint has worn and required remedial work. The ramp is in good condition, it has the correct gradient of 1:24 for the overall change in level and it provides a slip-resistant surface.

NOTE: Short and shallow ramps such as this minimise difficulties for wheelchair users for both ascent and descent, particularly those using self-

propelled wheelchairs, they also reduce the likelihood of slipping for people with walking difficulties.



D

Principal Entrance

The entrance comprises of a 2-door set (Image E). Each door offers a sufficient clear width (760mm) to accommodate the vast majority of wheelchairs and mobility scooters however both doors can be opened if necessary – this is good practice. The threshold is reasonably level and the door handles finished in a contrasting finish – this is welcomed as they are visually apparent thus potentially benefitting people with a sight impairment.

At the time of survey there were a number of notices affixed to the R/H glazing panel, please be aware this is not good practice and should dissuaded



E

NOTE: Please be aware that 'heavy' doors can be a barrier to some people particularly those with limited upper body strength; pleasingly the opening and closing forces at the principal entrance are acceptable.

Reception.

The weather mat immediately inside the entrance doors and the reception area carpet are very good. They each provide a short pile finish and are level and smooth so they are easy to traverse by a wheelchair user, they are also flush with the finished floor level thus limiting being a tripping hazard. The reception counter is high for some people at 950mm affl (Image F) but it is acknowledged there is a lower surface available for signing in etc. A hearing induction loop is not fitted.



F

NOTE: Please be aware that reception points like this (a busy environment and fitted glazed screen) should ideally be fitted with a hearing enhancement (induction loop) system to assist hearing aid users.

Occasional use seating is provided for use (Image G). Such provision shows good practice and the 2no seats are of excellent design fitted as they are with armrests.



G

NOTE: Please be aware that armrests are particularly useful for some disabled and older people, particularly when lowering or rising.

Parish Room

Entrance into the Parish Room is via 2no wooden doors each providing a 700mm through width. Ideally an internal door set such as these should provide a 750mm clear width however it is recognised that the second door could be easily opened if necessary, however at the time of survey a large cabinet was positioned in front of the L/H door (Image H).

NOTE: Please be aware a large number of wheelchairs measure circa 750mm width including what is known as 'knuckle room' for those who self-propel.



H

The doors are fitted with excellent viewing panels and very good door furniture

The room itself has very good levels of light with a mix of dual aspect natural light and fitted luminaires. Pleasingly the windows are fitted with blinds which help control the light level and the floor is laid to a hard and level finish. (Image I).



I

One of the 2no Accessible WCs on site is located in the Parish Room (Image J)



J

The facility is designated as a unisex accessible WC which is good practice as a carer or an assistant could be of the opposite sex to the user, additionally it is a WC which could be utilised by Transgender people should they wish to use it.

NOTE: When it comes to toileting it is important to meet the requirements as precisely as possible because what may appear to be a small and insignificant detail to some may pose a real element of difficulty or even danger to a disabled person. It should also be remembered that not only wheelchair users use 'accessible WC's'. They are useful for a broad range of people who are either permanently or temporarily disabled and include women in the latter stages of pregnancy.

The WC offers an outward opening and excellent width door to accommodate all wheelchairs, level and slip-resistant flooring and very good tonal contrasting. **NOTE:** People with differing disabilities will use accessible facilities including those with visual impairments, hence why tonal contrasting is important. The lighting level is good with a single luminaire in situ together with a degree of natural light. The single lever type basin tap is of good design as are all the grab rails.

The internal dimensions of this accessible WC are satisfactory and the Alert Alarm (tested okay) has the correct length cord fitted. The cistern flush handle is on the (correct (Open) side and a single shelf is fitted.

NOTE: A shelf is good practice as it provides a hygienic place for keeping equipment or bags (i.e., Colostomy equipment) off the floor that may be wet or for helping ambulant disabled people find personal effects without the need to stoop.

It was noted at the time of survey that a number of the facility's fixtures and fittings require some remedial work to bring it up to 'good practice' design standards as well as those outlined in British Standards 8300 and Building Regulations Part M. Specific areas for improvement include:

- Height of mirror
- Lack of clothes hooks

Taking the above points in order:

The vanity mirror is currently positioned too high, ideally a mirror located either above the wash basin or on the opposite wall should be fitted to enable people to see themselves in a standing or seated position. Guidance suggests any mirror fitted should be at least 1000mm tall and have its bottom edge set at 600mm affl.

2no clothes hooks should be located at heights of 1400mm and 1050mm to allow use by ambulant disabled people and wheelchair users respectively.

Main Hall

The Main Hall is a large space used for numerous activities and is accessed by a variety of double door sets all fitted with vision panels (Image K).

NOTE: Glazed vision panels are very useful as they ensure people approaching the door can be seen from either side; in that sense it's recommended the posters affixed to the areas of glass be re-located. Whilst the posters do not currently impair important areas of through vision it is poor practice.



K

The doors are fitted with excellent door furniture (D handles which can be operated with a closed fist) and are not considered too 'heavy' for opening.



L

The Hall flooring is very good being both flat and even and it allows for easy wheelchair manoeuvre and circulation (Image L). The light levels within the Hall are good however a hearing induction loop is not fitted.

KS1 Area

This area of the school affords excellent flooring which is firm and level. It offers very good levels of light with a mixture of fitted luminaires and some natural light – this is all good practice (Image M).

NOTE: The provision of good lighting is beneficial to everyone, especially people with partial sight or hearing loss. The illuminance on interior surfaces, the quality of the lighting, good colour rendering and the avoidance of glare are key factors to be considered.



M

Although there is an abundance of furniture and clothing in the space, a suitable 750mm clear width is available through the area.

Reception Class

The reception classroom is accessed via a single door which provides an adequate clear width of 750mm, excellent through vision and very good door furniture – in terms of access this is all very good. (Image N).



N

Within the classroom the floor is level and the joint between carpet and hard flooring is in excellent condition thus posing no trip hazard.



O

Good space is afforded for wheelchair circulation and very good levels of controllable light are provided by the fitted luminaires and window blinds (Image O)



P

One concern is the single step at the fire exit (image P) which could make unassisted wheelchair egress difficult.

Music Room

Access into and within the Music Room is very good, again the doors are very good in terms of design, weight and furniture and the flooring is excellent (Image Q).



Q

Classroom 3

Given that the classrooms are very similar within the school then Classroom 3 was audited as an illustration.

The classroom door affords adequate through width, is not too heavy and is fitted with excellent vision panels (Image R). All flooring is excellent and allows for easy wheelchair traversing and good lighting levels are provided by the numerous luminaires and windows.



R

The chairs and desks are mostly easily moveable which enhances wheelchair circulation if necessary (Image S). In addition, the fact that the furniture is not fixed means that wheelchair users can use the tables (chair removed) the same as everyone else thus enhancing inclusion.



S

KS1 library area

This area is fairly cluttered but still adequate widths are afforded for wheelchair users to circulate and manoeuvre. Light levels are good and the short pile carpet is good practice. **NOTE:** Please be aware that self-propelling

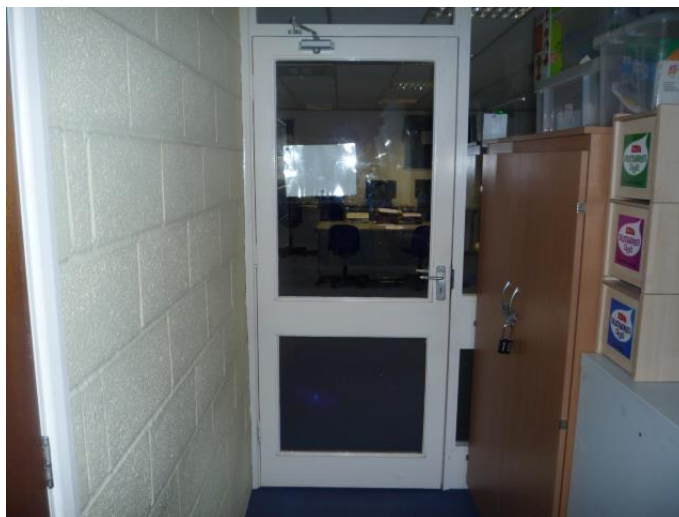
a wheelchair is far easier over hard even flooring or short pile carpets, see (Image T).



T

ICT suite

The ICT suite in terms of access is again very good. The door itself provides excellent through vision (Image U).). Just to reiterate, through vision (provided by glazed doors or vision panels) is extremely important particularly in schools where many of the building's users are short in stature as they ensure people approaching the door can be seen from either side.



U

The height adjustable chairs in the Suite are good practice as is the very good tonal contrasting and levels of light. Please be aware that people with visual impairments benefit enormously from tonal contrasting between primary adjacent finishes and good lighting design.

Technology room

The Tech room (Image V) is reasonably accessible given it's a relatively small area and helped by the fact the furniture can be re-positioned as necessary.



V

Accessible WC (nr ICT).

The external door furniture to this facility is poor and difficult to use for some people with limited dexterity, however the door opens outward which is particularly useful for people with limited mobility or impaired balance.

NOTE: A person in distress or someone who has collapsed against the door within the WC can more easily and quickly receive assistance because the door opens outwards.

This space doubles as a Wet Room and the facilities within are all accessible (Image W).



W

The cistern flush is well designed and fitted to the correct side and clothes hooks are provided. All the grab handles are good, a small shelf is fitted and the Alert Alarm worked when tested, the basin tap is correctly positioned nearest to the WC – all very good practice. (Image X)

The roller-towel is poorly positioned in the room being too far from the WC.

NOTE: Please be aware that it is important for reasons of personal hygiene that a person seated on the WC can reach the basin, taps, toilet paper and paper towels and / or a hand drier before adjusting their dress. It's is therefore suggested a paper towel dispenser be positioned on the wall adjacent to the WC.



X

Given the facility must allow for suitable wheelchair circulation it is a recommendation that the small set of drawers (Image Y) be re-positioned further into the corner of the space together with the waste bin currently adjacent to the WC.



Y

It was noted that the alarm reset is poorly positioned outside the WC.

NOTE: Please be aware that a reset control such as this should be reachable from a wheelchair and the WC, or from the wheelchair and the shower/changing seat, in this way the user has control over cancelling the alarm if required. In addition, the reset control should be easy to operate and located with its bottom edge ideally between 800mm and 1000mm affl.

A mirror should be installed in this facility, it needs to be 1000mm tall with its bottom edge set at 600mm affl.

Nursery

The Nursery area is reasonably accessible with good levels of light (dual aspect`) and very good flooring. Although a fairly busy space there is sufficient room for wheelchair circulation and manoeuvre.

Unfortunately, the entrance door is not fitted with lower vision panels whilst those above are again partially obscured by notices etc. (Image Z).



Z

KS2 Practical Area

Another area where there is normally an abundance of clothes and items of furniture etc. but overall, the space can still be deemed as 'accessible' helped by the short pile carpet. However, it's important that areas like this are managed to ensure a clear passageway is always available. (Images AA & BB).



AA



BB

External Areas

All the external areas are generally good with very few steps in place to hinder wheelchair access whilst some classroom exits are ramped which is very good practice (Image CC). Additionally, the ramps are well constructed in that they have the correct gradients, handrails and upstands and all provide a suitably slip-resistant surface – this is all excellent.



CC

Some areas of the outside space could be improved however. The storage boxes (Images DD & EE) should be re-positioned and other equipment tidied thus ensuring the walkways remain fully accessible.

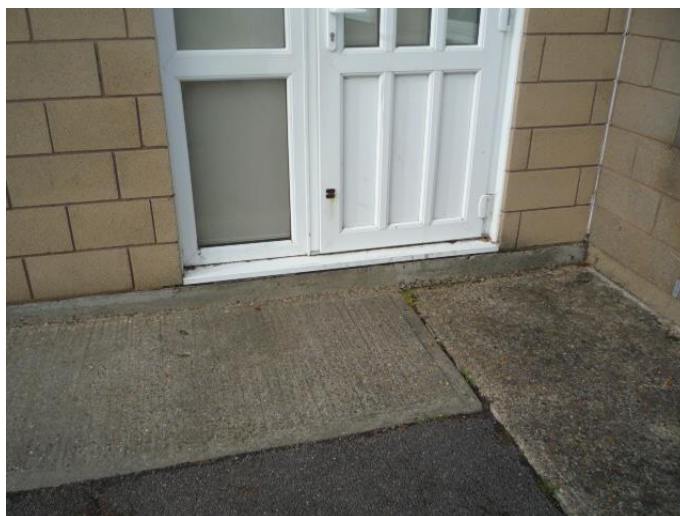


DD

Emergency Egress

Fire Safety issues have not specifically been considered or the means of escape in depth as part of this audit. This area needs to be addressed by the management under Health and Safety legislation. However, all Fire Wardens should receive disability awareness training so they can assist disabled people out of the building.

Some of the fire exits at the school have single steps down to the outside areas (Image FF as an example). These level changes could be problematic to some wheelchair and Mobility Scooter users and it is recommended remedial works be considered in an effort to make the thresholds more level or at least ramped.



FF

Recommendations

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Re-position cupboard in front of the Parish Room door **(A)**

Within the accessible WC (nr ICT), reposition the set of drawers and waste bin into the corner of the space **(A)**

Ensure all external walkways remain clutter free **(A)**

Remove any posters etc. currently on door vision panels. **(B)**

Provide a portable hearing induction loop at reception. **(B)**

Highlight (paint) the single step at the principal entrance **(B)**

Fit 2no clothes hooks in the Parish Room accessible WC **(B)**

Within the Parish Room accessible WC install a mirror that can be used by people standing or sitting **(B)**

Replace door handle and lock in the accessible WC (nr ICT) **(B)**

Within the accessible WC (nr ICT) install a mirror that can be used by people standing or sitting **(B)**

Install a paper towel dispenser for drying hands so that it's adjacent to the pan in the accessible WC (nr ICT) **(B)**

Consideration be given to ramping those fire exits currently stepped. An alternative could be to purchase some temporary ramps, often constructed from Aluminium they are light in weight and relatively low in cost (C)

Re-position the entrance intercom to a more accessible height of 1250mm affl. (D)

Reposition the Alarm Reset button currently outside the accessible WC (nr ICT) (D)

Fit vision panels in the lower sections of the Nursery door (D)

Install a hearing induction loop in the Main Hall. (D)

Summary

This Access Audit of St Katherine's School, Canvey has been completed at the request of Management.

Some excellent practices are seen to be already operating at St Katherine's School and it is extremely pleasing that some of the recommendations from a previous report have been acted upon by the school staff in a positive manner. The school provides good internal door widths, excellent flooring throughout, very good lighting levels and general circulation space – these are all positively welcomed.

Of course, 'Access' is not simply about the physical access into the school buildings but is also about access to information, particularly for visually impaired and hearing impaired people and those with learning difficulties. As such any information provided should be available, on request, in alternative formats such as large print etc.

The audit has highlighted areas in which improvements could be made to assist the access, movement and safety for all users of the school including pupils, staff and visitors. If the changes and alterations, as recommended in this report were implemented, they would enhance the good practices already in place.

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APPENDIX 1 - Management issues

Accessibility is not guaranteed by good design alone. How the school is managed in its day to day running will have a big impact on how easy it is to use by disabled people including pupils, staff and visitors, in this sense a building management manual could be drafted which could be updated and added to as required. In response to duties under the Equality Act 2010, and to achieve good practice in the management of buildings, the following buildings management, maintenance and health and safety issues should be considered:-

ROUTES – ensure that external routes, ramps and steps are kept clean, unobstructed and in winter, ice-free. Ensure foliage is regularly trimmed.

STEPS – ensure that step nosings are suitably highlighted in a contrasting finish.

DOORS – ensure that door closers are regularly maintained and that door ironmongery is kept clean and free moving. Where doors are fitted with ‘hold-open’ devices (and the building is in use) ensure the doors are kept in the open position.

HORIZONTAL CIRCULATION – ensure that spaces required for wheelchair manoeuvres are not obstructed by freestanding objects such as planters, signs, and deliveries or used for storage space.

TOILETS – ensure that accessible, or any toilets, are not used as unofficial storage areas for cleaning materials etc. That the facilities are kept clean, grab rails are always securely fixed and paper towels and toilet papers are well stocked.

SIGNS – ensure that new signs integrate with the adopted signage designs, and that signs are replaced correctly when removed for decorations.

ALARMS AND SECURITY – ensure that alarm systems are regularly checked and that new staff are trained in alarm response procedures.

SURFACES – ensure that cleaning and polishing of floors do not render slip-resistant surfaces as slippery. Ensure junctions between different floor surfaces do not become worn, presenting a trip hazard. Ensure that the redecoration of interiors does not compromise a particularly selected colour

scheme designed to impart information to people with poor sight, or impair contrast with building features such as door frames, control panels, signs etc.

LIGHTING – ensure that windows, blinds and lights are kept clean in order to maximise available light. Ensure that blown light bulbs are swiftly replaced.

VISION PANELS - ensure vision panels are always kept clear of notices etc.

LITERATURE - ensure any literature is available (usually upon request) in large font.

WEBSITE – ensure the website provides current details of the levels of accessibility.