



RNIB
Northern Ireland

Equality Commission
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

SENDO -

what it means for pupils who are blind or partially sighted

SENDO is the Special Educational Needs & Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. It is a new law relating to disability discrimination in education. This leaflet gives an overview of the legislation and how it might relate to pupils with sight loss.

SENDO applies to schools, Education and Library Boards, universities and colleges including teacher training and agricultural colleges, and general qualification bodies.

SENDO:

- introduces disability discrimination law to the education sector in Northern Ireland; and
- strengthens the rights of children with special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools.

Duties under SENDO

SENDO affords protection from disability discrimination to all disabled pupils and prospective pupils. It specifies Education and Library Boards and Boards of Governors of grant aided schools or Proprietors of independent schools as the bodies responsible under its disability discrimination duties. These duties apply to the provision of education and associated services, admissions, and expulsions.

Under SENDO responsible bodies have a duty:

- not to treat disabled pupils and prospective pupils less favourably for a reason related to their disability; and
- to make 'reasonable adjustments' to all policies, procedures and practices to ensure that a disabled pupil / prospective pupil is not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to pupils who are not disabled.

Duties under SENDO (continued)

The reasonable adjustment duty is both an anticipatory and reactive duty. This means that education providers must make changes, where reasonable, both in response to the individual needs of pupils, and proactively for disabled pupils in general.

Schools have a duty to work towards making school life more accessible to disabled pupils and prospective pupils in terms of premises, the curriculum and, of particular importance to pupils with sight loss, written information.

This does not include providing auxiliary aids and services for disabled pupils and prospective pupils. Aids and services such as CCTVs, ICT speech or magnification software and provision of a classroom assistant, continue to be provided through the Special Educational Needs framework. SENDO does not provide a new or additional means of obtaining these.

However, SENDO does cover how the auxiliary aids and services provided by a pupil's Statement of special educational needs are used. For example, a pupil's Statement of special educational needs provides a handheld CCTV so that the pupil can access the curriculum. However, due to a lack of training in its use, the teacher keeps it in a cupboard. It is likely that this would be an unlawful act under the disability discrimination duties in SENDO.

Schools might reasonably be expected under SENDO to arrange for:

- pupils with sight loss to have access to all teaching materials and texts in their preferred format at or before the day of the lesson;
- children with sight loss to receive a technology assessment, be provided with appropriate equipment, and training from a qualified professional in its use; and
- teachers and staff working with children with sight loss to receive Visual Awareness Training regarding the needs of blind or partially sighted pupils in school.

Role of RNIB Northern Ireland

RNIB NI offers a range of services to children and young people with sight loss and their families. Our aim is to help them enjoy the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and quality of life as those who have full sight.

RNIB NI can help schools meet their duties under SENDO through:

- A Transcription service that can provide curriculum materials in Large Print, Braille, audio and DAISY digital formats;
- A Technology Officer who can carry out a full technology assessment and appropriate training in the child's home, in school or in the RNIB office; and
- Provision of visual awareness training for school staff focusing on the inclusion of a child with sight loss in the school.

Role Of the Equality Commission

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has responsibilities to promote good practice, produce codes of practice and guidance materials, give advice and consider assisting with complaints about disability discrimination in education. The Commission has produced a Disability Discrimination Code of Practice for Schools that describes the duties on responsible bodies and outlines the rights of disabled pupils and prospective pupils. Copies

of this Code of Practice, and further information and advice about the disability discrimination duties under SENDO is available free of charge from the Equality Commission. The Commission's contact details are given at the back of this leaflet.

Further Help

If you would like further information or advice about meeting the needs of blind and partially sighted pupils and / or the services provided by RNIB NI contact:

RNIB Northern Ireland

40 Linenhall Street

Belfast

BT2 8BA

Tel: 028 9032 9373

Fax: 028 9027 8119

Email: rnibni@rnib.org.uk

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

For further information or advice regarding the disability discrimination aspects of SENDO and/or the work of the Equality Commission please contact:

**The Equality Commission
for Northern Ireland,**

Promotion and Education Division,

Equality House,

7-9 Shaftesbury Square,

Belfast

BT2 7DP

Telephone: 028 9050 0600

Textphone: 028 9050 0589

Fax: 028 9024 8687

Email: information@equalityni.org

Website: www.equalityni.org