

New law on disability discrimination and special educational needs in schools

From 1 September 2005, Northern Ireland will have a new law. It will:
• give children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) new rights in schools; and
• introduce to Northern Ireland, for the first time, disability discrimination laws for the whole education system, including general qualifications bodies.

The new law will affect every aspect of school life, including admissions, exclusions, school policies, the curriculum, and school trips and clubs. It's called the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO).

What will the new law mean?

For children and young people with SEN at school, the law will mean:

- increased rights to attend mainstream schools;
- new services for parents and for schools, giving
  – information and advice, and
  – help to avoid and resolve disputes;
- increased rights of appeal for parents to the SEN and Disability Tribunal;
- new duties on Education and Library Boards to comply with orders of the SEN tribunal within set time limits.

For children and young people with disabilities at school, the law will mean:

- protection against discrimination in education;
- new duties on schools to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate for pupils with disabilities; and
- new duties on Boards and schools to plan to continually improve the accessibility of the school building, curriculum and information provided to pupils with disabilities and to make these plans available for inspection.

For students with disabilities in further and higher education, the law will mean:

- protection against discrimination in education; and

- new duties on further and higher education institutions to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate, including physical adjustments to premises.

More information
You can access the full text of the law online at **http://www.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051117.htm** and buy copies from The Stationery Office, Belfast.

The Equality Commission (NI) is producing codes of practice and other guidance materials about disability discrimination in education. The Department of Education is producing guidance and support materials, including supplementary guidance to support the changes that the new law will make to the Code of Practice on the current Identification and Assessment for Special Educational Needs. You will be informed as these become available. Education and Library Boards will be organising training on the new law, in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Equality Commission.

For more information on the new law, or support and guidance materials, you can contact the Department of Education or the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland:

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