

# Equalities and Inclusion in Play and Childcare

## Introduction

This briefing focuses on equalities and inclusion in play and childcare services – with an emphasis on the inclusion of Disabled children and young people, and the requirements of the Disability Equality Duty (DED). As a national charity, **Kids** has a remit to provide services for, and promote the inclusion of, Disabled children and young people. However, the principles of inclusion apply to all children who experience (or are at risk of experiencing) social exclusion. For example, this briefing refers to Disabled children from Black and minority ethnic communities, as well as other marginalised groups.

The key messages and examples of good practice contained in this briefing are drawn from the work of the **Kids Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP)** and its Regional Networks. The PIP project aims to ensure that ALL children and young people have equal access to, and are equally included in, local play, childcare and social opportunities.

Research shows that families with Disabled children are more likely to live in poverty and experience social exclusion. Disabled children from Black and other minority ethnic communities face a 'double discrimination' having to contend with both racism and disablism in their daily lives. These experiences of discrimination



often result in exclusion and segregation. 'Disabled children from Black and minority ethnic communities may be pushed to the edges of society by uncaring institutions, cultural stereotypes and personal prejudice, and their families are more likely to experience social and economic discrimination and hardship.' (1)



department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

## The New Equalities Agenda

### Equalities legislation

Equalities legislation is advancing apace with the introduction of the Disability Equality Duty (DED) in December 2006, and the Equality Act 2006.

In legal terms, the DED is part of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which has placed a new duty on all public bodies (local authorities, hospitals, schools) to promote disability equality. The DED covers everything that public sector organisations do – including policy making and service delivery. In this respect it is similar to the duty to promote race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. People who work in the public sector now have to consider the impact of their work on Disabled people, take action to promote disability equality and actively involve Disabled people (adults and/or children as appropriate) in the process. All public bodies covered by the specific duties should have produced a Disability Equality Scheme (DES), and should now be taking forward the Action Plans laid out in the Schemes.

The Equality Act 2006 establishes a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). From October 2007 the CEHR will bring together expertise from the current equality commissions (the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission) to promote equality and tackle discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, race and promote human rights. The final report of the Equalities Review (February 2007) which set out to examine the causes of persistent



discrimination and inequality in Britain (and will inform the development of the new Commission) revealed that Disabled people are among the most discriminated members of our society.

Another significant development has been the establishment of Equality 2025. This Network is composed entirely of Disabled people and was set up in December 2006 by the Government's Office for Disability Issues. Equality 2025's main aim is to carry out the promise to Disabled people that they will have a direct voice into government – to help design policies and services that Disabled people require, and to look at all issues from an equalities perspective (for further information on the DED and CEHR refer to the websites listed on the back – 2 & 3).

## How does the DED impact on the play and childcare sector?

The DED builds on the existing provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) which require us not to 'treat Disabled children less favourably' and to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure their inclusion in play, childcare and education.

The main difference is that the DED is a duty on the local authority, and not necessarily on the play or childcare setting. However, all play and childcare services that are commissioned by the local authority will be required to show how they are assisting the local authority in meeting the DED by collecting information about the numbers of Disabled children attending their setting, demonstrating how they are promoting disability equality, and how they are involving Disabled children and people.

It is also important to note that many quality play and childcare providers will

already be implementing aspects of the DED under OFSTED Standard 9 which requires staff to 'actively promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice'.

It is still too early to gauge what the longer term impact of the DED will be on the play and childcare sector, and to what extent Disabled children will be involved in shaping services. Legislation alone does not change oppressive practices. However, the DED does provide a positive opportunity for services to begin to think strategically about disability equality. Most significantly, it is the first piece of legislation where there is a clear emphasis on the Social Model of Disability – focusing as it does on removing barriers, rather than on a person's impairment. So it is timely that we re-examine what equality and inclusion means in the context of play and childcare, and how settings can begin to put it into practice.

---

## Promoting Equality and Inclusion

### Equality and anti-discriminatory practice

**'Those holding power provide services that keep minority groups isolated from mainstream provision. For example, special schools and provision for Disabled people mean they remain invisible and are unable to access mainstream opportunities. Inclusivity, on the other hand, based on anti-oppressive principles and practices, can enable the needs of all groups to be met through dialogue, sharing of good practice, joint planning and an inclusive organisational structure.'**  
(Haki Kapasi)

The University of Gloucestershire's 'Equality and Diversity in Playwork' (4) module summarises key terms as follows:

#### Equality

- Does not mean treating everyone the same
- Needs to be considered at societal level as well as individual levels
- Is often defined as access to what those in power have (for example, resources, services, employment, influence, self-determination, etc.)
- Is inextricably linked to notions of diversity

### Diversity

- Is about seeing the positive aspects of difference
- Goes beyond the narrow confines of equality of opportunity
- Is complex (we cannot assume that every member of a particular group is the same, and we need to be aware that people are often members of more than one minority group)
- Adds another dimension to equality – it does not replace equality

### Anti-discriminatory practice is based on:

- recognising the impact that discrimination has on people's lives
- Avoiding the pitfalls of reinforcing stereotypes
- challenging oppressive structures and attitudes that prevent Disabled children from participating (5).

The DED ensures that for the first time public authorities must take responsibility for tackling institutional disability. However, staff working with Disabled children also need to have an understanding of the individual discrimination that children and their families face as a result of ethnicity, religion and disability. 'The combined impact of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the DDA 2005 should be that every worker is aware of how Disabled children and children from Black and other minority ethnic communities may face discrimination in their lives, and what they can do to challenge and overcome it. The effect of these laws is that public services must have both a race equality scheme and a disability equality scheme, which together should help to tackle the discrimination faced by Black and minority ethnic Disabled children' (6).

### An inclusive ethos

The DED is about taking a systematic approach to promoting equality of opportunity. Equality and inclusion must therefore be central to all activities, from greeting the child to policy making, employment practices and strategic planning.

An inclusive play strategy or inclusion policy based on the Social Model of Disability is a useful first step. Bristol City Council, for example, developed a Play Strategy in partnership with Disabled children and young people which is committed to inclusion: 'our commitment is that Disabled children and young people have the right to be a part of any local play environment they choose'. Manchester Sure Start also has an Equality and Inclusion Strategy to ensure that all Sure Start Services are inclusive. For further guidance on inclusive play strategies refer to the **Kids Briefing Planning for Inclusion** (7). However, as demonstrated in the example below, it is equally important that this is fully implemented on the ground if you want to make a difference.

**'Stepping into the play centre it becomes apparent that inclusion is defined in the widest sense of the word. Staff reflect the ethnic mix of the children attending the scheme, posters display positive images of Disabled people, rules of the play centre (written by children) emphasise fair play and respect for others. A rights based philosophy underpins all aspects of policy and practice at the centre. There is no specific inclusion policy, but the rights of Disabled children to belong and be included are set out in an equal opportunities policy so that impairment is viewed alongside other common determinants of inequality such as class, race and gender.'**  
(Coronation Road Play Centre, Birmingham, 8)

## Changing attitudes

The **Playwork Inclusion Project** has demonstrated time and again that when staff training focuses on exploring attitudes to disability, managing the change to inclusion becomes easier.

**'Inclusion training has been extremely useful. In my opinion the biggest barrier to offering an inclusive service is attitudinal. I have seen the participants change from week to week and become more confident to challenge and change their practice. They are learning to see a Disabled child as a child first and realising that when they meet each child's individual requirements this is good inclusive practice for ALL children – there is no need to first attach labels to a Disabled child. It's great and I know it is the training that has enabled this to happen.'** (Cheshire County Council)

Putting inclusion into practice is not just about working inclusively with all children. It's also about working inclusively with everyone - developing respectful relationships, and working as part of a team as the changes towards inclusion start to be implemented. For some teams the process can be challenging and difficult, for others it is more straightforward. For sustainable and beneficial change, it is important to ensure that all those involved are supported along the way.

**'Inclusion is a journey and we still have a long way to go. The journal we kept during the first year enabled staff to express their concerns. One member of staff wrote: Honesty, flexibility and a positive attitude is essential, as even the best thought out plans can go wrong. Don't think of it as a failure - see it as a learning curve. You cannot get everything right the first time. Remember we have the children for a whole year and we allow them to grow and develop. Surely we should give ourselves the same opportunity.'**

(Haven Early Years Centre)

## A child centred approach

**'Inclusion is access plus respectful relationships.'** (Pippa Murray)

The DED states that organisations must be 'prepared to take extra reasonable steps to promote equality of opportunity'. This does not mean treating everyone the same. Under the DED, unlike the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, you can 'positively discriminate' by treating a Disabled person more favourably than someone else. Treating everyone the same may result in discriminating against Disabled children as it ignores the ways in which everyone is different.

Staff at **Kids** playgrounds in London aim to ensure that activities are led by the interests and enthusiasms of the child, with appropriate levels of support. For example, some children who have autism might need a quiet space away from the other children, or the option of having their lunch before the rush in order to feel safe and supported. Children with complex health conditions might require extra assistance from staff in order to participate in certain games and activities.

**'We're child centred in the sense that we always focus on who the child is – and never on the impairment. If you treat children with respect and negotiate rather than enforce, a community grows up based on acceptance and understanding. At our playground you get a wide spectrum of kids from all ages, abilities and backgrounds, and a richness of experience that I don't believe you can find elsewhere.'**  
(Senior Playworker - Kids playground)



## Involvement not consultation

**‘Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.’ (Native American saying)**

The DED moves beyond consulting with Disabled people/children to ‘active involvement’. This means involving Disabled people at all stages from drawing up your policies to the delivery of services.

If you don’t know where to start, seek advice from local or regional disability groups. In the South East, for example, a Disability Council (South East Disability Council) has been set up partly to respond to the demands of the new DED, and to give information and guidance to public bodies regarding Disability Equality. According to SEDEC: ‘Disability Equality is about the self determination of a people, Disabled People. This can only be achieved with Disabled People in the lead.’

**The Kids Young People’s Inclusion Network (YP-in)**, a project led by Disabled young people to participate in and shape leisure activities, defines the difference between consulting and involving in the following way:

- In consultation, the focus is on the person doing the consulting. The person being consulted is invited to bring only aspects of themselves that are relevant to the consultation.
- In involvement, the focus is on the person being involved. They are invited to bring all aspects of themselves into the involvement.

**‘Disabled Young People are involved in all aspects of decision-making and development. We have adapted recruiting processes so young people have the main say and developed communication so that all young people can put their opinion across at their own pace.’**

**(Kids YP-in Project)**

## Communication

In order for children’s views to be taken into account, you must be able to communicate with them. Communication can sometimes be an issue if children have speech, language, or learning difficulties. Thus it is vital to find out the child’s first language and preferred method of communication (including British Sign Language).

**‘We communicate with all children - If children cannot communicate verbally, we build relationships with the children and are able to know their likes and dislikes by either their body language, signing and facial expression. We also use pictures, symbols and colours.’**

**(Out of School Development Worker, Cheshire County Council)**

When seeking the views of Disabled children, it is important to involve children and young people from a wide cross section of the community. Disabled children and those from Black and other minority ethnic communities need to be asked to participate in a way that is culturally relevant and appropriate to them. This means not making assumptions about what they want or how they communicate, but checking with the children and (if appropriate) with the families.



## Working in partnership

To promote equality and inclusion in play and childcare, it is vital to reach out to parents/carers and build links with community groups. Equally important are the partnerships formed with local, regional and national agencies and organisations. Whether you are drawing up an inclusive play strategy or setting up a new project, establishing partnerships and involving Disabled people and their organisations is a fundamental part of the process.

**'In drawing up our Play Strategy we consulted with 1,300 children, 25 parents/carers, 100 play practitioners and numerous agencies including Bradford People First who took a party of Young People with learning difficulties out to sample different play facilities and comment on their experiences.'**

**(Bradford Play Strategy Group)**

An excellent example of partnership working is the 'Include Me Too' project which involved Disabled children from Black and other minority ethnic communities in Wolverhampton (as well as parents & carers, local businesses and statutory agencies).

**'The project was set up to consider the barriers to participation faced by Disabled children from Black and other minority ethnic groups. The project took place over two years and used innovative ways of involving groups often considered 'hard to reach' through the creative arts - from African Drumming and Bollywood Dancing to Dru yoga. The children wrote a Children's Charter, produced a music CD and created a gallery of positive images of Black and minority ethnic Disabled children.'** (Include Me Too - 1)

## Key Recommendations

- Assess your service – establish the current profile of the children and young people using your service. Consider which local children are unable to access the service, and why.
- Draw up a rights based policy, and take action to recruit staff who are Disabled and/or from diverse cultural backgrounds. Check your requirements under the DDA, DED and Race Relations (Amendment) Act.
- Ensure that service users (Disabled and non-Disabled children and their parents/ carers) and relevant partnership agencies are actively involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of your services.
- Ensure that staff have training on equalities legislation and inclusion for play/childcare (not education), and that they are supported in putting this training into practice.
- Be proactive - target local community groups. Ensure that all information is, or can be provided in accessible formats and appropriate languages. Check a multi-faith calendar before organising any important events.
- Ensure that all children feel welcome, safe and accepted. Make it clear that everyone's first language is of equal value and that individual requirements can be accommodated.
- Check that posters, signs, activities and resources reflect the diversity of the local population, and promote positive images of disability. Use positive language in consultation with Disabled people's groups.
- Monitor and evaluate your service: Write measurable outcomes (e.g. a target number of Disabled children and young people who are accessing your provision).

## Conclusion

The DED provides a fresh impetus to move towards the building of more responsive services, and inclusive communities. We all need to contribute individually and collectively for a cultural change across the entire play and childcare sector – valuing and celebrating individuality and diversity. In working towards equality and inclusion in play and childcare, we should do so with dignity and respect so that equality and social justice can be seen and heard in practice.



## References & Resources

1. **Include Me Too** (Parmi Dheensa 2006) [www.includemetoo.com](http://www.includemetoo.com)
2. **The Disability Rights Commission Information on the DDA and DED:** [www.drc.org.uk](http://www.drc.org.uk) and [www.dotheduty.org.uk](http://www.dotheduty.org.uk)
3. **The Commission for Equality and Human Rights:** [www.cehr.org.uk](http://www.cehr.org.uk)
4. **Equality and Diversity in Playwork** (PL104 Workbook). (W. Russell 2006) University of Gloucestershire.
5. **Anti-Discriminatory Practice**, 4th edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (N.Thompson 2006)
6. **Diversity Matters** (Justin Simon 2006) [www.ncb.org.uk/cdc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc)
7. **Planning for Inclusion – making your play strategy inclusive (Kids 2006)**. Downloadable from: [www.kids.org.uk/ndd/publications](http://www.kids.org.uk/ndd/publications)
8. **Best Practice in Inclusive out of school provision** (Karen Dunn, Michele Moore and Pippa Murray (ICE – 2003). Research carried out for **Kids** to inform the development of the PIP project.

**Kids** is a national charity working towards a vision in which all Disabled children and young people realise their aspirations and their right to an inclusive community, which supports them and their families. **Kids** offers a wide range of services including play and leisure projects through five regional centres, and provides training, publications, advice and a national development programme to promote inclusive play and leisure through its National Development Department (NDD). **Kids** NDD runs the **Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP)** funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the **Young People's Inclusion Network (YP-in)** funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

If you would like a copy of this Briefing in large print or an alternative format, please contact the PIP team.

### Kids

6 Aztec Row, Berners Road  
LONDON N1 0PW

Telephone: 020 7359 3073

Email: [pip@kids.org.uk](mailto:pip@kids.org.uk)

Website: [www.kids.org.uk](http://www.kids.org.uk)

All photographs show activities in Kids playgrounds.  
(Becky Nixon)

