

# Inclusive Design for Play

## Mainstreaming Inclusive Play Good Practice Briefings



## Introduction

Disabled children and young people have the right to play and be included in their local communities. The National Play Strategy makes it explicit that all new play provision must be accessible and inclusive - and that disabled children and young people are to be consulted in the process. The responsibility now falls to local authorities under the play pathfinder and play builder programme to ensure that this right becomes a reality.

### Why design for disabled children on every play site?

Firstly, it is a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Equality Duty. Secondly, it makes sense – it costs very little to design in inclusion from the outset,



so that all parts of the site are accessible and can also be used by schools and community groups. Finally, creating truly accessible, truly inclusive environments is just one outcome of a broader, deeper commitment to equality for all disabled children and young people.

### What is Inclusive Design in relation to Play?

It is a way of thinking and a way of working to produce attractive, functional environments that can be enjoyed equally by everyone; taking into account differences in age, gender, culture and ability. It is not a rigid set of standards or criteria. It will evolve over time and will reflect changing expectations, environments and design ingenuity.

In order for disabled children to access inclusive play spaces, forward planning is essential. Good practice must be embedded from the very start at the design stage. However, a play environment cannot be adapted or designed for every need. Nor will every item of play equipment be suitable for all children. Rather, it is important to take into account as many physical and sensory impairments as possible at the planning and design stage.

### The six principles of Inclusive Design

The Disability Rights Commission (now incorporated into the Equality and Human Rights Commission) established six principles of Inclusive Design. These are:

#### 1) Diversity and difference

It should be recognised that disabled people are not a homogenous group. Even within impairment types, children

will have different abilities. They may also be from black and ethnic minority cultures and may have English as a second language.

**Good practice will show:** the steps that have been taken to involve them in the consultation phase and evidence thinking about how to include them.

#### Examples:

- ◆ consulting with a special school located near a playsite
- ◆ involving disabled children and their parents in the community consultations
- ◆ play equipment is tailored to those with different physical and sensory impairments with something that everyone can enjoy

#### 2) Ease of Use

No one should be forced to exert undue effort, experience discomfort or



a loss of dignity. This will have implications for the location and orientation of a site, as well as the choice of materials.

**Good practice will show:** ease of access to the sites, into the site and to the facilities within the site.

### Examples:

- ◆ location within residential area, with safe, accessible routes to the site
- ◆ designated blue badge parking and vehicle drop-off points, then accessible routes to the site
- ◆ wheelchair access to all parts of the site, accessible toilet within easy reach of the site
- ◆ play equipment which can be enjoyed in a number of different ways

### 3) Freedom of choice and access to mainstream activities

Independent access should be available, but equally support and assistance should be provided to those who might require it; and should be provided on the users' terms. Whilst this is not the focus of this briefing it is nonetheless a key issue and one of the principles of Inclusive Design. For further information refer to the section on this in the KIDS publication 'Inclusion by Design'.

### 4) Quality

Aspects of design incorporated to meet the specific requirements of disabled



people should be produced to a standard equal to that in the remainder of the development. Designers should also, wherever possible, exceed minimum standards, to avoid impressions of meanness or double standards. This is a design opportunity (part of the environment's evolution), enabling you to develop innovative, playful environments for all.

**Good practice will show:** examples of well designed adaptations. These may be unique or unusual adaptations which have arisen in response to potential users' needs.

### Examples:

- ◆ toilets or changing rooms may have fittings which make independent use easier (e.g. a closomat toilet; a 'ladder' of handrails at different heights; a shower bench)
- ◆ equipment at different heights with adequate space between pieces of equipment
- ◆ play equipment such as swings, slides and roundabouts that are

- ◆ wheelchair accessible
- ◆ imaginative landscaping of a playspace using natural resources, such as sand and water
- ◆ a sensory garden with plants children can smell and touch



### 5) Legibility and predictability

Illustrated site plans are useful and will help many orientate themselves. Where signs are essential they should be made available in alternative formats – including braille and pictures – so as to include as many children as possible.

Where there are containers for loose parts they should be kept in the same location so that children with visual impairments can always locate them.

#### Examples:

- ◆ child friendly signs welcoming disabled children with opening times and contact numbers. Also consider providing signs in minority languages appropriate to

- the local community
- ◆ use of alternative formats (e.g. braille, images) for communication
- ◆ use of tactile surfaces, colour contrast, tactile maps, pictograms etc
- ◆ strategies for keeping a consistent and orderly layout of equipment around the site and within buildings

### 6) Safety

Environments must be safe whilst inspiring a sense of risk. This will have implications for the design of lighting, the use of particular materials, finishes and tones that may enhance or undermine the ability of people with a visual impairment to read spaces. It will also be a key area of collaboration between design and procurement.

**Good practice will show:** how procurement and design work together to achieve a safe environment

#### Examples:

- ◆ creation and use of sightlines and layouts for unobtrusive supervision
- ◆ imaginative use of surfaces – including the use of natural resources
- ◆ well sited and guarded moving play structures and drops
- ◆ maintaining non-slip surfaces e.g. outdoor surfaces in winter
- ◆ press-operated taps in toilets where they are located near sites
- ◆ additional safety features for play structures and equipment (e.g.

straps, backrests, handrails) that children can choose to use or not

Nonetheless, within the facility it is important to remember that risk is an essential part of play. Disabled children in particular need an element of risk and challenge in their lives to enable them to overcome obstacles, develop and learn new skills.

### The Process of Inclusive Design

These principles are also informed and reflected by an understanding of the process of Inclusive Design - a process that:

- ◆ Begins at the beginning
- ◆ Sees the design and management of the built environment as inextricable partners
- ◆ Takes account of user experience at every stage of the development
- ◆ Is equally applicable to the development of landscapes, structure, materials and finishes, fixtures and fittings, management, and information
- ◆ Brings together functional and aesthetic considerations (e.g. works well and looks good)
- ◆ Is regularly monitored and evaluated.

### References and Resources

**Inclusion by Design – A guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments** (Clare Goodridge, Ed. Philip Douch. KIDS, 2008)

**All of Us – The Framework for Quality Inclusion** (KIDS, 2008)

Both documents can be ordered from KIDS at: [www.kids.org.uk/publications](http://www.kids.org.uk/publications)

**Design for Play – A guide to creating successful Play Spaces** (Play England, 2008) Can be downloaded from the Play England website:  
[www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)

**Managing Risk In Play Provision – A position statement** Go to:  
[www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-play-safety-forum.pdf](http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-play-safety-forum.pdf)

**Can Play – Will Play: Disabled Children and Access to Outdoor Playgrounds** (Alison John & Rob Wheway, 2004) Go to:  
[www.fieldsintrust.org](http://www.fieldsintrust.org)

**Centre for Accessible Environments:**  
[www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk)

**Children’s Play Information Service (CPIS)** The CPIS has a range of fact sheets and resources including a list of playground designers. Go to:  
[www.ncb.org.uk/cpis/](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpis/)

## Play Space checklist

### Location

- ◆ Is the play space near to car parks with drop kerbs at crossing points of any roads?
- ◆ Are there parking bays adjacent to the play area?
- ◆ Could controlled vehicular access to the play area improve access?
- ◆ Are toilets and shelter nearby?
- ◆ Are there public transport connections?

### General access issues

- ◆ Are paths wide, clear and wheelchair accessible?
- ◆ Are slopes accessible?
- ◆ Are there any sudden changes of level on access paths?
- ◆ Are handrails needed?
- ◆ Are gates wide enough for wheelchairs?
- ◆ Do animal grids, stiles for example, block access?
- ◆ Are access routes well lit at appropriate times?

### Potential Users

- ◆ How many disabled children live in the neighbourhood?
- ◆ Are there schools disabled children go to in the area?

**Remember many disabled children and young people attend ordinary schools and nurseries, others will be members of traveller communities or visitors to the area.**

### Information and Signs

- ◆ Are there notices about who to contact in an emergency?  
Notices about who is responsible for the play space and where to report faults?
- ◆ Are there signs to welcome disabled children and their families in relevant community languages and modalities?

**Size of lettering and contrast are important details to get right.**

### Installation and Upgrade dates

- ◆ Could accessible features be added at next date?
- ◆ What accessible features can be added to each of these play space categories?
- ◆ Can the play space be made inclusive even when no equipment is used?
- ◆ Are there features encouraging social play?
- ◆ How can planting and natural features add play value and enhance access?

**Remember, different play spaces could cater for different things and create a complete network of inclusive play spaces.**

### Equipment

- ◆ Can equipment be used by children of all ages, including older children with impairments?
- ◆ Is there sufficient space between

items of equipment for manoeuvring wheelchairs?

- ◆ Can lockers and wheelchair storage be made available?
- ◆ Would a risk assessment be needed?

### Safety Surfaces

- ◆ Is there sensory variation?
- ◆ Is the surface non-slip and wheelchair and buggy accessible?
- ◆ How could colours, textures and materials be used to both enable depth perception and minimise confusion?
- ◆ Is there impact absorbing surface around equipment and is it in good order and suitable for all children?

### Fencing

- ◆ Are there easily accessible entrances and exits and do they provide clear views for watching parents?
- ◆ Does the number, type and position of gates improve access?
- ◆ Is the area animal free (with the exception of guide dogs)?

### Seating Areas

- ◆ Can seating be provided in quiet and calm areas as well as in the midst of the busiest parts of the play space?

### Health and Safety

- ◆ Are there toilets and changing facilities?
- ◆ Are there adequate litter bins and separate dog fouling bins well away from the play space?
- ◆ Is the play space well maintained and clean?
- ◆ Are children and families protected from traffic danger and fumes?
- ◆ Are lifting and handling issues well thought out?
- ◆ How often are inspections carried out?

European Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177



*The content of this Briefing has been drawn from the KIDS publication 'Inclusion by Design' and the Play Space Checklist reproduced from 'Developing Accessible Play Space' (Can be downloaded from: [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/developingaccessibleplay2](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/developingaccessibleplay2))*

## KIDS - the disabled children and young people's charity

KIDS is 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 provides a wide range of services in seven English regions, and promotes inclusive play and leisure through its Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP) run by KIDS National Development Department (NDD).

This good practice Briefing was compiled by KIDS in partnership with Play England. It forms part of Play England's contract with the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to support and challenge local authorities receiving funding under the National Play Strategy.

KIDS is working with Play England to provide advice and guidance to play pathfinders and play builders on promoting accessible design and inclusive play and will be running a telephone advice line which will be open from Monday to Friday from 10.30am-12noon and 2.00pm to 3.30pm. Please call 020 7359 3073 or email: [pip@kids.org.uk](mailto:pip@kids.org.uk)

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

## Contacting us:

KIDS NDD provides inclusive play training, publications, briefings and other resources. To find out more about the work of KIDS, to book training or to order publications go to: [www.kids.org.uk](http://www.kids.org.uk)



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Making space for play



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