

Inclusive Design for Play

Mainstreaming inclusive play
Good practice briefing No: 1



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, or even when refurbishing an existing



site, so that all children can enjoy themselves and have great play experiences whether with their family, friends, schools or 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?

Inclusive design 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. It is important to take into account the experience of children with different physical and sensory impairments at the planning and design stage. However, a play environment cannot always be adapted or designed for every need. Nor will every item of play equipment be suitable for all children.

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

Disabled people are not a homogenous group. Children with different types of

impairment will have different abilities. They may also be from different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds and have a wide variety of interests.

Good practice will show: the steps that have been taken to involve a diverse group of children in the consultation phase and how their views have been taken into consideration.

Examples:

- ◆ consulting with children at 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

The design of a play site should ensure that no-one is 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 different 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

Where possible children should be able to use the play site independently. But equally, support and assistance should be provided to those who might require it; and should be provided on the users' terms. 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 the same high standard as the whole of the development. This is a design



opportunity (part of the environment's evolution), enabling the development of 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 (for example: an adapted 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 accessible to children with mobility impairments, including wheelchair users
- ◆ 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 maps of large sites can be useful and will help many orientate themselves. Where signs are essential they should be made available in alternative formats - including braille and pictures - including braille and pictures - so as many children as possible can use them.

Good play site design will build in predictability. For example, 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 **all** children with opening times and contact numbers. Also consider providing signs in minority languages appropriate to the local community

- ◆ use of alternative formats (for example, braille and pictures)
- ◆ use of tactile surfaces, colour contrast, tactile maps and pictograms
- ◆ strategies for keeping a consistent and orderly layout of equipment around the site and within buildings.

6) Safety

Environments must feel safe whilst offering exciting, challenging play experiences. 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 an environment free from unexpected hazards.

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 for example outdoor surfaces in winter
- ◆ additional safety features for play structures and equipment

- ♦ (for example: straps, backrests, handrails) that children can choose to use or not
- ♦ press-operated taps in toilets where they are located near sites.

Nonetheless, within the play site 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:

- ♦ Begin 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 (for example: working well and looking 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

Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces (A. Shackell, N. Butler, P. Doyle and D. Ball, 2008)

Can be downloaded from the Play England website:

www.playengland.org.uk/resources

Managing Risk In Play Provision: Implementation guide

(D. Ball, T. Gill and B. Spiegel, 2008)

Can be downloaded from the Play England website:

www.playengland.org.uk/resources

Can Play - Will Play: Disabled Children and Access to Outdoor Playgrounds (Alison John & Rob Wheway, 2004) Go to:

www.fieldsintrust.org

Centre for Accessible Environments: 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/

Play space checklist

Location

- ◆ Do nearby car parks or parking bays have drop kerbs at crossing points in the roads?
- ◆ Could controlled vehicular access to the play area improve access?
- ◆ Are there public transport connections?
- ◆ Are toilets and shelter nearby?

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 in the area may attend mainstream schools and nurseries, others may be from other communities or visitors to the area.

Information and signs

- ◆ Are there notices about who to contact in an emergency and

notices about who is responsible for the play space and where to report faults?

- ◆ Are there accessible signs that welcome disabled children and their families in relevant community languages?

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

Installation and upgrade dates

- ◆ Could further accessible features be added at a later date?
- ◆ What accessible features can be added to each of these play space categories? For example: equipment/ground surface.
- ◆ Is the play space accessible without equipment?
- ◆ Are there features encouraging social play?
- ◆ How can planting and natural features add play value and enhance access?

Remember, different play spaces should cater for all children and create a complete network of inclusive play spaces.

Equipment

- ◆ Can some 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 benefit assessment

be needed? (See *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* for guidance on risk benefit assessment).

Ground surfacing

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

Fencing

If fencing and boundaries are used:

- ◆ Are there easily accessible entrances and exits and do they provide clear views for parents to observe?
- ◆ 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?
- ◆ Does the play space comply with European Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177?

Bearing in mind that the above standards are not enshrined in law but rather make recommendations about practice, how does the space accommodate them?



The content of this Briefing has been drawn from the KIDS publication **'Inclusion by Design'** the DCSF and Play England Publication **Design for Play** and the Play Space Checklist reproduced from **'Developing Accessible Play Space'** (this can be downloaded from: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities).

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

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





Play England
Making space for play

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