



Disability Action Plan 2023 to 2024 – KIDS' Response

2a. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to create a hub of guidance about playground accessibility?

Strongly agree

2b. To what extent do you agree that the voluntary standards for playground accessibility should be made mandatory?

Strongly agree

2c. If you would like to explain your answer, please do so here. (Suggested maximum 500 words)

At KIDS, we believe that every child should have an equal opportunity to play, learn, grow and thrive. Opportunities to play are an essential part of a disabled child's life. Playgrounds provide social, emotional and physical benefits and allow children to foster independence and agency. Therefore, we support the need for both a hub of guidance about playground accessibility and mandatory standards to support mainstream playgrounds. However, both should be about inclusion and not just accessibility.

To be fully inclusive to disabled children, consideration must be given to several aspects, including staff, accessible transport, training, toilets, facilities for changing and food. Guidance should cover specifics, such as whether adult Changing Places toilets are available for younger people. On-site, accessible equipment is important as well as a range of different environments to meet diverse needs (recognising that needs may change, even during a visit) and provide opportunities for stimulating and fun play in a safe environment. Staffing is key, as for many disabled children it will be the presence of a specialist staff member that enables them to access a playground.

Involving children, young people and family members in shaping standards is essential, reflecting the range of physical and learning disabilities in a local population and importantly to capture how different children will experience the same setting.

KIDS' expertise derives from our four specialist adventure playgrounds in London - Hackney Adventure Playground, Lady Allen Adventure Playground, Chelsea Adventure Playground and Hayward Adventure Playground.

In 2022/23 we gave just under 300 disabled children over 13,000 hours of play opportunity through these four playgrounds, as well as opening our doors to families, the local community and other professionals. The playgrounds allow for child-led play in a safe, creative and stimulating environment which we urge the sector to emulate. Parents and carers value opportunity for their disabled children to enjoy independent time whilst they enjoy time to themselves. These playgrounds are part of a holistic strategy to support a disabled child and their family.

KIDS' experience in specialist playgrounds can be used to inform mainstream provision, to ensure that mainstream playgrounds are genuinely accessible to more disabled children, involving them at a local level in the conversation as well as consultations. We want to ensure that local councils understand the range of needs to be considered for playgrounds and other aspects of play (for example neurodiversity) *and* for the value of specialist settings to be recognised and resourced too.

The evidence from our specialist playgrounds is that parents and carers are reassured by the relationship staff build up with a child, over several years. This gives them the confidence to leave their child, reassured that their needs will be met.

Standards must be set high for the benefit of the young people that use these facilities. Mandatory standards could help support local authorities and other agencies to work with disabled children, young people, families and community providers to clarify the elements required for accessible play to be a reality for every disabled child.

However, if play is to be available to every disabled child, then funding for short breaks is necessary. To allow many disabled children to access play and fully participate in universal play settings, skilled short break workers add real value. They enable parents and carers to take a break knowing their children are having a great experience. Again, this emphasises the importance of investing in both the infrastructure and the staff.

2d. If you know of existing guidance that DU should consider including on the hub, please share them.

We would urge the DU to look at the works and publications of bodies like Inclusive Play and Play England as well as work with KIDS to ensure that young people are involved in this new guidance.

8a. To what extent do you agree that access to assistive technology would be improved by better-informed advice from public sector staff?

Strongly agree

8b. If you would like to explain your answer, please do so here.

Lack of knowledge of assistive technology (AT) is holding back many disabled people in the UK, in particular disabled children whose learning, development and access to essential services may be held back not by their disability but by a lack of access to the right technology and support to meet their needs. We want recognition that all disabled children and young people will have specific and varied needs from AT. We welcome the government giving this area the attention it needs, including in the Disability Action Plan, and would like this to be developed into a recognition that AT could be used from birth to 25 to support children and young people with a range of physical or learning disabilities in their daily living.

AT will need to be accessed by disabled children and young people both in and outside of school and this means mainstream and specialist schools being equipped to support them. Our study [Locked Out: Digital Disadvantage of Disabled Children, Young People and Families during the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) showed that just under a third of parents said assistive technology at home was poor, or had inaccessible design for people with disabilities. A similar percentage had issues with poor or limited internet which is essential for many ATs.

The value is clear; in a KIDS' well-being group in Yorkshire and Humberside, one young man is able to participate because he has access to Eye Gaze technology. We highlight the story of James, who after 16 years was able to communicate with his mum and the wider world via eye gaze equipment. This is a wonderful story showing how the world opened up for him, but with better funding and greater access to the technology, James could have been supported earlier on in his communications. James' story can be found here: [Counting our blessings everyday](#).

9a. To what extent do you agree with each of the following proposed areas of focus?

Transitions to adulthood

Strongly agree

Accessibility of public spaces and transport

Strongly agree

Bullying, personal safety and impact on wellbeing

Strongly agree

Earlier identification of need and support for families

Strongly agree

9b. If there are other issues that you think this taskforce should consider, or you would like to explain your answer, please do so here.

We at KIDS strongly recommend that digital inclusion be part of taskforce remit. There used to be more work in this area across the government, but this has tailed off in recent years.

The taskforce needs to seize the opportunity to support and stimulate innovation in this area, and this will require parents, carers, young people and providers' representation. We at KIDS can support young people's engagement, building on our existing participation work with the Department for Education.

We believe it is important that young disabled people's voices are heard by the taskforce as their lived experience is vital to understanding the importance of the digital world for young people and how to overcome barriers to access. This is especially important for disabled young people who can be more isolated and have fewer options to access services and meet people, planning to visit a nearby town or accessing therapies or peer support. We saw this isolation during COVID and we highlighted it in our *Locked Out: Digital Disadvantage of Disabled Children, Young People and Families during the Covid-19 Pandemic*, which can be found [here](#).

KIDS has developed a Young People's Hub, an online space that has content created by young people to support on-line inclusion. This hub can be found [here](#), it outlines a variety of services available to disabled young people.

As part of the taskforce's focus on digital inclusion, improving internet infrastructure and access across the whole country should also be a priority, along with user-centred design approaches and inclusive adaptations, particularly within statutory services. Developments towards universal design are important to overcome barriers experienced by people with limited dexterity or some sensory impairments.