

# Inspiring Inclusive Play Design

## Review of Inclusive and Accessible Design Resources

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“Accessible and inclusive play spaces help to ensure that all our children and young people, including those with additional support needs, can exercise their right to play.”

Maree Todd, MSP  
Minister for Children and Young People

# Introduction

This paper is a summary of the principles and standards of inclusion relating to play that are reflected in resources drawn from the four nations.

The paper identifies what is currently available and draws primarily on documents published by the national play sector organisations.

Many of these documents refer to the Equality Act (2010), which refers to rights for “access to goods, services and facilities”. In the Act, a person has a disability if:

- 1 | they have a physical or mental impairment
- 2 | the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities

It has to be noted that disability is not limited to specific physical disabilities, but has a much wider definition and a range of disabilities need to be considered when planning. Wheelchair accessibility, while important does not guarantee inclusion or accessibility for all.

## The Play Strategy for Scotland

The Strategy asserts that all children and young people should have the opportunity to play every day. The Strategy is underpinned by three principles:

- we should value all children and young people
- we should enable all children and young people to realise their right to play
- all children and young people should have the space and time to play.

(The ‘Sufficiency’ Principle).

## What do we mean by all children?

“All children” or “all children and young people” can be assumed to refer to children of a range of ages, abilities, stages and play preferences, all of whom should have the opportunity to realise their right to play without discrimination of any kind.

# 1. Current Resources

**Casey, T and Harbottle, H (2018) Free to Play: A guide to creating accessible and inclusive public play spaces, Inspiring Scotland, Play Scotland and the Nancy Owens Award for Play**

[www.playscotland.org/play/playful-communities/free-play-guide](http://www.playscotland.org/play/playful-communities/free-play-guide)

Developed for those developing or improving a play space. It has been produced as a contribution to resources to support play in Scotland although it has general relevance and import across the UK. It draws on resources from the UK and wider.

**Play Wales and Alison John and Associates (2017) Creating Accessible Play Spaces: A toolkit, Play Wales**

[www.issuu.com/playwales/docs/creating\\_accessible\\_play\\_spaces](http://www.issuu.com/playwales/docs/creating_accessible_play_spaces)

Developed for providers and parents in order to support the provision of accessible play opportunities.

The aim of publication is “to support local authorities, town and community councils, politicians at all levels, open space planners, housing associations and parks and playground managers to meet the requirement of the Equality Act 2010 in terms of developing and upgrading accessible play spaces.”

**PlayBoard Northern Ireland (2018), Space to Play, Play Board Northern Ireland**

[www.playboard.org/product/space-to-play](http://www.playboard.org/product/space-to-play)

Resource to meet the needs of early years practitioners working within registering settings.

**Play England (2008) A Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces, Department for children, schools and families**

[www.playengland.org.uk/media/70684/design-for-play.pdf](http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/70684/design-for-play.pdf)

Guide developed for commissioners and designers of children’s play areas.

**Play Wales (2013) Play: inclusive provision, Play Wales**

[www.issuu.com/playwales/docs/play\\_inclusive\\_provision?e=5305098/5307437](http://www.issuu.com/playwales/docs/play_inclusive_provision?e=5305098/5307437)

An information sheet for play providers offering practical ideas to overcome barriers to inclusion so that children and young people can access play provision.

**The British Standards Institution (2013) Playground equipment accessible for all children, BSI**

The CEN Technical Report provides guidance and the document is the UK implementation of CEN/TR 16467: 2013. CEN members are the national standards bodies of European countries. The document focuses on unsupervised play provision.

**Design for All Principles (EIDD Stockholm Declaration), 2004**

[www.dfaeurope.eu/what-is-dfa/dfa-documents/the-eidd-stockholm-declaration-2004/10](http://www.dfaeurope.eu/what-is-dfa/dfa-documents/the-eidd-stockholm-declaration-2004/10)

Primarily, “for commissioners and designers of children’s play areas. It is non-statutory guidance to ‘playbuilder’ local authorities under the capital-spending programme launched by DCSF in April 2008.”

**UK Government (2003) Developing Accessible Space: A Play Guide, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

“The good practice guide provides examples of how careful attention to design can help to ensure that play spaces are inclusive, comfortable and appealing to disabled children and their families.”

## 2. Definitions of inclusive play

Across the publications, inclusive play was identified as play for all children, regardless of ability or disability.

### Definitions and understandings of inclusive play

“A fundamental aspect of ensuring accessibility to play for all is the need to ensure that play areas offer opportunities for children and young people to play together regardless of individual ability or disability levels.”

#### Inclusive Play (Local Authority Extract)

“Play for children regardless of their physical or mental capabilities” and inclusive “play equipment and spaces that can be used and accessed by a wide range of users with different abilities.”

#### BSI (2013)

“To create these play spaces, attention must be given to access and inclusion so that children of different ages, abilities and play preferences are able to play together...”

“Accessible refers to equal access to the physical environment, transport, information, facilities and services.”

“Inclusive: accessibility alone is not sufficient to create an inclusive play space as social factors and play value should also be considered.”

#### Casey and Harbottle (2018)

“Inclusive play means that all children and young people have equal access to good quality local play provision, This means that they can play with others or alone as they wish in a rich environment that supports their play needs and gives them access to a wide range of play opportunities.”

#### Play Wales (2017)

“Successful play spaces... offer movement and physical activity... stimulate the five senses... are good places for social interaction...allow children to manipulate natural and fabricated materials...offer children challenge...”

#### Play England (2008)

“Envisaging accessible play spaces as places where all children can have the chance to interact and play with each other should be the starting point when thinking through what is involved in creating inclusion by design.”

#### UK Government (2003)

“Inclusive play means more than simply providing physical access to play areas or open spaces. In order to be truly inclusive a play must be open and accessible to all, providing high quality physical, creating and social play opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities.”

#### PlayBoard NI (2018)

**“Accessible and inclusive environments and facilities must be made available to children with disabilities to enable them to enjoy their rights under article 31... as equal and active participants in play, recreation and cultural and artistic life.”**

(General Comment 17, UNCRC)

## 3. Principles of Inclusion

- The goal of inclusive play is not to encourage the provision of specialised items of equipment, as this may only serve to segregate users further. Nor should it look like it is ‘for’ disabled children. Rather it should bring together play value and accessibility in creative ways.
- Equipment which enables children with different skills and capacities to play collaboratively is recommended – non-disabled children and disabled children say they want to play together.
- The aim of inclusive play is not to reduce the overall level of challenge that is offered by play spaces.
- All children need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities.
- Designing for inclusion requires a careful consideration of the overall design and elements within it. The result shouldn’t be an accessible but boring space. The best play spaces have a balanced offer with some higher and some lower challenge activities, to provide something for as many ability groups as possible.
- Not every space has to be able to do everything for every child and each element of a play space doesn’t need to be accessed in the same way. The important thing however is that there are no unnecessary or avoidable barriers and all children have choices about how they play.
- It is unrealistic to expect all pieces of play equipment or indeed all areas of play space to be accessible to all children. It is inevitable that certain pieces of equipment will be specifically designed not to be accessible to certain groups of children, for example where age and height mean children would not cope with inbuilt risk factors. Children and families know this. **Andy Yates (HAGS)**

The publications covered by this review generally emphasise a rights-based approach underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Children with Disabilities (CRPD).

The UNCRC Articles which are specifically relevant include: Articles 31 (right to play), Article 23 (disabled children have right to dignity, self-reliance and active participation, Article 12 (right to be heard) and General Comment no. 17. The CRPD relevant articles are Article 7 (full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms), Article 9 (equal access) and Article 3 (right to equal access to play, recreation, sporting and leisure activities) (see Casey and Harbottle (2018), PlayBoard NI (2018), Play Wales (2013)).





**The Play Wales (2017) publication highlights that:** “All children are morally and legally entitled to play within their own community whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community.”

**Design for All Principles (EIDD Stockholm Declaration, 2004)** states that everyone should be able to participate equally in society and that therefore “everything that is designed and made by people to be used by people – needs to be accessible, convenient for everyone in society to use and responsive to evolving human diversity.”

## 4. Inclusive play: play value and play types

### Play types and inclusion

Play types are different behaviours we see when children are playing.

Therefore, play space design should take play types into account so that design supports “a wide range of play not all physical or equipment based.”

#### Casey and Harbottle (2018)

“...play value describes the range and quality of play opportunities and experiences offered by a play environment” – including:

- Other children and young people
- The natural world
- Loose parts
- The natural elements
- Playing with identity
- Movement
- Challenge and risk taking
- Rough and tumble
- Senses

(Play Wales, 2017:6)

The “truly accessible playground will have a range of equipment that can accommodate a range of abilities, since it is not possible to know the range

**BSI (2013)** “Disabled children should be welcomed and encouraged to use play facilities jointly with other children.”

**Play England (2008)** states that “Successful play spaces offer enjoyable play experiences to disabled children and young people and to those who are non-disabled, whilst accepting that not all elements of the play space can be accessible to everyone. Children with different abilities can play together in well-designed play spaces, and parents and carers who are themselves disabled should be able to gain access to play spaces if they are to accompany their children.”

of impairments or numbers of children who will want to use the equipment now and in the future. Not all equipment will be used in the same way by children with different abilities, but the important thing is that they can access a variety of items. A good accessible playground will attract children of all abilities from a wide area.”

#### BSI (2013:9)

“In seeking to maximise outdoor play opportunities a number of types of play need to be considered by childcare settings.

- Physical or active play...
- Cognitive play...
- Social Play...

The play environment should provide a range of sensory experiences, have open access to play opportunities and other possibilities for all children to extend their experience and explore limits through play. Expensive, specialised equipment is rarely needed: if fixed equipment is in place, it should be multi-functional and accessible to all abilities.”

**PlayBoard NI (2018)**

## The best play spaces evolve (Free to Play, 2018)

### The best play spaces evolve

#### Children and young people bring the space to life by playing

Unexpected, unintended.

#### Sensory and ephemeral qualities

Bird song, textures, rough, smooth, jaggy, colours, change, seasons, a view of the sky, weather.

Sensory barriers – wind, noise or confusing signals.

#### Richness

Playing, loose parts, gathering places, shelter, storage, notice boards, adaptable structures.

#### Experiences

Main play features, water play, equipment, structures, art pieces, planting, designing for the senses.

#### The base

Access, movement, entrances, exits, paths, landscaping, amenities, significant features.



## 5. Designing spaces

The documents reviewed contain a rich resource of tools on how to plan, design and develop play spaces covering the following areas:

### 1. Project planning

#### Undertake planning and development of proposed or existing play space

Review and assess current play spaces
Undertake a community profile
Consultation and engagement (and throughout) – children, young people, parents and carers, community, other services
Identify location
Identify a budget
People and roles
Develop a design brief
Project plan

### 2. Developing play spaces

#### Process for developing new or existing play spaces

Options analysis
Identify proposed site and planning permissions
Location for accessibility and informal oversight
Develop a communications plan
Develop a fundraising plan and budget
Procurement and engagement with contractors
Develop inclusive indicators
Undertake play space audit

### 3. Design

#### Develop an accessible and inclusive design – taking account of access, location, play value, different impairments/nature of disability, community engagement

Identify play value
Identify key features of site
Involving children and young people and families in design process
Relationship to other playable space
Incorporate natural and sensory features
Include quiet and social spaces and shelter
Space for parents and carers and families
Health and safety
Identify what equipment (see reports for extensive detail)
Signage and boundaries/fencing
Play ranger or other staffing
Identify access – surfaces and accessible paths
Planting
Consider bespoke features
Using Loose parts and other materials – and storage
Balance risk, benefits and challenge- and risk management policy
Identify play value
Play space action plan
Responsibility, care and maintenance
Take into account industry and other standards and legislation
Promoting play space
Evolution and sustainability of play space
Review and ongoing evaluation
Celebration

See for detail – BSI (2013), Casey and Harbottle (2018), Play Board NI (2018), Play Wales (2017), Play England (2008), UK Government (2003).

## 6. Key features of good play spaces or things to consider: examples from publications

“There are no ‘standards’ for inclusive play spaces. Anybody who claims to offer a ‘standard’ or standard formula for inclusive play spaces is giving misinformation. It is a judgement that should be specific to local community objectives and requirements. Each inclusive play space play space will likely need its own unique balance for the location. It could be thought of as dials on a dashboard indicating risk, challenge, safety, sensory stimulation, restfulness, physical activity etc. Some dials will be turned up higher, some lower and sometimes by turning one up, by necessity, another goes down. The trick is to achieve the best solution for the particular community objectives.” Andy Yates (HAGS)

Play England’s Design for Play identifies ten principles for designing successful play spaces.

Successful play spaces:

- are ‘bespoke’
- are well located
- make use of natural elements
- provide a wide range of play experiences
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- meet community needs
- allow children of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- allow for change and evolution

#### Play England (2008)

“Spaces are designed with the needs and characteristics of the local community in mind in identifying location and likely range of use and users.

Spaces have a distinct local character in terms of the particular design, material and features included.

The natural features, such as existing trees and natural puddles, of the spaces are respected and integrated.

The space and context as a whole are as important as individual play features in creating successful play spaces.

Spaces include play materials and play features are non-prescriptive and therefore encourage imagination and suggest many different ways of being placed on or with.

Spaces do not rely on manufactured play equipment for the play opportunities offered. Spaces use manufactured equipment to enhance what is on offer.

The design of the spaces ensures that when play equipment is used, it is integrated with and complements other features in the play space.

The spaces incorporate opportunities for children to encounter or create challenge and risk.”

#### Play Wales (2017:8)



## Inclusive Indicators (Free to Play, 2018)

### Freedom

- to move
- a sense of space
- to be yourselves
- from judgement
- to choose.

*"Let's make play spaces open to exploring, journeying, hiding and seeking and open-ended adventures."*

### Variety

- places to retreat to when things are too busy
- open spaces
- different levels of height and difficulty.

*"Open grass area, large natural areas for exploring, trees to climb, rocks or fallen trees to balance on, anywhere with trees and water, anywhere with things to climb, anywhere flat so she can use her scooter."*

### Social experience

- playing alongside other children and not in a separate space
- being able to access equipment in his wheelchair is important to his inclusion
- feeling secure
- being with other children.

*"Playing alongside other children without having to communicate verbally with others."*

### Independence and access

- accessible toilet and changing facilities/ Changing Places toilet
- suitable equipment for older children with additional support needs
- paths and surfaces
- accessible seating and tables
- parking
- different types of play areas in a town or region, giving more choice.

*"Most importantly, the independence to have a go at it themselves."*

### Sensory qualities

- things that spin, things you can touch, contrasting light and colour
- natural materials in play areas e.g. sand, planting, long grasses
- the elements – water, fire, wind, earth.

*"Go wild. Natural is best."*

### Equipment and interaction

- adventurous and challenging play
- play workers / staff / volunteers
- shade and shelter.

*"Love the idea of staff involvement to do things like den building."*

This section was derived from responses to a survey for families and people caring for or working with children and young people with additional support needs. There were 116 responses from all over Scotland. The survey took place from July to October 2017.

"...accessible design would seek to minimise environmental and physical barriers to participation including, for example, entrances, movement around the space, ease of access to the features or opportunities with the space, types of services used, width of gate and paths, steepness of inclines, ease of access to play equipment, location and access to and from the site."

Casey and Harbottle (2018)

the "truly accessible playground will have a range of equipment that can accommodate a range of abilities, since it is not possible to know the range of impairments or numbers of children who will want to use the equipment now and in the future. Not all equipment will be used in the same way by children with different abilities, but the important thing is that they can access a variety of items. A good accessible playground will attract children of all abilities from a wide area."

BSI (2013:9)

## Conclusion

Play Scotland produced this report for the UK Children's Play Policy Forum (CPPF). Overall we found the resources reviewed provide a rich source of information and guidance on the principles and practice of developing inclusive play spaces. Further work in this area is on-going through the CPPF.



Play Scotland is the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Scotland. We work strategically to make the child's right to play a reality so that all children can reach their full potential and be able to confidently inhabit an inclusive public realm, as well as help shape child friendly communities.

## Further information

More resources can be found on our website  
[www.playscotland.org/play/playful-communities](http://www.playscotland.org/play/playful-communities)

"Accessible and inclusive play spaces make a hugely important contribution to local communities as welcoming, social gathering places. They should be recognised as important community assets, promoting health, well-being and a sense of community."

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### Committed to PLAY



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