

FULL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Title

Play Strategy – delivering the Children’s Plan Vision

Description of the policy

One of the principles underpinning the Children’s Plan is that children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life. Play brings proven benefits in terms of a healthy childhood and the acquisition of some of the key skills that children and young people need as they become adults and move on in education or into work.

Yet there is evidence that opportunities for play, particularly child-led, outdoor play are falling. Concerns about safety, the loss of open green space, the poor quality and inaccessibility of many existing play areas, particularly to disabled children and the increasingly structured use of children’s spare time are all barriers to children engaging in more outdoor play.

One of the main messages received from parents and children is that there are not enough safe, stimulating places for children and young people to go, that children’s needs are often ignored in public space design, and that tackling this is one of the most important things that Government can do to help families today.

The Children’s Plan announced a new agenda on supporting play with the biggest ever investment in play by Government – £225 million over three years which was increased by £10m in April 2008. This will fund 30 new adventure playgrounds and up to 3,500 play areas nationally will be developed to create fun, stimulating, accessible and inclusive places for all children, including disabled children, particularly those aged 8-13 years and those living in disadvantaged areas, to play.

The first ever national strategy was published in April 2008 and set out our vision for how we can all work to give children the time, space and opportunity to play by giving play a much greater profile and priority than in the past. The strategy was subject to consultation, the purpose of which was to: raise awareness of issues relating to play, set out what is already being done and to invite views on our proposals for improving play opportunities for children and young people.

The evidence base

The principle evidence base includes various pieces of research on the benefits of play; the reports from the children and adult consultations; and the report from the deliberative events held in support of the consultation.

What the evidence shows – key facts

The benefits of play

The value of play is wide ranging. Play has developmental impact, in terms of intellect and socialisation; is at the heart of individual personality and sense of self; and drives the creative process and the growth of problem solving skills. It helps us to attain, maintain and retain emotional equilibrium and facilitates the development of skills that enable us to interpret the meaning of other people's actions.

Play nurtures the development of creativity and problem solving and helps develop the capacity for abstract thought. Play may become increasingly complex with age as it offers opportunities to explore alternative solutions and combinations of behaviour, leading to the development of creative problem solving.

Play provides the opportunity for children to develop a sense of wellbeing by allowing them to explore who they are or might be. It allows children to experience and control primary emotions; learn about learning and consolidate previous learning; provides children with enjoyment, accomplishment and belonging and supports the development of interpersonal skills. Play also allows the opportunity to practice making friends and consolidating their friendship to deal with conflict.

Play can help prevent obesity. Doing 15 minutes a day of moderate exercise lowers children's chances of being obese by almost 50 per cent. Unstructured play in particular is better for children in terms of activity calories per minute burnt, compared to the equivalent organised activities.

Play can also increase community cohesion. Research suggests that children playing outdoors and establishing relationships with other children in their community can positively affect community cohesion. The more social networks children have in a neighbourhood the greater parents' confidence of the safety of that area. Parents also establish their own networks through their children more than any other means.

From the consultation

Two consultations were conducted over the summer: one aimed at children and young people; the other at key practitioners and stakeholders. Over 9500 responses were received, including 9409 from children and young people, of which 1176 were disabled.

Children were asked *“What more could we do to make it easier for disabled children to play with other children?”*

7531 responded and the main points were:

- They wanted their disabled peers to be able to do the same fun things as everyone else (58%) and to have people around who could help them (53%)

- Many felt that play areas were generally inaccessible to them. Issues such as accessibility to the sites and equipment, more wheelchair-friendly surfaces and ramps should be addressed in order to allow disabled children to reach and enjoy the play spaces in the same way as others. (50%)

- Many also felt that there was a need for wardens to be available who could supervise play areas to ensure that disabled children were not bullied, teased or victimised by other children; and that trained playworkers were available to help them develop games and activities that all the children could join in with. Suggestions were also made that able-bodied children should be educated to develop a greater awareness of, and respect for, the needs of disabled children – this would help promote inclusion and understanding.

Adults were asked *“What more could be done and in what settings to support disabled children to be able to play?”*

The majority (44%) said that access to facilities was a major factor stopping disabled children playing as some facilities are too difficult to access, particularly for wheelchair users, because of unsuitable surfaces. Issues were also raised regarding the lack of dedicated disabled parking bays; the need for safe accessible routes to play areas; and access to public transport which is often unsuitable for disabled children, does not go near play areas, not running at suitable times, or was too expensive. Others also said that it was important to have toilets and changing facilities available at play sites.

43% said that play areas needed to have suitable equipment to allow disabled children to play. This does not necessarily have to be equipment specifically designed for disabled children as this can lead to disabled children feeling alienated particularly as such equipment is often sited in a different area of the play site. It could simply be good quality equipment that can be used by all children. Comments were also made that play was not just about fixed equipment and that play areas should be designed to allow all children to play by interacting with the natural environment.

Respondents also said that it was important that playworkers receive training to help them facilitate play for disabled children so that they felt included. It was also the view of respondents that more training was needed to enable playworkers to challenge peoples attitudes to disabled children playing as this was often a barrier to them having full access to a play area.

Adults were also asked “*Are there groups of children who do not have opportunities to play and what could be done to help them?*” Among those identified were Black and Minority Ethnic children, those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and those for whom English is not their first language. It was also noted that girls are often less attracted to outdoor, active play provision than boys.

Challenges and Opportunities

In summary, the main challenges and opportunities are:

Ensuring that play spaces are fully inclusive, accessible and attractive to all children and young people, including those with disabilities and from minority ethnic communities, within available budgets. Accessibility to be judged both in terms of who they can get to the play areas as well as how accessible the equipment and play opportunities are for them;

Ensuring that there are trained playworkers and voluntary staff available to supervise play areas and ensure that disabled children are safe whilst playing with the equipment and from anyone who could be bullying or teasing them.

Ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to support disabled children’s play; and to challenge peoples stereotypes and inappropriate behaviour and attitudes towards disabled children and young people.

Equality impact assessment

A positive impact is explicitly intended and very likely. We have taken time to consider the responses from the consultations as well as the report from the deliberative events for stakeholders, held over the summer, before determining the actions, as set out in the play strategy, which will be taken to ensure all children and young people have the opportunity to access high quality play spaces.

The key actions are set out below:

Our vision for play reaffirms that play spaces will be welcoming, attractive, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including

disabled children, children of both genders, and from minority groups in the local community;

We are investing in up to 3,500 play areas which will be developed and made accessible to all children, including those with disabilities. Every local authority will receive funding by 2010;

30 local authorities will also receive funding to develop a large, staffed adventure playground or playpark;

A national delivery partner has been contracted to ensure that every local authority has access to expertise, planning advice and guidance, including publications *Design for Play* and *Inclusion by Design*, to enable them to deliver the fully accessible and inclusive play spaces that all children and young people have told us that they want to see;

We are contracting with the sector body KIDS to provide a full-time senior consultant to work with Play England to support our capital programme to 2011; providing seminars, materials and direct advice on how to support play for disabled children;

All local authorities are involving all children, young people and the wider community in engagement, consultation and decision making processes – best practice from this will be shared;

We will publish guidance for practitioners on tackling bullying outside of schools when children and young people are playing;

We are introducing a new national indicator for play, from April 2009, which will measure children's satisfaction with parks and play areas;

We are enabling 4,000 playworkers to achieve a level 3 playwork qualification by 2011.

Next steps

We believe that the actions set out in the play strategy, which will be launched on xxx, responds to the demands made by children, young people and their families via the consultation. Through the actions set out in the strategy and our continued involvement with local and national partners, the third sector, parents, children and communities, we will raise the profile of play and ensure that children and young people have high quality, fully accessible and inclusive play spaces to enjoy with their friends and family.

The pathfinder and playbuilder programmes will be independently evaluated to ensure that the aims of the programme are being met, in particular, that the play areas are stimulating, exciting and attractive to children and young people of both genders, minority ethnic communities and abilities. An interim report will be produced in Autumn 09 with the final report delivered in 2011.

The campaign group Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) published a report *Every Disabled Child Matters – Going Places* in September 2008. This report contains 17 recommendations of which 5 relate specifically to play and positive activities. The Department is able to respond positively to these recommendations and EDCM has responded with the following quote "EDCM welcomes the response from Baroness Morgan to the proposals in our

campaign briefing '*Going Places!*' which we will be considering in detail. In the meantime we look forward to working with the Department to ensure that the opportunities for all children and young people set out in the Play Strategy are fully inclusive of all disabled children and young people."

For the record

For the record, but not for publication, give:

Your name and today's date:

Name of SRO and date endorsed by SRO: