

Inclusive Play in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP) briefing



Introduction

This Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP) briefing examines the impact that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is having on the inclusion of disabled children in play settings and services – the theme of the PIP regional seminars held in autumn 2009. We outline some of the challenges and concerns that were raised, highlight some examples of good practice and summarise the key recommendations that emerged from the seminars.

The overarching aim of the EYFS is to help children achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes (1). It brings together and replaces the **Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, the Birth to Three Matters framework** and the **National Standards for Under-8s Day Care and Childminding** creating a single framework for the early years. The EYFS came into force in September 2008 and is aimed at all those offering play and childcare provision for children in the early years from birth to the end of the academic year in which a child has their fifth birthday. All play and childcare providers working with young children (unless exempt – see below) must deliver the EYFS and meet the legal requirements as set out in the **Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage** (2).

Play and childcare providers must plan, record and report on the development and early learning of children in their care in a more coordinated way. There is also more emphasis

on self-evaluation (through Self Evaluation Forms – SEFs), working in partnership with other professionals and families, and helping with continual assessment and improvement.

Alongside this, nearly all providers caring for children under eight years old must register with Ofsted either on the Early Years Register (for children from birth to five) or on The Childcare Register (for children aged five to seven). Care or supervised activities that are not required to register (for example, open access or play ranger schemes) may now register on a voluntary basis. You can find out more about exemptions on the Department for Education (DfE) website (3).



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EYFS guiding principles

The EYFS has four guiding principles:

The unique child

Every child is a competent learner from birth, who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Positive relationships

Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Enabling environments

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

Learning and development

Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

Each principle is supported by four 'commitments'. 'Inclusive practice' is one of the commitments which supports the EYFS principle 'A unique child'.

The explanation of the commitment includes information about children's entitlements - their right to be treated fairly regardless of race, religion or abilities.

There is information about involving parents in early support and knowing when and how to call for specialist help. With reference to inclusive practice, the EYFS framework makes it clear that all providers have a responsibility: 'to ensure that diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected and that no child or family is discriminated against. Settings need to provide individualised opportunities based on each child's needs, particularly those related to ethnicity, language and disability.'

With reference to play, 'Play and Exploration' is a commitment which comes under 'Learning & Development'. There are six areas of Learning & Development all of which, according to the EYFS framework, 'must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult led and child initiated activities'. The framework further states that 'in their play children learn at the highest level'.

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Listening to young children – Hertfordshire Early Years Participation Toolkit

Hertfordshire local authority has won praise for its work and a new toolkit on improving participation in early years settings and listening to children. The toolkit (which can be downloaded) includes information on research relating to early years participation, simple guidance and planning and assessment materials (11).

The six areas of learning and development are as follows:

- ★ Personal, social and emotional development
- ★ Communication, language and literacy
- ★ Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
- ★ Knowledge and understanding of the world
- ★ Physical development
- ★ Creative development.

So the rhetoric on inclusion is there, and the EYFS is clearly based on the principle that children learn through play. Despite this there have been concerns from the play sector that play is not sanctioned (or even properly defined) in its own right. Play is not celebrated for play's sake. Rather, its value is acknowledged only in so far as it promotes the learning and development of children.

According to a SkillsActive briefing on the EYFS: 'the EYFS does not give a definition of play although the play strategy defines it as 'children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others' (4).

A very useful policy summary examining these issues has been produced jointly by SkillsActive and Play England **Play provision, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Ofsted Early Years Registration process in England'** (5).

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Barnardo's Get Started project

Our project works with disabled children from the age of five upwards to enable them to join in play and leisure activities of their choice. We work with providers through discussion, need assessments, training and sessional worker support (for up to eight weeks).

We embrace the unique child – our service will find out as much as possible about the child to share it with the activity provider, so that they can be prepared to make any changes to the group's environment and /or activities to be inclusive. We work in partnership to support all children so that they can develop friendships, social skills, confidence and self esteem while they (sometimes unintentionally) educate those around them that being a disabled child doesn't mean they can't join in and have fun.

The PIP seminars– the findings

During discussions at each of our regional seminars we asked participants questions about how the EYFS had been working in practice.

We asked about what was working well, particularly the impact of the EYFS on disabled children, challenges being faced embedding the EYFS and solutions they had come up with. The findings that emerged are summarised below, and we have been able to link them into the EYFS Principles as shown.

Working well

- ★ There is more emphasis and understanding of the importance of learning through play. Staff are becoming more aware of the benefits of a play based approach.
- ★ Linking activities to the areas of learning has been helpful in supporting staff's day to day ownership/celebration of children's achievements (for example photographic evidence).
- ★ There have been many benefits from improved partnership working.
- ★ Evaluating own practice is good practice and helps improve the quality of service.
- ★ The EYFS has helped to improve and revise our policies on inclusion.
- ★ We are now able to see the child as an individual with individual progress, rather than focusing on chronological progress.
- ★ The key worker system is beneficial – all children have a key worker, so disabled children are not singled out as 'special'.

A Childminder talking about a child she cares for with autism.

'By providing a range of activities including playing with musical instruments, sensory play, role play and free play, Jake* is able to join in at his own level and at his own pace without feeling under pressure to stay with the activity. When he is bored he can move on to another activity. He has become a lot more confident and is now joining in a much wider range of activities.'



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*This name has been changed for confidentiality reasons

Challenges/concerns	Possible solutions/key recommendations (For toolkits and guidance, visit the National Strategies website, [12])	EYFS Principle
The Playwork Principles (6) are being compromised and the value of child centred play is being buried in formal structures and assessments.	Adhere to the Playwork Principles which support and facilitate the play process (play that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated) and meet the EYFS criteria.	Learning and Development
Staff workload has increased – paperwork is becoming more important than playing and interacting with the children!	Map what play based activities you provide to the six learning and development areas and make sure all this is captured through your Self Evaluation Forms. Play by its very nature fits into all of the six areas of Learning and Development.	
Jargon sometimes too complex and staff have had difficulties in understanding the EYFS and linking certain activities to the areas of learning and development.	Work with partners to devise a planned approach to removing disabling barriers and develop and share useful resources. Better guidance and training would be beneficial as would be a single point of contact for advice on implementing the EYFS.	Enabling Environments
Inconsistency of Ofsted inspectors and concerns over the way individual Ofsted inspectors interpret play. Difficulties in keeping up to date with current legislation/ Ofsted documentation.	Make sure you have a 'live' inclusive play policy in place to underpin your organisational practice and that you are working within the legislative framework pertaining to disabled children's rights (i.e. the Disability Discrimination Act, Every Child Matters, and the emerging Equality Act etc).	
The EYFS doesn't work well with some disabled children who have short attention spans and prefer short bursts of unplanned play.	The unique child approach helps practitioners plan what is right for each child at each stage of their development.	A Unique Child
Many disabled children's likes / dislikes can change on a daily basis and this is proving difficult to reflect in the paperwork.	Use appropriate observation methods to develop play based activities that are based around individual children's preferences and requirements.	
There have been problems sharing information between settings (particularly getting information from schools) and getting information from parents.	Improve communication between settings and parents and involve disabled children and their parents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.	Positive Relationships
Maintained sector not recognising non-maintained sector. Playwork not always recognised as a profession.	Work in partnership with schools, health and social care professionals. Link in with programmes such as Early Support (7) and support transition between settings.	

Essex Works - I Know I Matter to You

Essex Works (in partnership with Sure Start and Essex County Council) has produced a very useful resource: *I know I Matter to You* (8). There are six chapters (based on the themes of the EYFS) including a very useful section on Inclusive Practice which consists of information and an activity around respectful language, the social model of disability, equality and diversity. The publication is complemented by a programme of inclusion training and clearly supports the implementation of the EYFS for early years settings. It is also aimed at supporting all those working with children in meeting the Every Child Matters outcomes. There is also a range of advice and guidance on inclusive practice published through the Inclusion Development Programme (9).

Conclusion

As the EYFS was introduced many playworkers and play settings raised concerns about the impact this new framework would have on children's play, and in particular on children's 'free play.' A series of meetings were held between the play sector, the former DCSF and Ofsted which resulted in some clarification and the publication of an Ofsted briefing: *Regulating play-based provision – a childcare factsheet* (10). The overriding message was, and remains – if you work to the Playwork Principles and adopt a child centred approach you will be promoting good inclusive play practice AND meeting the requirements of the EYFS. This echoes the findings of research undertaken by the Playwork Inclusion Project which maintains that good practice for disabled children is good practice for all children.

However, it is unclear at this stage whether the current framework of the EYFS will remain, as the coalition government has now confirmed that an independent review of the EYFS will go ahead from Autumn 2010. The review will be chaired by Dame Clare Tickell, chief executive of Action for Children and will consider whether or not the current EYFS framework is too rigid, and how to reduce the burden of the EYFS on those who have to deliver it. The review will also be looking at how children can best be supported in their early learning, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds.



References and resources

1. Every Child Matters: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk
2. Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (resource):
www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/151379 (www.education.gov.uk)
3. EYFS exemptions: <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84508>
4. SkillsActive briefing paper: Early Years Register and the Delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage
www.skillsactive.com/assets/0000/1001/eyfs-briefing-doc.pdf
5. SkillActive/Play England briefing paper: Play provision, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Ofsted Early Years Registration process in England:
www.playengland.org.uk/resources/eyfs-ofsted-childcare-register-summary.pdf
6. www.skillsactive.com/playwork/principles
7. Early Support Programme: www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/earlysupport
8. I know I matter to you – Published by Essex County Council (tel: 01245 438500)
9. www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/earlyyears
10. Regulating play-based provision – a childcare factsheet (Ofsted)
www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-homeForms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Factsheet-childcare-Regulating-play-based-provision
11. Hertfordshire Early Years Participation Toolkit <http://www.hertsdirect.org/caresupport/childfam/csupportservices/>
12. National Strategies website - toolkits and guidance to help implement the EYFS <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/earlyyears>



KIDS – working with disabled children and young people

KIDS is a national charity 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 and promotes inclusive play and leisure nationally across the children and young people's sectors through workforce development and support.

The Playwork Inclusion Project (PIP) is funded by a 3 year strategic grant from the Department for Education and is run by KIDS National Development Department (NDD). Please visit our website or contact KIDS NDD for further information about inclusive play training, publications and briefings.

If you would like a copy of this briefing in large print or an alternative format, please contact the PIP Team.



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PIP offers strategic development, information and guidance to local authorities and settings on inclusive play and childcare, including:

- ★ National Inclusion Forum – discussion and dissemination of good practice using a network of key strategic leads and decision makers.
- ★ Strategies for Inclusion – a flexible consultancy package aimed at local authorities.
- ★ Regional Network Seminars and one-to-one advice – an opportunity for practitioners and managers to develop and share good practice on inclusion.
- ★ E-bulletin – sign up for our free, bi-monthly e-bulletin on inclusive play. To subscribe go to: www.kids.org.uk/ebulletins.

KIDS publications

- ★ **The Sensory Play Resource Book - Making a short break a positive experience** (Wendy Usher 2010)
- ★ **Inclusion by Design - a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments** (Clare Goodridge 2008)
- ★ **Pick & Mix - a selection of inclusive games and activities** (Di Murray 2006)

KIDS Publications & briefings can be ordered or downloaded from:
www.kids.org.uk/publications.