



Summary

Young people's attitudes to disability

About the DRILL Programme

DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) was an innovative 5 year, UK wide programme led by disabled people, for disabled people and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Launched in 2015, the programme was managed by a partnership of Disability Action Northern Ireland, Disability Rights UK, Disability Wales and Inclusion Scotland.

The aim of the programme was to build better evidence about approaches which enable disabled people to achieve independent living. The findings from the projects it funded can be used to inform future provision across a wide range of policy areas, and give a greater voice to disabled people in decisions which affect them.

This is one of a series of summaries of the project supported by DRILL. Final reports, toolkits and summaries of all the projects are available from the DRILL website at www.drilluk.org.uk.

Overview of the project

This project explored young people's attitudes to disability. It looked at how schools respond to bullying, whether young disabled people are excluded from social networks and what the Department of Education should do to support teachers and schools.

Approach

Five disabled young people participated in a round-table discussion on issues affecting them, and reviewing proposed questions and activities.

The project then used 11 focus groups in both mainstream and special schools, with three to four pupils per group.

Findings

Pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) did not identify themselves as disabled, and didn't talk about their impairments or health conditions when describing themselves. They emphasised personality traits, hobbies and interests instead.

Most of the young people with SEND described being bullied and socially excluded at school. They often described their friendship group as small, or non-existent.

SEND pupils in mainstream schools were able to identify other young disabled people, but were reluctant to identify with them.

Many equated having an impairment with being unable to walk, and because they could walk, they did not think they had very much in common with other disabled young people.

Non-SEND pupils described different concepts of disability. Some struggled to identify disabled people they knew inside and outside of school.

They equated disability with being unable to work, or do particular tasks. There was an emphasis on functional limitations.

Non-SEND pupils discussed their relationships with their disabled peers, describing themselves as friendly, but not friends, with disabled people in their school.

Several non-SEND pupils expressed frustration with the process for deciding who did or did not get extra support at school. They felt that resources were directed to pupils with obvious impairments, or were disruptive.

Findings (continued)

Young people were often unaware of why they receive particular support or reasonable adjustments. Sometimes, they seemed unaware of their own impairment or health condition.

There was dissatisfaction with how some teachers handled bullying and social exclusion of both SEND and non-SEND pupils.

Recommendations

The project outlined many recommendations, some of which are listed here. All recommendations are included in the full report, which is linked below.

- School leaders should encourage more active intervention to address bullying and social exclusion in the classroom
- Support pupils to develop personal skills and coping mechanisms to mitigate the impact of bullying
- The Department for Education should give greater importance to socialisation in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). It should encourage schools to make the social inclusion of disabled pupils more of a priority
- The development of SEND-specific guidance for schools should have direct input from young disabled people
- Teachers and other staff with invisible impairments should be encouraged and supported to 'come out' as a positive example to pupils with SEND
- Involve pupils with SEND in the development of support plans and setting up reasonable adjustments so pupils are appropriately supported
- Make disability awareness a compulsory part of the PSHE curriculum
- Disabled People's Organisations should set up in-school programmes to mentor disabled pupils; and provide an adult mentor with a similar impairment to help better understand their own.

Final report

[Young people's attitudes to disability](#)

Please click on report name to read the full report.

Project partners

Disability Rights UK



**The Centre for
Education & Youth***



*Previously LMKco

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