



We're here
for young
wheelchair
users



Making the grade

Youth Board Report
for Young People

Introduction

Young wheelchair users do not always have the opportunity to achieve the same educational outcomes as their non-disabled peers, and we want this to change. We wanted to better understand school experiences, see any gaps in support, and find ways young wheelchair users can be better included at school.

To do this the **Whizz Kidz** Youth Board made two surveys - one for school colleagues (e.g. teachers, support staff etc.) and one for young wheelchair users. We wanted to understand the school experience from both views and see where improvements could be made.

93 young wheelchair users, or their parent/carers, answered our young people's survey and **105** school colleagues answered our school survey.

Training

The table below shows how many school colleagues had received training in the last 12 months.

Have you received training on the following in the last 12 months?

	Yes	No
Equality	67%	33%
Disability awareness	50%	50%
Supporting young wheelchair users	15%	85%
Wheelchair skills training	10%	90%
Safeguarding	99.05%	0.95%*
Fire safety	87%	13%
Evac chair training	73%	26%
Manual handling	65%	35%
Hoist training	32%	68%
Medical emergency procedures for pupils	57%	43%


*This is one person.



Only 10% said they had received wheelchair skills training in the last 12 months and only 15% said they had received training on supporting young wheelchair users.

In another question, only **51%** of people who work in schools said they had received enough training to support young wheelchair users. Meanwhile, only **41%** of young wheelchair users thought people at their school have had enough training to support them and only **31%** of young people said people at their school understood their needs. This is a significant gap; how can we expect school colleagues to support young wheelchair users when no standard training is provided?

When young wheelchair users were asked what training they thought would help school colleagues to support young wheelchair users, the main topics were:

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- Understanding young wheelchair users and their needs
 - Specific training around disability awareness
 - Basic understanding of wheelchair users and wheelchair maintenance

When school colleagues were asked what training they thought would help the majority of responses from mainstream schools were wheelchair skills training (including opportunities to have a go at using a wheelchair to understand lived experience), general training about the best ways to support young wheelchair users and understanding specific needs.

Some people also said they would like more information around how to adapt or make the curriculum, and specifically PE, more inclusive.



Language

Only **67%** of young wheelchair users said school colleagues speak to them in a respectful way, nearly a third of responses said 'some' school colleagues speak to them in a respectful way and unfortunately **4%** said school colleagues do not speak to them in a respectful way.

Meanwhile only **30%** of school colleagues said that they know the preferred terminology when talking to young wheelchair users and **31%** said they did not know the preferred terminology when talking to young wheelchair users.

'I feel that some people at my school treat the child differently to others e.g., the way they talk to them, like they are much younger but it's their physical ability that's different not their age. It's frustrating because I work very hard with the child to push their boundaries and others don't.'

(School colleague survey, mainstream school)

Recommendations

We think the following would make things better in school.

- All school colleagues should be provided with training on how to best support young wheelchair users within their setting. This will ensure schools move beyond accessibility towards equity and inclusion. Best practice examples and case studies should be provided demonstrating a whole school approach implementing appropriate language, approach and awareness of individual needs and preferences of the young wheelchair user.
- Young wheelchair users should be offered wheelchair skills training within their setting and support on how to advocate for themselves to enable them to receive the best education possible.
- Schools should develop an established process for the sharing and updating of information pertaining to young people's needs with all school colleagues. This process should be reviewed annually to ensure it is working and fit for purpose.

Inclusion

The Youth Board made a list of areas within schools and opportunities to see the extent, if at all, young wheelchair users were able to access these in the same way as their non-disabled peers. This question was in both the young wheelchair users and school survey. The table below outlines the response given for fully accessible and not at all accessible from each survey.

	Fully accessible		Not accessible	
	Schools	Young people	Schools	Young people
Playground	75%	50%	1%	11%
PE lessons	46%	20%	1%	18%
Sports/ playground equipment	30%	13%	4%	32%
School trips	83%	44%	2%	16%
Residential school trips	68%	36%	6%	31%
Prom or similar events	90%	47%	0%	13%
Events that engage/invite the local community to school e.g. a fete	86%	44%	1%	12%
Sports day	58%	30%	4%	25%
Class events e.g. class visits, outdoor lessons etc	80%	41%	1%	10%
Drama/school plays	87%	57%	1%	10%
School assemblies	95%	70%	0%	5%
School library	92%	69%	3%	10%
School lunch hall	89%	70%	1%	10%
Extra-curricular or after school clubs	70%	33%	2%	31%
External events e.g. DofE (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award), NCS (National Citizen Service)	41%	17%	16%	42%

The table shows there are differences between what areas young wheelchair users and schools think are accessible.

The biggest differences between what schools and young wheelchair users think are fully accessible are prom or similar events, and events that engage/invite the local community to school e.g. a fete and school trips. The biggest differences between what schools and young wheelchair users think are not accessible at all is extra-curricular or after school clubs, sports/ playground equipment and External events e.g. DofE, NCS DofE (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award), NCS (National Citizen Service).

When school colleagues were asked for examples of what types of support they provide to young wheelchair users to access these activities, the answers highlighted the importance of having 1:1 support and the importance of physical access such as ramps, lifts, toilets, and suitable transport. Examples of adaptations were also provided such as re-rooming to ensure pupils can access the same areas of school to their peers, mini libraries in every classroom and accessible sports equipment.

When young wheelchair users were asked for examples of what type of support they would like their school to provide to access these types of activities, the availability of additional staff (especially in relation to accessing extra-curricular activities after school) was also highlighted as was more equipment/facilities but also for schools to plan events/activities with wheelchair users and accessibility in mind.

'I feel that only the children who are more abled are planned for and the physically abled children are an afterthought. We need more equipment they can access and activities that allow all children to participate in (Young wheelchair user survey).

While there were some excellent examples from young wheelchair users and schools that were inclusive, overall, the responses from the young wheelchair user's survey outlined mixed experiences.

'Fantastic in some areas not so great in others. They try but don't fully understand it from the perspective of a wheelchair user.'

Young wheelchair user's survey.

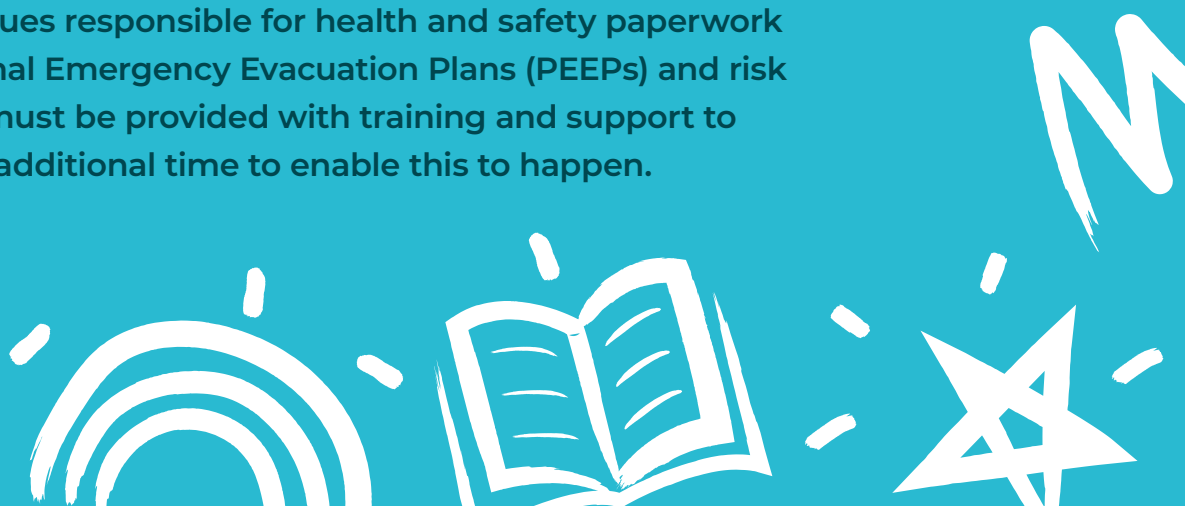




Recommendations

We think the following would make things better in school.

- Young people should be included in mandatory school accessibility audits to ensure they accurately reflect how accessible the school site is for young wheelchair users
- Schools should be supported to maximise accessibility and all new build schools should be fully accessible. School colleagues should be confident to make adaptations rather than refuse to accept young people, with Local Education Authorities supporting this.
- The Department for Education should commit to providing adequate funding and support to schools so they can make necessary adaptations, purchase equipment and provide one to one support where needed to ensure no young wheelchair user is excluded.
- School colleagues responsible for health and safety paperwork such as Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) and risk assessments must be provided with training and support to do so and the additional time to enable this to happen.



Promoting Inclusion

We know that there is work being done in schools to raise awareness of and promote equality and inclusion. We asked school colleagues how their school address any social or attitudinal barriers related to young wheelchair users. The table below shows how they answered.

Theme

Number of Responses

PSHE/wellbeing curriculum/school assemblies	25
Working directly to the young wheelchair user/family about any concerns	14
Staff training	7
Nothing/don't know	5
Student voice/listening to children/young people	3
Through a specific staff member (Head of Year, EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion specialist)	2
Following school policies e.g. bullying policy	2
We have not/do not have any attitudinal barriers	2
We have a fully inclusive environment	2
Correction and modelling	1





The table shows the PSHE/wellbeing curriculum/school assemblies was the most frequent response given by schools as how they address any social or attitudinal barriers relating to young wheelchair users.

Meanwhile, we asked young wheelchair users how their school make sure you, and everyone, feels included. Sadly, the most frequent response was that young wheelchair users do not always feel included.

The responses given by young wheelchair users to this question varied, some included negative experiences, some included positive experiences and some included some examples that could be interpreted as condescending, such as being given 'special jobs' or put into specific groups.

However, there were some good examples from young wheelchair users, and this shows that inclusion is possible,

'Everyone is equal. Adaptations have been made to enable access the same as everyone else.'

'The school tries to make sure everything is always accessible and then will approach us to double check if there is anything else that may be required.'

'I am able to take part in every lesson and activities.'



"The school tries to make sure everything is always accessible and then will approach us to double check if there is anything else that may be required."

Recommendations

We think the following would make things better in school.

- Schools should be supported on how to maximise their PSHE and wellbeing curriculum from stand-alone events into practice. Best practice examples and case studies should be provided demonstrating how to work with individual needs and a whole school approach.
- School colleagues should be provided with training and development opportunities to understand ways to adapt the curriculum, including PE, to meet the needs of young wheelchair users. Best practice guidance and examples should be provided.
- Practices (whether direct or indirect) that actively exclude young people should not be allowed. Schools should review their current practices to identify any which are inadvertently exclusive and implement changes where needed.

Work experience

Work experience is important for young wheelchair users to prepare them for further learning, employment and independent living. Therefore, although we had a small response to this section of the report, from both young wheelchair users and schools, the information provided is still important to include. Some of the things we found were,

- **20% of young wheelchair users told us their school offers work placements and a third (33%) said they were unsure.**
- **Only 32% of young people said work experience placements offered at their school were accessible with 26% saying 'some' were accessible. Another 32% were unsure and 11% said no, work experience placements were not accessible for young wheelchair users.**
- **Of the schools that said they offer work experience placements, 35% said there was a process for supporting young wheelchair users to access work experience placements including working with employers beforehand.**





Recommendations

We think the following would make things better in school.

- ▶ **The implementation of a standard process that includes how to support young wheelchair users, liaise with employers and raise aspirations needs to be provided to schools to implement effective and appropriate work placement opportunities.**

Summary

In summary, what both surveys show is the different school experiences young wheelchair users are having, ranging from fully inclusive to being actively excluded. The main areas that schools raised as a concern were the suitability of school buildings, a lack of provision for young wheelchair users and the time and funding available to support young wheelchair users.

More consistency is needed to level the playing field and improve the school experience and outcomes for young wheelchair users. Training, guidance and opportunities to share best practice could help schools move away from schools focussing on just being physically accessible to schools being proactively inclusive, creating an equitable education experience for all.



**We're here
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You can find the **Making the Grade** report
on our website:

wkidz.org/policy

If you want to get in touch with Youth Board
or Whizz Kidz about this report or any other
way you feel we can support young
wheelchair users, please contact us.

Kidz Board

kidzboard@whizz-kidz.org.uk

Whizz Kidz Policy Team

policy@whizz-kidz.org.uk



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