

Revision January 2007

A Play Strategy for East Devon



This Strategy was produced by the 'East Devon Play Network'

Under a Steering Group consisting of 'zero14plus', East Devon District Council's 'communities' and policy team, the Primary Care Trust, Youth Service, Devon Play, Lymptone Parish Council, East Devon District Council's Planning and Streetscene teams



A. Background – Issues about play

*A consistent theme) is the importance of having communities where there is somewhere safe to go and something to do, (providing) recreational activity for children and young people.. Building the fabric of communities and increasing young people's skills, confidence and self-esteem.
Every Child Matters, Government Green Paper, September 2003*

The purpose of preparing and implementing a play strategy is to enable East Devon District Council and its partners to establish clear policies on play as the basis for a range of activities that will create and improve access and opportunity for all its children and young people to enjoy a range of quality play and recreation opportunities. In doing so it will also contribute to achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes for children being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.

This document looks at issues and benefits of play. The policy context of play, play opportunities in East Devon community engagement, action and evaluation.

1 Government and Play

'The right to play is a child's first claim on the community. Play is natural training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.' David Lloyd George

*The term 'Play' refers to the freetime activities of children and young people of all ages when they are choosing what to do, usually with their friends and without direction from adults.
(Planning for Play 2005)*

- 1.1 Play is essential to children's happiness, health and development. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, gives all children the right 'to rest and leisure; engage in age-appropriate play and recreational activities'. There is increasing evidence, however, that children's play opportunities are under threat. Many children and young people, particularly in our cities do not have the degree of freedom or access to the spaces and environments – physical and social – that they need to play. The consequences – real and potential – both for their immediate quality of life and for their long-term health and development are serious.
- 1.2 The government has recognised the need to make better provision for children's play as a theme that cuts across a range of policy areas, from planning, open spaces and transport to health, education and childcare. Most significantly, the enjoyment of 'recreation', including play, is one of the key outcomes for children that authorities are required to consider in drawing up co-ordinated children and young people's plans under the Children Act 2004

Such is the contribution that play can make to children's lives in so many areas that the Department for Education and Skills, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department of Health and the Home Office can (each) contribute to play through their policies. My department...is beginning to draw up a government agenda for play.' **Estelle Morris, Minister for the Arts (Department of Culture, Media and sport) House of Commons, January 2005.**



2 What is children's play?

- 2.1 Although we all recognise it when we see it, play is difficult to define. National Occupational Standards of the playwork, childcare and early years professions define play as 'freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. It can be fun or serious....by playing, children learn and develop as individuals and as members of the community'ⁱ 'The 2004 play review uses the straightforward description of play as 'What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons.'ⁱⁱ
- 2.2 Play provides children and young people with an important opportunity to develop their values, beliefs and traditions and understand how they impact on their environment. Play is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practise skills.
- 2.3 Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them.

3 Play and health

Play is essential for children's healthy physical and emotional development. The Chief Medical Officer advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least x minutes moderate-intensity physical activity each day.' There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure this for children, and that a range of increasing health problems are associated with the decline in such opportunities.ⁱⁱⁱ The government white paper Choosing Health, 2004, noted that 'many children appear to have less time being physically active.'

4 The benefits of play for children's development

- Play provides valuable life skills and is vital to their development.
- Play is integral to learning, but can not be taught through formal education.
- Play keeps children and young people healthy and active and able to learn.
- Play promotes independence, resilience, fosters self confidence, self esteem, self awareness.
- Play stimulates five key areas of development in child, social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional.

5 The benefits of play for parents/carers and families are:

- Improved family relationships
- Social contact with other families
- Healthier and more resilient children
- Happier and more confident children



6 The benefits of play for the community are:

- Involvement of children in creative and positive activities
- Anti-social behaviour is reduced and children are less at risk of crime
- Facilities are a focal point for the community
- Families are supported
- Young people are helped to prepare for a learning and working life

7 What are the barriers to play?

The overwhelming cry from both parents and young people is around lack of activities and facilities the thing they say would most improve family life is the provision of places to go and things to do...where they can spend their leisure time with their friends.'
Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children and Families, January 2005

Parents and the wider community strongly believe that children today have fewer opportunities to play than they did as children, and are spending too much time watching television or using computers. This is a serious concern for many adults. A 2001 MORI poll in Devon cited 'activities for teenagers' as people's top priority for local improvements, ahead of crime reduction, road repairs and better transport. More and better facilities for younger children were next.^{iv}

Children and young people commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space.^v These include: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty, boring or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and lack of access. East Devon's youth survey showed 'transport' as a serious barrier to accessing their preferred leisure pursuits. This is unsurprising in an area with a widespread 'rural' aspect.

8 Play and the environment

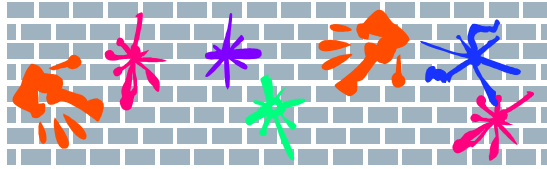
'Children are losing their connection with the natural environment and their well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked. The worse a local environment looks, the less able children are to play freely..'
A Child's place – why environment matters to children, Green Alliance/Demos, 2004

A research report by Demos and the Green Alliance^{vi} has found that there is a big gap between children from rural and urban backgrounds in their level of access to natural environments and that this is detrimental to city children. Among the report's key recommendations was that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be provided with more and better opportunities to good quality open space and its design. The environmental charity Groundwork reports that community-based play activities can ensure optimum use of such space.

9 Inequalities and social exclusion

'inclusive play provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate.'
Alison John, for Kidsactive and the Better Play Awards

For children with disabilities, negative attitudes and inaccessible physical environments compound the general problems experienced by most children, creating enormous social and physical barriers to the enjoyments of their right to play independently. In Devon, as across the UK as a whole there is evidence that disabled children do not enjoy equality of access to play and leisure activities. A recent survey of 1,000 UK parents of disabled children demonstrated



how their children were excluded from ordinary leisure opportunities. Parks and playgrounds were the least user friendly, with few facilities for disabled people.^{vii}

Research has shown that certain minority ethnic groups are disproportionately excluded from play provision across the UK. For example, Asian Children – and girls in particular – can be widely discouraged from attending mainstream play services owing to a range of cultural and ethnic pressures, including overt and implicit racism.^{viii}

10 Anti-social behaviour

Groups of children or young people ‘hanging out’ in the public domain are often characterised as posing a threat or a nuisance, even when they are simply enjoying being together. Many children and young people complain that they do not have access to space that is theirs, or which they are welcome to share with adults, and that they are consequently scapegoats.

Research commissioned by CABE space shows that ‘place making’ – improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces – is a more effective solution to anti-social behaviour than simply increasing security measures.^{ix}

11 Play facilities

‘Young people want to play and spend time outside and it is important that we provide suitable spaces for them. Alongside learning more about themselves and each other; play facilities will help keep children fit and healthy, help tackle the growing issues of obesity and provide parents with places where they are happy to let their children spend their free time.’
Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

12 When and where children play

Half of all days in the year are weekends or school holidays, when, given the opportunity, children will play outdoors for many hours. If given the opportunity they also play before, and after and on the way to school

Research shows that children, especially those with special educational needs, benefit from the space and the opportunity to play during the school day.^x

Research has also shown that children like their play space to be visible and readily accessible, to be at the heart of the communities and the environments with which they are familiar and where they feel socially secure. However, they also like the option of accessing or creating special and ‘secret’ spaces: dens and hideaways. Successful play places will take account of children’s need to see and be seen without compromising the need for a rich and varied environment.^{xi}

13 Good play provision?

Neither the identification of children’s needs for play, the definition itself, nor the description of its objectives, actually tell us what constitutes good play provision. What they do tell us is that play is about much more than swings and roundabouts in the park. Fixed equipment playgrounds have their place but the strategy should take a much broader view of where and how often children need access to the space and opportunity to compete, cooperate, practice skills run, climb, skip, hide, play with ropes,



jump, practice cartwheels, throw and kick balls, make friends, fall out, build fires, grow things, tell stories, climb trees, take risks, get wet, explore nature, build dens, get dirty, dress up, keep animals, dig holes, swing on tyres, shout, fight, invent games, make things, paint pictures, talk with their friends, or just sit.

B. The policy context for play

The Play Policy must recognise the themes in “Every Child Matters” and the Children Act 2004 as well as Article 31 of the United Nations Rights of the Child (a right to play and recreational activities, as well as equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities).

We recognise that play can impact positively on a range of issues and we will continue to...ensure that it is recognised as having an important contribution to the Change of Children Programme, the Physical Activity Plan and the Cleaner, Safer, Greener agenda. We will be considering how to take forward a more strategic, cross-departmental policy for play.'

The Play Review

Getting Serious About Play – a review of children’s play (2004) made the key recommendation that ‘the local authority or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals...prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young and local communities.’ A fuller summary of the recommendations of the Play Review is set out on page...

Every Child Matters and Change for Children

The government’s Every Child Matters framework and Change for Children programme (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk) identify the enjoyment of recreation, including play, as a key outcome for children and young people to be considered in the preparation and implementation of Children and Young People’s Plans under the Children Act (2004).

The National Childcare Strategy

The Extended Schools Initiative –part of the National Childcare Strategy to offer ‘wrap-around care’ for all children up to age 14 – was to look at opening school grounds and premises for out-of-school activities, including children’s play. These are expected, as a priority, to provide leisure facilities for all children in a locality, including disabled children, and not only for those who go to a specific school.^{xii}

Early Years development and childcare partnerships have been encouraged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to promote play as an integral part of childcare plans. Government guidance to the partnerships sets out a range of measures to ensure the quality of play opportunities within childcare provision, stating that ‘partnerships have a crucial role in the promotion and development of good quality play opportunities.’

Supervised provision that is open to children under eight must be registered with Ofsted under the national Standards for out-of-school care. Under the standards, open access playgrounds or play schemes have alternative criteria to those that apply to childcare: Out of School Care: Guidance to the National Standards.

Devon Play Policy Context

Devon has a county-wide play policy which has shaped and informed this document.



C. East Devon as a place for children and young people

These are the key messages that come out from the review of data.

5540 children 4 years and under

6693 children 5 – 9 years

6989 children 10 - 14 years (the most significant group)

16.5% of East Devon's population are male under 15's, 14.3% are female.

Exmouth Withycombe Raleigh Ward has the greatest number and highest percentage of under 15's. Sidmouth Rural the lowest.

East Devon has slightly less % of pupils with special educational needs (451) in total than Devon, England or the South West.

Only 0.07% of East Devon's households are from BME communities. The largest group within this is Chinese. However travelling communities and migrant workers are poorly revealed through census data.

3 Wards in Exmouth rank in the lowest quartile in England for educational skills and training in young people.

2 Wards (one in Exmouth, one Sidford) are in the lowest England quartile for "Income Deprivation affecting children".

Devon generally has a slightly lower percentage of 'free school meals' than other parts of the South West or England.

East Devon as a place to play

A great deal is said about the very high age profile of East Devon. However, over emphasis of these older age groups would ignore the needs of children and young people.

In order to best consider the needs of children and young people we also need to remember the following combination of issues which are special to East Devon:

- A very rural District. Some parts rank in the top quartile nationally for rural isolation with all that is entailed in forms of limited transport limits and range of facilities.
- One in five households have no access to a private car. To an extent certain areas having good access to bus, rail, and community transport offset this, but such facilities are by no means universal, and may limit the transport option for children and young people. Thus we can see that free or low cost access to areas, activities and equipment for play needs to be dispersed throughout our District, in places where children and young people live.



Leisure facilities and schemes in East Devon

East Devon District Council no longer directly provides sports and entertainment venues. The major facilities are now run by Leisure East Devon (LED) (a charitable body) and more minor facilities are leased to other relevant enterprises. East Devon District Council still provides and maintains play parks and skate parks.

Key messages from our research show:

- Four public swimming pools (in addition to privately run ones)
- Around 150 halls used by the community
- 7 public indoor sports facilities (the majority shared with schools)
- 163 sports pitches (almost 60 of which are specifically for junior sport)*
- 86 equipped play areas and Skate parks **
- 17 parishes have neither sufficient sport nor play facilities with open community access (almost 25% of parishes)***

These facilities have been mapped in several major studies.

Summer play events have been run in the past by the Council and others, and LED is proposing to work with the Children's Trust in future on these.

Devon Youth Service not only provides Youth Clubs and centres but outreach services and a mobile provision.

Excellent examples of free play with an environmental theme relate to the work carried out by the Council's Countryside Team Education Ranger. They run Junior Ranger, Great Trees, and Nature Reserve schemes.

Similarly the East Devon District Council Arts Development team have worked with many formal and informal childrens groups and individuals (eg Big Draw, sand sculpture, Banners project) Support for exploration of digital arts for young people has been through Digital Express.

[* Playing pitch Strategy 2002/03

** Recreational areas strategy 2003]

*** Outdoor sport and play provision within Devon (DPFA) 2005, and 'Devonplay' data.

Planning and Strategy

East Devon is currently involved in several major regeneration areas (indeed is also creating a new community), and as such new opportunities will arise in these areas.

This East Devon Play Strategy is in line with the Devon Play Policy which in turn is informed by a wide range of other policies (including priorities from Local Area Agreements and the Children and Young Peoples Plan).

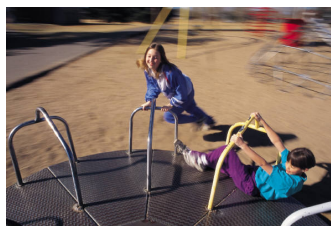
East Devon Play Strategy is in line with the East Devon Cultural Strategy (2004/08) which forms a part of East Devon Community Plan (most recent version 2006), and which relates to East Devon District Council's Corporate Strategy.

East Devon has draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on “Provision of open space, recreation and play space on residential development sites” (this supports Local Plan Policy RE3). This follows the National Playing Fields Association Guidance on accessibility, capacity, type and also makes arrangements East for maintenance costs. The Planning Guidance was based on East Devon Recreational Areas Strategy 2003.

East Devon has a Playing Pitch Strategy (adopted in 2004) following identification of where any short falls in sports pitches lie.

This Play Strategy builds on a previous version of 1996 and recognises significant change in the organisations’ funding policy, and ambitions of the people of East Devon.

Play is not specifically mentioned in the Sustainable Communities Plan but it is recognised as being related to achieving sustainable Communities Plan priorities around communities with problems, positive mental health, anti-social behaviour, culture and use of the countryside.



East Devon’s multi-agency structures that support play opportunities

- East Devon Play network, Devon Play Support, Funding Officer, CTLF, LSP etc
- Children’s Trust Local Forum
- Local Strategic Partnership (via Community Plan priorities)

D Driving the Play Strategy and Play projects process

From an initial, wide, meeting with the East Devon Play network a steering group was established from ‘zero14plus’, East Devon District Council’s ‘communities’ and policy team, PCT, Youth Service, Devon Play and Lympstone Parish Council, East Devon District Council Planning and Streetscene teams.

E Consultations and Community Engagement on play within East Devon

The gaps and barriers as identified by the consultations carried out in 2004 by Devon Play Network gave rise to a number of play policy objectives, from which District Councils and partner organisations can further develop their own strategies.

The East Devon Youth Survey (2005) identified key activities and barriers for young people (secondary school ages) asking a very large proportion of young people from Sidmouth, Ottery St. Mary, Axminster and their surrounding areas (almost 2000 students).

Consultation specifically to create this Play Strategy have included:

1. East Devon Play network consultation and evening discussion (70 invitees)
2. Parish and Town Council postal consultation (69 consultation letters – postal)
3. Consultation through County Show.
4. Consultation through Honiton Show and Honiton Play event (parent and child, face to face)
5. Consultation through Seaton skate event (BIAS) [300 attendees] (video interviews)

6. Council tenants consultation (4,500 consulted – postal)
7. Consultation with Children’s Trust Local Forum Members (presentation)
8. Consultation with Council ‘Culture Think-Tank’ (presentation)
9. ‘Drop in’ consultation event about play projects to be funded through Lottery Funding (building a wall of ideas).
10. Consultation of LSP (presentation)

As a result we have information from parents, grandparents, young people, and children (some as young as 3!). The results from 4,5, and 6 were the most significant consultations which have been aimed specifically at this strategy. All views were gathered around a consistent set of questions for these events but using different, age appropriate, means of collection.

The key results of the Consultations were:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| A | Youth Survey | - <u>Swimming</u> , cycling, shopping, tennis and trampolining, ice skating were popular wishes. transport was the biggest barrier. |
| B | Play Network views | - A wide ranging list including play grants, holiday play schemes, extended school use, and use of coastline were suggested as gaps. |
| C | Parish & Town Councils | - Rural play equipment and facilities for older children (especially games surfaces and skateparks) were the main gaps. |
| D | County Show
(young people) | - this identified the wish for a range of clubs, adventure activities and play spaces. Ice rinks and theme parks were notably mentioned! |
| E | Honiton Show

Honiton Play Days,
Seaton (BIAS) event
(young people), &

Tenants consultation | These were the biggest consultations devised especially for the Play Strategy. Key issues were (scoring over 15% of responses): <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ safety & maintenance▪ more play opportunities required and accessible and free parks are the most significant place where play takes place▪ organised structure for play (events etc) would be welcome▪ choice of options needed▪ 12-16 year olds need play places (followed by 8-12's with young groups less so)▪ both genders but especially girls had insufficient provision▪ poor provision for children with particular needs |
| F | CTLF Members &
Communities Think Tank | - gaps in freely accessible exercise facilities, creative play, and engagement of extended school facilities - major landowners were identified as may be having a role. |

From consultation and data gathering these are the key criteria for our Play Strategy:

1. We need to focus on encouraging and allowing more play.
2. We need to ensure that play 'gives something' to those involved.
3. The play provision needs to be inclusive of all types of children and young people (including both genders, all cultures, all abilities and including people from rural locations).
4. Play provision must be safe, secure and easy to maintain.
5. Play in parks must be retained and encouraged.
6. There must be a variety of choice.
7. Must be easily accessible (time, place and for rural children).
8. Must cater for 12 – 16 year olds.
9. A framework of organised activities is welcome.
10. Legitimised spaces for different activities/age groups will help to control domination by certain groups and individuals (which is an issue).

F Our Vision of the future and the policy principles which we have derived

- In recognising the essential nature, benefits and value of play our vision for the future is to see play provision as a key strand of sustainable communities (existing and new, urban and rural).
- Furthermore it must be recognised that, largely, play should be freely accessible, free of charge and freely chosen.
- The need to create locations which are 'legitimised' for play, and for many different groups of children and young people, and that permit (preferably encourage) integration.
- We must not limit our concept of play to children of primary school age and younger. Play is important throughout life but especially up to the age of 16.
- As play is not just about equipment we must also seek out other means to engender play and playfulness.
- Whilst play needs to be undertaken in reasonably controlled environments there is a need to enable challenging and exploratory play (physical, mental and emotional challenge are key elements).
- Because of the huge variety of play needs no single organisation is able to provide these. Partnership working needs to continue into the future developing from the East Devon Play Network.

G Action Plan we will now follow

Our actions to develop the vision and policy principles are to:-

1. Create a communication strategy to raise the profile of play within East Devon and recognise that play should be largely undirected, need not be physical, nor outdoor, and is not primarily about the provision of equipment (initial work by December 2007).
2. Work through East Devon District Council's Funding Officer to help to identify initiatives and grants through which play opportunities in rural villages may be enhanced (initial work by December 2007).
3. Value children and young people's ideas and opinions on their play needs through a programme of ongoing consultation and involving them in decision making (debate at Consultation Group in 2007).
4. As policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that the needs of children and young people are formally considered (ongoing).
5. Ensure that through design, location, type and maintenance, of local Councils' own facilities that play environments allow children and young people to access the provision and to ensure the balance between children's play need and their need to experience risk is not compromised (review standard by April 2008).
6. Stress the importance of partnership working, including private, voluntary and statutory to work together to get the best for the children and young people of East Devon. Through the Children's Trust Local Forum (initial work by September 2007).
7. Seek delivery of appropriate additional play space and equipment through local planning policies (as identified in the Recreational Area Strategy) (ongoing).
8. That the AONB teams (based at EDDC) seek to identify, support and promote play activity using the natural environment (initial review by December 2007).

9. That the regeneration and new community developments in East Devon recognise the need for a range of play options. Initially within 2007).
10. That indoor creative play is recognised as requirement for development by the partners to East Devon's cultural strategy (to the LSP by December 2007).
11. That EDDC seeks to develop new, and increased uptake of, play and recreational opportunities through its formal contracting arrangements with Leisure East Devon (to review by LED SLA Monitoring Group by April 2008).
12. That EDDC uses the standards in the Supplementary Planning Guidance in its considerations of the future of existing play areas (ongoing).
13. To seek more "flexible use" hard surfaced and grassed sites rather than just play equipment as planning gain (to review within LDF process according to programme).
14. Recognise the needs of people with disabilities and others at risk of exclusion for integrated play within future provision (initial discussion with CTLF in 2007).
15. Seek opportunities to enable access to play and craft materials within East Devon (eg scrap store) (initial consideration within 2007).
16. Recognise the needs of older children for 'play' type activities in our provision (discuss at LSP within 2007).
17. Highways & Planning departments consider the use of traffic calming and Home Zones within existing and new housing developments within Devon to ensure the safety of children's play (to consider within LFD process in CTLF in 2007).
18. Help to legitimise certain areas of play provision for different age groups and activities through their design (initial discussion in CTLF in 2007).
19. Develop the East Devon Play network (with links to the local forum of the Childrens Trust) as a forum to develop and monitor progress on these action points (within 2007).

Lottery Money

A further consultation event (afternoon and evening) was held about the Play Strategy and about the Lottery Play Funding. This generated a number of ideas for use of the Lottery money towards the 'key criteria' for our play strategy. These were all evaluated against our criteria, and the schemes that provided best outcomes were:-

1. Multi-use, all-weather community play surfaces, designed with consultation for use by older children.
2. A mobile provision for rural communities to run schemes with the community and then train and hand the schemes over to volunteers in that community.
3. A 'playtrail' suitable for older children, including those with disabilities, developed around an existing route.

H Evaluation Plan

We will monitor the following indicators annually through the Children's Trust Local Forum:

- Numbers of villages and towns with play facilities
- Numbers of play sites specifically aimed at older children
- Monitor levels of use and community value of play facilities via Town and Parish Councils
- Identify value of planning gain negotiated
- Monitor progress against action plan

Notes and references

- ⁱ B Hughes and F King, 1985 as adopted by the National occupational Standards for Playwork
- ⁱⁱ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Getting Serious About Play, a review of children's play*, 2004
- ⁱⁱⁱ Chief Medical Officer, *At Least Five A Week*, Department of Health, April 2004
- ^{iv} MORI/Audit Commission, *What needs most improving in your area?* 2001
- ^v SOLC, 2004
- ^{vi} Green Alliance/Demos, *A Child's Place – why environment matters to children*, 2004
- ^{vii} P shelly, *Everybody here? Play and Leisure for disabled children and young people*, Contact-a-Family, 2002
- ^{viii} H Kapasi, *Asian Children Play*, Playtrain, 2001
- ^{ix} CAGE Space, *Preventing anti-social behaviour in public spaces*, policy note 2004
- ^x Play Inclusive (P.inc) Action Research Project; *Inspiring Inclusive Play*, 2004
- ^{xi} R Wheway and A Millward, *Child's Play: Facilitating play on housing estates*, The Joseph Rowntree Association and Chartered Institute of Housing, 1997
- ^{xii} *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, Government Strategy for Special Educational Needs, section 2.11

