

Schools still failing to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

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Many primary school teachers admit they 'could do better'. Lack of resources or insufficient training has led to teaching that is often inadequate and lacking in confidence, claim researchers.

"Some of the reasons for the lack of positive promotion of disability in primary schools are; uncertainty about how to fit disability equality into the curriculum or a reluctance to talk about disability for [fear](#) of highlighting 'difference' " says the study.

The Disability Equality in English Primary Schools Project, led by Dr Angharad Beckett of Leeds University, focused on the extent and nature of teaching for disability equality, whilst also examining children's understanding of what it means to be disabled.

In December 2006, a legal duty was placed upon public sector organisations to promote equality for [disabled people](#). Primary schools were supposed to have a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) in place by December 2007, which included their plans for promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.

The study found that only 30 per cent of respondent schools had a DES in place that included this dimension and teaching about disability equality was often the 'poor relation' compared to other equality issues such as 'race'.

"When we talked to children about the lives of disabled people, many

were appalled about how society effectively disables people, excluding them from key areas of life. Most children appear to have a keen sense of what is socially just, and consider the way that society treats disabled people to be very 'unfair'," Dr Beckett said.

"The challenge is how to encourage and support already hard-pressed teachers to start talking to children about disability and to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people. Schools are not the only agents with responsibilities here. The family and the media also need to play their part but they are certainly well placed to challenge disabling attitudes and help build a more enabling society."

Encouragingly, schools said they would value more visits by disabled people's organisations and where schools knew how to embed disability into the curriculum, this teaching was not considered 'burdensome'.

This is important because the findings of the study suggest the need for a proactive approach. Children in the study (aged 6/7 and 10/11) admired famous disabled people, such as Stephen Hawking, but misunderstandings about disability were commonplace.

Younger children tended to believe that disabled people would not be able to have partners or marry, while many children of both age groups did not think disabled people could be employed. Both age groups suggested that disabled people could not or should not have [children](#) because they might 'pass on' impairments.

The research concluded that local authorities and head teachers need to be more aware of children's misconceptions and of their responsibilities to challenge these; teachers need more training. In addition, Ofsted inspections could be extended to include assessment of schools' progress with regard to the Disability Equality Duty.

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