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## Guest blog: Leonard Cheshire and the World Bank discuss priorities on inclusive education

To introduce this special edition on inclusive education, Ruth Owen OBE, Chief Executive of Leonard Cheshire, and Charlotte V. McClain-Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor at the World Bank, discuss why it's vital that world leaders make clear financial commitments to disability-inclusive and gender-responsive education if we plan to build back better and fairer from the pandemic.



Students at a school in Uganda, where Leonard Cheshire supports inclusive education for girls with disabilities. Leonard Cheshire, 2021.

**Ruth:** World leaders have a crucial responsibility for championing disability inclusion and promoting programmes that work in this area. So it was encouraging to see financial commitments being made to girls' education at the recent G7 summit with clear references to girls with disabilities. But there is still more to be done. There was still little dialogue or indication on exactly how girls with disabilities would be central to these commitments. And clear sub-targets around disability are crucial, particularly as nine out of 10 out of school children have a disability. And a significant proportion of them are girls. Because gender and disability are not mutually exclusive, are they?

**Charlotte:** I agree, it was important to see the reference to girls with disabilities. However, if we are to make real progress on inclusion and reach the most marginalised girls, then intersectionality needs to be at the forefront of the agenda. **Research** tells us that girls with disabilities are less likely to enrol and have lower rates of attendance and grade completion because disability and gender are two of the most prominent factors in educational marginalisation. The **World Bank's commitment** to ensuring all education projects and programs are disability-inclusive by 2025 is central to accelerating action on disability-inclusive development. Further, the World Bank's **Disability-Inclusive Education in Africa program** and **Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI)** make catalytic investments to operationalize disability-inclusive education, across education and social dimensions in low-income country contexts. Given our current environment, the impact of COVID-19 on girls with disabilities cannot be overlooked. Evidence from an upcoming survey report conducted by the **IEI** suggests that **girls with disabilities, in particular, are at risk of not returning to school due to economic hardships, parental preference, early marriages or becoming pregnant during lockdown**. Additionally, several respondents to the survey pointed to the critical role of campaigns and advocating for the participation of all learners, including girls with disabilities by national governments.

**Ruth:** And rightly so! Governments and leaders have a real opportunity to shape the future of education and equality, especially with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Replenishment Summit coming up. But I think one of the main barriers to this vital investment, is the assumption that these investments are always costly and time consuming. But that really isn't the case. In fact, research indicates that if aspects of inclusion are

integrated from the outset then the additional costs are less than 5%. However, if retrofitted, then the costs of inclusion become considerably higher. So it really is in everyone's best interest to think about disability inclusion right from the word go. Children with disabilities need and deserve these investments so that they have access not only to education, but to the career opportunities that can come after. **Leonard Cheshire's holistic inclusive education model** has worked to address environmental and attitudinal barriers inside and outside of school. And it's making a real impact, improving participation in learning for children with disabilities, including girls in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. So these investments really do work!

**Charlotte:** Investment is imperative for impact. **COVID-19 exacerbated the existing gaps in financing for education, which now stand at an enormous US\$200 billion.**

International donors must protect their share of international development aid apportioned towards education and ensure that support is directed towards the most marginalised groups, including children with disabilities. At the same time, governments in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) must protect their national education budget and ensure re-enrolment strategies are underpinned by financial commitments that are disability-inclusive and gender-responsive.

To do so, we suggest an approach that helps both mainstream disability inclusion in education budgets and creates specific mechanisms to target the most marginalised. This is often referred to as the **twin track approach**. This model supports cross-sectoral approaches and goes beyond financing to include the development of robust policy and implementation plans to ensure impact. The **World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework** operationalizes the twin-track approach by promoting **non-discrimination for persons with disabilities** in Bank-funded operations, including **education projects**. And finally, critical to the disability rights movement is the involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities, including children and youth with disabilities, in processes that impact them. Persons with disabilities should be seen as active agents of change and not exclusively as the recipients of funds. They should be involved and participate in shaping financial mechanisms to ensure that collectively their lived experience is reflected in plans and actions.

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## The latest evidence and guidance on disability-inclusive education

### Research

Human Rights Watch published findings on **increased inequalities in children's right to education due to the COVID-19 pandemic** based on 470 interviews across 60 countries, including interviews with children with a range of different disabilities. The research found that barriers to distance learning have been particularly high for children with disabilities; children with disabilities were significantly less likely to have access to technologies, which precluded them from distance learning; and intensive outreach will be necessary to ensure children with disabilities return to school.

**A systematic literature review published by EdTech Hub** found that amongst the 60 publications reviewed, there is evidence of new developments in the number of assistive

technologies that are having a small but significant impact on learners' with disabilities access to and engagement with national curriculums. There is, however, a major evidence gap in evaluations of educational interventions using education technology and how education technology can be most effectively introduced within mainstream education settings. Evidence suggests that there is more of a focus on the development of technology rather its than alignment to curriculum goals, or how technology can help teachers facilitate inclusive learning. The review highlights a reluctance among teachers to adopt education technology in their teaching, significant gaps in teachers' knowledge of how to use education technology, and a lack of training on education technology available to teachers. Earlier this year, EdTech Hub published [guidance on using education technology to support learners](#) with special educational needs and disabilities in LMICs.

**Qualitative research in Zimbabwe** (involving interviews and 44 focus group discussions with education professionals, community leaders, and children with disabilities) highlighted pervasive stigma, negative beliefs about and attitudes towards children with disabilities in five districts of Zimbabwe. The study outlines approaches by government, INGOs and boarding schools to address environmental barriers to education for children with disabilities, and emphasises the need to develop effective and targeted awareness campaigns on disability inclusion to reduce negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.

**Malawi:** A survey of 99 parents and carers of children with disabilities conducted in October to December 2020 found that 86% of respondents had no contact with their children's school or teachers during school closures. 31% reported their children were not studying at all. About a quarter said their children were missing essential physio or speech therapies that were only available at school. Respondents emphasised the need to make educational programmes accessible for children with disabilities during the pandemic; increase support from schools to children and their parents; and invest in educational technology.

**Ethiopia and Jordan:** Research conducted from April to October 2020, drawing from 4441 phone surveys and 500 interviews with adolescents (including 197 adolescents with disabilities in urban Ethiopia, 352 adolescents with disabilities in urban Jordan) found that in Ethiopia respondents with disabilities were less likely than peers without disabilities to be using technology to continue learning during the pandemic (15% versus 22%). In both Ethiopia and Jordan, adolescents with disabilities were as likely as peers without disabilities to receive family support for learning during school closures, and their caregivers were significantly more likely than caregivers of adolescents without disabilities to be worried that their child would not return to school (58% versus 45% in Ethiopia, 73% versus 62% in Jordan). The authors recommend investing in gender- and disability-responsive distance education provision, using a range of modalities, and providing training to education providers to implement inclusive distance education.

IEI published recordings and summaries of their recent webinars, including on [the World Bank's Inclusive Teach Tool](#) for preparing inclusive teachers; [applying a social inclusion lens to disability-inclusive education](#); and [trends in disability-inclusive education financing](#). One webinar presents the findings from the [IEI's survey of learners with disabilities during COVID-19](#) school closures: 41% of surveys parents reported having no access to the financial support they needed to support their children's learning; 58% were concerned about inaccessible distance learning modalities affecting their children's learning;

and parents reported a need for financial support and social protection schemes, improved access to devices and connectivity, community and social networks, and educational materials, to support learners with disabilities during the pandemic.

The UNGEI, UNICEF, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, Sightsavers and Humanity and Inclusion launched a **webinar series on inclusive education for girls with disabilities**, presenting findings from studies in West Africa and discussing how to effectively address barriers to ensure inclusive education for girls with disabilities.

**Ethiopia:** Mixed methods research that surveyed 6800 adolescents with disabilities and their caregivers in 2017 and 2018 found that adolescents with disabilities in Ethiopia experience multiple barriers to education, heightened vulnerability to gender- and age-based violence, and higher levels of psychosocial distress compared to peers without disabilities. The authors recommend increasing investment in specialised training and mentoring for education and service providers, support networks for parents, and strengthening disability-inclusive social protection and referral mechanisms.

## Guidance and case studies

UNICEF has published a **practical guide to blended/remote learning and children with disabilities** to support school directors, teachers and other education professionals in making decisions to ensure children with disabilities continue to receive education and associated services while schools are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies. It outlines basic concepts, how to plan for and implement inclusive remote and blended education, and suggestions on how to create more inclusive and equitable school systems when students return to schools. Earlier this year, UNICEF also published '**Combating the Costs of Exclusion for Children with Disabilities and their Families**', which summarises the evidence on global childhood disability prevalence; the impacts of disability on children; the financial costs of excluding children with disabilities; and how to combat these costs by reducing the prevalence of disability and removing the barriers that prevent children with disabilities from full and equal participation in society.

The UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and Leonard Cheshire have published an advocacy brief on **ensuring efforts to advance gender equality in education are disability-inclusive**. The brief includes several case studies, for example: on Leonard Cheshire's Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) project in Kenya, which sensitises men on the rights of girls with disabilities and aims to address patriarchal norms and reduce stigma; and on Humanity Inclusion's Girls' Access to Education (GATE) project in Sierra Leone, which empowers girls with and without disabilities to identify areas of improvement for inclusive education, and strengthens referral pathways and reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, with a specific focus on children with disabilities.

Earlier this year Leonard Cheshire published a **resource pack for parents and caregivers on how to support children with disabilities at home during COVID-19**. It provides guidance on supporting children with disabilities to continue learning at home, safeguarding children with disabilities during the pandemic, and how to communicate in accessible ways. The pack provides a collection of other guidance and resources.

## Programme learning on disability-inclusive education

**Accessible digital textbooks:** Under the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), UNICEF, UNESCO, the Ministries of Education in participating countries, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and the National Union of Disabled People of Uganda (NUDIPU) partnered to deliver a programme in **Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda** to enhance inclusive education through quality, accessible digital textbooks. Capacity building activities to build technical knowledge on inclusive education, universal design for learning, and accessible digital textbooks were delivered and a technical working group was established in Kenya to provide technical advice, guidance and oversight to the programme. In addition, several internal guidance notes have been produced, and an accessible digital textbook prototype was piloted in Rwanda on Grade 1 English in five schools. OPDs are actively involved in providing technical advice and developing guidance notes, including underrepresented groups, such as persons with deaf blindness. The programme has contributed to Rwanda's signing of the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate access to published works by visually impaired persons with print disabilities and generated interest in improving the foundational skills of children with disabilities, for example, influencing the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to invest in accessible digital textbooks using similar approaches by the UNPRPD MPTF programme.

**Building families' trust in schools:** In Nigeria, the Inclusive Futures programme is developing a model of disability-inclusive education in eight schools with the aim of scaling it up. The SMILE project (Supporting Mainstreaming Inclusion so all can Learn Equally) is strengthening school management committees, which bridge a gap between schools and their local communities. Sightsavers has reported that working with the community has increased trust in the schools for local families and improved attendance rates among pupils. AA Awokson, head teacher at Wazari Aliyu primary school, says: *"The things we have done in the school have encouraged others to come, because once the school tries to encourage them to participate in the classroom, the stories go out, people get to hear about it. [Parents] realise that if their children will be given such respect at that school, let's get them enrolled there. Before this time, many parents would prefer leaving them at home, sending them for begging or things like that."* Christy John Daniel, head teacher of Taka One Model Primary School, has seen the project's impact in getting more children with disabilities learning and improving their future opportunities. *"We use the committee to speak to parents on the importance of children with disabilities to be in school,"* Christy says. *"That is how we got a number of children with disability back into school."*

**Media promoting the rights of girls with disabilities:** in the Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) project, Leonard Cheshire worked with the South Sudan Union of Persons with Disabilities, engaging with radio presenters and journalists to promote the rights of girls with disabilities. They used WhatsApp groups and Teams to spark discussions with more than 20 radio announcers. The broadcasters shared their thoughts through voice notes, leading to lively debates, and some participants broadcasted messages and questions about the rights of girls with disabilities on their local radio stations. Journalists learned about how their own personal belief systems can come through in their stories, how important it is to use positive language when talking about disability, and the power they have as journalists to affect behaviour and promote equality and inclusion.

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## The latest disability inclusion evidence and guidance: Other topics

### Stigma, discrimination, and violence:

Able Child Africa and Save the Children published guidelines on **disability-inclusive child safeguarding** to respond to the gap in child safeguarding practices that address the specific measures and adaptations required to ensure the safety of children with disabilities.

An **assessment of sexual offence laws in the Commonwealth** by Human Dignity Trust found that in 23 Commonwealth countries consensual sexual activity with people with disabilities is criminalised, and in 25 Commonwealth countries sexual assault laws use derogatory language to refer to people with disabilities.

A qualitative needs assessment from UNFPA found that **girls and women with disabilities in Syria were at high risk of various forms of violence**, including physical, emotional, and sexual violence, and exclusion from education and other services.

An assessment of two radio interventions aiming to address **albinism-related stigma in Tanzania** (which assessed 111 community members' attitudes towards people with albinism before and after the radio programmes) found a significant reduction in stigma after exposure to the programmes, with respondents indicating they had more understanding of albinism as a result of listening to the programmes.

Qualitative research with 20 people with disabilities aged 15-24 and 13 carers who provide menstrual support to these individuals found that **barriers to menstrual hygiene management in Kavrepalanchok district, Nepal**, include inaccessible water, sanitation and hygiene facilities; inaccessible information about menstrual hygiene management; no support mechanisms for carers providing menstrual support; and stigma and discrimination concerning both menstruation and disability.

### Poverty, social protection, and employment:

Qualitative research with 42 working-aged people with disabilities found that **people with disabilities and their households in Nairobi and Dhaka face high costs** for healthcare, assistive devices, transportation and accommodations at school and work, and indirect costs such as unemployment, underemployment and lower salaries. Interventions to address these costs are likely to be more effective the earlier they are provided. Social protection programmes may require tailoring – for example, by broadening the coverage of services for health insurance and removing restrictions on working from cash transfers. The research recommends that programmes should unbundle support for extra costs from anti-poverty transfers because these programmes are currently insufficient to cover costs. It also finds that more programmes are needed to complement social protection – for example, to address environmental barriers.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) published a policy guide on **how to design disability-inclusive social protection**. Recent guidance from Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19: Expert Advice (SPACE), the UNPRPD joint program on inclusive social protection, the UNPRPD global initiative on COVID-19

inclusive response and recovery, and Humanity and Inclusion provides further detail on **how targeting mechanisms can identify people with disabilities for inclusion in social protection programmes** and **gender- and disability-inclusive information systems for social protection**. The guides highlight that countries that already had disability identification mechanisms and registries in place have been in a better position to provide fast relief and expand support to people with disabilities and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CDC Group launched its **guidance for fund managers** and **guidance for companies in LMICs** to include people with disabilities as employees, service users and customers. The guidance is included in CDC's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Toolkit. As part of the **Inclusive Futures Employer Disability Confidence Toolkit**, Sightsavers also recently published an **accessibility costing tool** for companies seeking to improve accessibility in their operations.

### Inclusive health systems:

**WHO and UNICEF**, the **International Disability Alliance**, and **Leonard Cheshire** have each published guidance on ensuring equity in access to vaccination against COVID-19 for people with disabilities. WHO and UNICEF's recommendations for governments include prioritising older people with disabilities and people with disabilities with relevant underlying health conditions for vaccination; consulting with people with disabilities, their networks and organisations to identify and address barriers to accessing vaccination activities, including stigma and misconceptions about people with disabilities; including people with disabilities in estimations of target populations; ensuring immunisation monitoring systems collect disability-disaggregated data; providing information about vaccines and vaccination processes, as well as feedback mechanisms in accessible formats; and providing clear and accessible messaging on the criteria for prioritisation of vaccination.

A survey of 2114 blind and deaf students from 15 special schools in Ghana found that approximately **70% of respondents had ever used sexual and reproductive health services** (67.8% of males, 62.8% of females). The authors recommend that the Ghana Education Service and Health Service adopt targeted interventions for sexual and reproductive health services in special schools.

A **national accessibility audit of 38812 primary healthcare facilities in Brazil** found that overall the accessibility score of primary care facilities in Brazil was low, and scores were consistently better in the least poor regions of Brazil and in facilities in larger municipalities. The authors suggest there is a need to develop and trial approaches to overcoming the gaps identified in the audits (for example, through incentives or penalties) in order to improve access to healthcare for people with disabilities.

The Center for Inclusive Policy published a video explaining **disability-inclusive universal healthcare and ways to cover the healthcare costs of people with disabilities**. It highlights the importance of including assistive devices, rehabilitation and extra transportation costs in health systems and the role of social protection in covering health costs.



## Disability inclusion in humanitarian settings:

A mixed methods **Age and Disability Inclusion Needs Assessment** conducted with 2530 households of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, found that 12% of individuals were people with disabilities. Of people with disabilities, 52% reported facing barriers related to mobility in shelters, 76% barriers related to mobility around camps, and the highest proportion of people facing these barriers were older people with disabilities. 64% of people with disabilities reported barriers to accessing services, compared to 39% of people without disabilities. 65% of children with disabilities aged 5 to 9 had reportedly attended temporary learning centre for at least 4 days a week, compared to 88% of children without disabilities.

A **disability and inclusion survey in Malakal Protection of Civilians site in South Sudan** found that amongst people with disabilities, 44.5% reported at least one mental health concern. The main barriers to services for people with disabilities were a lack of economic resources (39.3%), distance to service points (38.4%) and physically inaccessible sites (34%). 10.4% of respondents fear forms of verbal violence when accessing services and 7.4% fear physical violence. Priority actions recommended by people with disabilities were giving more support to family members and care givers (70.6%) and making access to basic services easier (45.9%).

A **Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme nationwide survey in Syria** found that 23% of returnees to Syria above the age of 12 (21% of females and 26% of males) have disabilities. 57% of households with more than one member with disabilities were displaced 3 or more times, compared to 47% of households without members with disabilities. 22% of returnees aged 12-23 with disabilities are attending school, compared to 56% of returnees without disabilities. 41% of households with members with disabilities report having regular access to water, compared to 83% of households without members with disabilities.

A recent report found that the main **protection issues affecting people with disabilities in Syria as a result of the pandemic** are: lack of access to services, including due to accessibility and mobility issues (69%); lack of access to health care and medication (68%); psychological trauma, stress and anxiety (57%); stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination (50%); violence, abuse or neglect within families/households (39%); lack of access to information, including due to communication barriers (37%); and separation from family/household members/caregivers (23%).

The Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey) produced **guidance on including people with disabilities in the COVID-19 CCCM response**, with key recommendations on including people with disabilities in needs assessments, analysis and planning; design and implementation of programs; monitoring and evaluation; and for frontline staff working with people with disabilities.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Iraq published an **accessible construction toolkit** to strengthen accessibility of future construction – for example, school buildings, health facilities and community centres.

Humanity and Inclusion, Human Rights Watch, International Disability Alliance, Women Enabled International and the Women's Refugee Commission made a **joint submission on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations**. The submission calls for all relevant stakeholders to ensure that

monitoring and reporting on the experiences of women and girls in conflicts includes the specific experiences of women and girls with disabilities, and that women and girls with disabilities can meaningfully participate in conflict prevention, response, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

GSMA published guidance on human-centred design research methodologies to ensure that **people with disabilities' perspectives are integrated in to the design of mobile products and services in humanitarian contexts**. The report outlines the approach taken in a project conducted in 2020 in Nairobi Kenya, and five specific research methodologies that could be applied in other projects.

### Assistive technologies:

A special issue of International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health focuses on **assistive technology and support services for people with disabilities in low resource settings**. It includes, for example, articles on **assistive technology and civic participation in Sierra Leone**; **supported decision making to realise the right to legal capacity of people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in South America**; and a **review of the government wheelchair provision system in India**;

Qualitative research with 20 adults with intellectual disabilities and 17 providers of assistive technologies found that **people with intellectual disabilities in Western Cape province, South Africa experienced a range of barriers to accessing and using assistive technologies**. These barriers include: negative attitudes amongst governments, community members and family members towards people with intellectual disabilities and their use of assistive technologies; limited advocacy on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities; limited knowledge amongst caregivers and health professionals on assessing needs for assistive technologies; a lack of financial resources; and inaccessible transport are some key barriers to accessing and continuing to use assistive technologies.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF published a manual for procurement teams working in less resourced settings on **procurement of assistive products**, accessories, spare parts and related services. The manual provides detailed good practice guidance, including a recommended procurement process.

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## Disability inclusion policy news

The **G7 summit** was held in the UK from 11 to 13 June 2021. It was the first G7 summit since 2019 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus an important opportunity for leaders to commit to policy and financial pledges for building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK government pledged £430 million of new UK aid funding for education for children in the world's poorest countries, with a focus on girls' education. The funding will go to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The **Global Education Summit** will be hosted by the UK and the Government of Kenya in July, and will aim for governments and donors to pledge a total of US \$5 billion to support the implementation of GPE's 2021-2025 strategy. Disability-focused organisations have highlighted the critical importance of making specific commitments to increase enrolment and completion for children with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities.

**The 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of States Parties (CoSP) to the UNCRPD** was held online from 15 to 17 June. The theme of the CoSP was building back better: COVID-19 response and recovery; meeting the needs, realising the rights and addressing the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities. The sub-themes were 1. Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies; 2. Living independently, being included in the community; and 3. Right to education: challenges with inclusive education and accessibility during COVID-19. Videos and background documents from the event are available on the [UNDESA website](#).

**Sierra Leone introduced a new policy on inclusive education in April**, which aims for enrolment, retention and successful transition of all students in pre-primary, primary and senior secondary education, regardless of disability, gender, pregnancy or parenting status, geographic location, and socio-economic background.

**Armenia adopted a new law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** in May. The law bans discrimination against people with disabilities, and includes guarantees of accessibility, independent living, access to justice, and reasonable accommodation.

The recent World Health Assembly saw an agreement on the **Resolution on the Highest Attainable Standard of Health for Persons with Disabilities**. As part of this, the WHO's disability unit will oversee a new Global Report On the Highest Standard of Health for Persons with Disabilities, due to be published in 2022.

The World Bank published analysis of **the extent to which household surveys and censuses in LMICs include disability questions**, and the types of questions they use. They found that only 31% of the data sets reviewed had at least one disability-related question and 15% have functional difficulty questions that meet international standards, such as the Washington Group Questions. Use of these questions is essential for monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The Valuable 500 global disability network has **reached its goal of getting 500 major companies to publish quarterly reports on disability** representation in their operations.

## About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All of our published reports are available on [our website](#). Contact us via: [enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk)