

# Research Briefing No. 5

---

## Children's Disabilities: Developing tools to help schools identify needs

### Key findings

- Our research indicates that disability cannot be identified without reference to its impact on day-to-day activities. Identification therefore requires evidence collected not only from schools but also from both parents and children.
- Questionnaires sent from schools to parents can reveal previously unknown child disabilities - as found for one or two children in approximately one third of schools in this study.
- Overall, 11% of returns indicated that parents had a child with a disability, with the most prevalent condition being asthma.
- Parents found the project's questionnaire tool to be usable and clear; and schools reported that processing the questionnaire data was straightforward.
- Almost half of the schools in the sample reported taking actions as a result of the data, noting that this new information provided more detail to that which is currently collected.



### The research

There is a lack of reliable information on disability. Schools in England are currently required to collect data on children with special educational needs, but this does not necessarily capture information about disabled children. In 2008 and 2010 a team of academics from the Universities of Bristol and Bath were commissioned to address this problem and to develop data collection tools for use with pupils and parents to help schools identify:

- Whether a child has a disability in line with the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) definition.
- The nature of the child's disability.

The tools developed by the research team included a questionnaire for parents; and a set of instruments for children and young people e.g. an online questionnaire on supports and barriers and a child interview schedule.

Both studies (2008 and 2010) were funded by the Department for Children Schools and Families (now the Department for Education).

## Research design

Seventy-four primary, secondary and special schools from 10 English Local Authorities participated in the initial 2008 study on children's disabilities. The focus was on the development of data collection tools. Twelve validation visits were conducted and teaching staff were interviewed. In 2010, a sample of 52 schools from 12 Local Authorities was recruited. The focus was on the usability of the data collection tools. 42% of parents who were contacted completed questionnaires and validation visits were made to 31 schools. Data collection during both studies included teacher questionnaires; individual and group interviews with school staff; observation of lessons; and interviews with parents. Because of time constraints, only 13 of the 52 schools in the 2010 study used the instruments developed for children and young people.

## Further information

Feiler, AC, Porter, J., Daniels, H., Gerogeson, J., Hacker, J. & Martin, S. (2012) 'The use and usefulness of a parent questionnaire to help schools identify disability', *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12, 1: 22-27.

Feiler, A. (2010) Paper presented at the International Conference on Special Needs (ISEC), Queen's University, Belfast, July, *Information from parents about disability and its impacts*.

Porter, J, Daniels, H, Feiler, AC & Georgeson, J. (2011) 'Collecting disability data from parents' *Research Papers in Education*, . 26, 4: 427-443.

## Website

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/research/pdes/>

## Contact

Dr Anthony Feiler, (Dr Jill Porter, University of Bath) [j.porter@bath.ac.uk](mailto:j.porter@bath.ac.uk), Prof Harry Daniels (University of Bath), Dr Jan Georgeson (University of Plymouth).

**Email:** [a.feiler@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:a.feiler@bristol.ac.uk) **Phone:** 0117 331 4498.