

Press-information.

June 2020

Playing together -

A special inclusion playground in Ballymena, Ireland

If people require a different or specially designed environment due to their limited abilities, their special "disability" must be precisely defined in order to find an appropriate and good answer to arising questions and tasks. What's decisive for the design of an inclusive play space is the degree of self-determination of the users – i.e. the question of the degree to which they are restricted and what is possible without help from others.

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Playground equipment can, of course, be designed to meet specific needs or the requirements of defined user groups, as is true in the case of special equipment for wheelchair users. However, it's desirable to have as little special equipment as possible in inclusive play spaces; for one thing, special equipment is often disproportionately expensive, and for

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another, it can only be used by a few, which may result in isolation rather than integration. Considerations such as these ultimately lead to focusing on the creation of playground equipment that can be used by as many different people as possible. Ideally, all users can get immersed in play on an equal footing while learning from another and helping each other.

An inclusive world of play, a special place, was created for the playground of the Castle Tower School in the Irish city of Ballymena in 2017. Students, parents and teachers work closely together at this inclusive school, which accepts children with physical and learning disabilities and specialises in their education. The defined pedagogical and educational goal is to ensure that the entire school community can gain self-confidence and acquire skills for life. The question of what it really means to have an inclusive society is always a key consideration. The staff at Castle Tower School are constantly striving to promote learning and at the same time develop respect and tolerance and prepare very special young people for life after school.

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Richter Spielgeräte, together with its English partner Nature Play and the school's teaching staff, have realised an exemplary project. The spacious school grounds feature numerous pieces of equipment that have a strong inclusive effect. In the Cradle Nest, for example, several children can lie together, and, if it is set in motion by playing children or caregivers, enjoy the gentle rocking back and forth in the nest. A small playhouse, a platform and an extra wide slide allow for sharing simple climbing and exercise experiences that are lots of fun. There is also plenty of room for role-playing games. The ground-level sound elements of the Wind Pipes do not only produce cheerful sounds when children run or jump back and forth, but also when being rolled over by a wheelchair.

There is also a special carousel for wheelchair users, which gives the children great pleasure when they experience rotational motion and feel the wind and centrifugal force. The children also share light-hearted moments on the Railway and the Swinging Horse. The Wobbly Sheep especially attracts mentally and emotionally handicapped children – the warm, soft poplar wood with its mossy surface and the gentle wobbling of the animal invite them to stroke, hug, ride and cuddle.

In this particular school in Ireland, children succeed in developing alternative skills through play, which can help to overcome some of the restrictions they may experience in their lives. And even though all this equipment is designed for special development needs, they can also be used by children who are not restricted in any way. You will see that it is merely the way they play that is different. Play is necessary and possible for all children – each in their own way but still together.



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