

Accessible and Inclusive Play Areas, York 2026

Summary of Key Findings from City of York Councils' city-wide survey

1. Top Priorities Identified by Respondents

Rank	Priority	Key Message
1.	More inclusive and adaptive play equipment	Children want to participate alongside peers
2.	Accessible pathways, surfacing and entrances	Access begins before children reach equipment
3.	Secure fencing and self-closing gates	Essential safety infrastructure
4.	Sensory and quiet-space provision	Supports regulation and communication
5.	Accessible toilets and Changing Places facilities	Significant infrastructure gap
6.	Better provision for older disabled children and young people	Existing facilities often unsuitable
7.	Accessible parking and drop-off facilities	Important part of accessibility journey

2. Barriers to Accessibility

Woodchip surfaces	Grass and muddy routes
Narrow gates	Steps
Uneven ground	Poor connection between play features

3. Demand for Inclusive Equipment is High

Respondents consistently requested:

Adaptive swings	High-backed swings	Accessible zip-wires
Ground level play	Sensory equipment	
Wheelchair accessible roundabouts	Inclusive spinning equipment	

4. Sensory Play is a Major Priority

Families frequently identified the importance of:

Musical equipment	Sensory gardens
Tactile play	Water and sand play
Nature-based sensory experiences	Quiet sensory spaces
Communication boards	BSL and Makaton signage

5. Older Children and Young People are Underserved

Swings too small	Narrow slides
Lack of age-appropriate equipment	Limited opportunities for teenagers and young adults with SEND

Age-Appropriate Provision Gap		
Feature	Younger Children	Young People up to 25
Swings	Good	Limited
Slides	Good	Too small
Climbing	Moderate	Poor
Social Space	Moderate	Poor
Challenge	Available	Significant gap

6. What Good Looks Like

Respondents consistently associated successful inclusive play areas with:

Level accessible routes	Wide gates	Inclusive equipment
Multiple swing types	Sensory opportunities	Quiet spaces
Secure fencing	Seating and shelter	Accessible toilets
Nearby parking	Social inclusion	

Key Findings

- Wheelchair users prioritised access infrastructure.
- Autistic children prioritised safety, swings and sensory opportunities.
- Older children experienced the largest participation gap.
- Disabled parents highlighted gate and pathway accessibility.

7. Strategic Design Principles

Play area improvements should be guided by the following principles:

- Accessible by default
- Inclusive rather than segregated
- Suitable for a wide range of disabilities
- Promote independent play
- Support social interaction
- Provide age-appropriate opportunities
- Consider disabled parents and carers
- Incorporate sensory experiences
- Provide supporting infrastructure
- Enable future adaptability