

Why is diversity and inclusion in the school library important?

Students need to see themselves reflected in their school community including the library. If they cannot see themselves represented in books or displays, if they are excluded from conversations or from participating in activities, they will feel invisible. The message they receive is that they are worthless and not important enough to be included. This impacts on their self worth and perceived value which, in turn, impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. It is also important to recognize that some aspects of diversity, such as ethnicity or LGBTQ+, have more impact than others; these students are often subjected to bullying which further exacerbates poor mental health conditions.

Making diversity visible within the school library raises the profile of these students and sends a message to the whole school community. Reading about diverse characters increases empathy and understanding, and can be a starting point for further conversations. Having access to a range of resources that reflects different ways of life can provide positivity and inspiration.

Useful links

BookTrust: Breaking new Ground—a celebration of British writers and illustrators of colour
[breaking-ground-brochure.pdf \(booktrust.org.uk\)](#)

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) - Reflecting Realities research
[Reflecting Realities Research, Our Research and Publications \(clpe.org.uk\)](#)

Empathy Lab—[HOME \(empathylab.uk\)](#)

Equality Act 2010— [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

IBBY—International Board on Books for Young People
<https://www.ibby.org>

Inclusive Minds—collective for people passionate about inclusion and diversity in children's books— [Inclusive Minds](#)

Letterbox Library—multicultural booksellers
[Multicultural Diversity Children's Books - Letterbox Library](#)

Pen & Inc—CILIP's guide to diversity in children's publishing
[Pen & Inc - 2 issues - CILIP: the library and information association](#)



Key Issues for School Librarians

Diversity and Inclusion in the School Library

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**CILIP School Libraries Group 2021
Key Issues Series No. 10**



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What is a diverse and inclusive school library?

According to the Cambridge English dictionary, the meaning of diversity is: *“the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people .”* A diverse and inclusive school library is one that supports the needs of all students, that creates a supportive and inclusive environment in which diversity is valued and respected, and where no-one feels excluded.

It is important for a school library to be relevant to the school community and support the academic, recreational and emotional needs of its students. Even schools situated in an area with few ethnic minority families will have a student body with diverse characteristics; and these students will eventually live and work within the wider society.

There are also legal requirements that have to be met. The Equality Act 2010, which lists nine protected characteristics, means that schools must provide equal access and support to all students and cannot discriminate against students with a listed characteristic. They cannot provide services or facilities that disadvantage students and one group cannot deny the needs of another group. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 states that schools have *“a duty to educate children with special educational needs in mainstream schools”* (section 316).

A good starting point in assessing the needs of the student body is to undertake an audit to determine its diversity. Factors to consider include: race, ethnicity, culture, sexual identity, gender, religion or belief, and disabilities (both visible and invisible). It is also important to include neurodiversity, special educational needs, and social class. Following this, carry out a stock audit and evaluation of the library environment measured against the needs of the students.

School library policies should ensure diversity and inclusion is considered within the library by stating that resources will be provided for the whole school community. These include the stock selection, donations and complaints policies. The latter is important when dealing with any challenges to resources.

What to consider when creating a diverse library

There are three aspects to take into account within the school library; the physical environment, the resources and the services provided.

- The layout of the library should be such that it is suitable for disabled students to use—are aisles wide enough for everyone to use them? Are there tables for wheelchair users? Is the shelving low enough for all students to reach resources?
- Is the signage and guidance suitable for those with visual disabilities or learning needs? - consider font, size and colour.
- Do you have a range of books by diverse authors and illustrators including those from ethnic minorities, who are LGBTQ+ or who are disabled?
- Do your books contain diverse characters? Are characters always depicted in stereotypical roles, for example, are female characters always in supporting roles or ethnic minority characters always depicted as being involved in crime?
- Do images and illustrations reflect diversity? Are a range of family situations shown? Do they depict a variety of cultures? Do they show positive role models?
- Do you have books featuring a wide range of cultures including festivals, art, traditions, poetry, myths, etc.
- Do you provide all students with details of possible support networks outside the school?
- Do you use relevant keywords when cataloguing books to ensure students can easily access resources?
- Do you consider diversity when creating displays, book lists and other promotional material?
- Are library activities and events always aimed at a small group of students with similar needs or are they varied, encompassing a wide range of interests and skills?