

Intro

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow led by Angela Bonomy, Director (Scotland & Northern Ireland).

Background

The Scottish Government have recognised the unacceptable attainment gap that exists for this group. We welcomed the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry in March 2015 into the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment which examined the varied factors contributing to this attainment gap and the challenges facing deaf education.

We also welcomed the historic passage of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. While the Act did not include explicit provisions around education, the bill proceedings saw robust debate about what is needed to improve deaf education.

Support for deaf learners in school

- Every deaf child is different, some may prefer using spoken language such as English, others may use British Sign Language and some may use a combination of spoken and sign language. The support required by deaf children therefore varies: around 80% of deaf children are educated in mainstream schools, another 10% attend mainstream schools with attached deaf resource bases and the remaining 10% attend special schools.¹ As such, alongside the universal offer of schools, deaf children may require Teachers of the Deaf, Educational Interpreters, Classroom Assistants, equipment such as radio aids and SoundField systems, Educational Audiologists, good acoustical conditions and trained practitioners in deaf and British Sign Language awareness.
- The eligibility criteria that is used by local authority hearing impairment services varies significantly. In some areas children with all levels of hearing loss are supported, while in some authorities no or minimal support is provided for learners with mild or unilateral hearing losses. Parents tell us they often have inadequate mechanisms through which to challenge this inconsistent provision of support.
- Models of education provision for deaf children was an issue highlighted in the Inquiry report, revealing mixed views about the presumption of mainstream education for learners with ASN this has been reiterated more recently through Enable Scotland's 'Included In the Main?' campaign. To achieve inclusion, it is critical that the needs of a deaf child within a mainstream school are effectively identified and addressed. On a national level there is a need to understand how best to achieve inclusion and how mainstream and specialist practitioners should work together, drawing on examples of best practice that we know exist across Scotland.

¹ CRIDE 2013

- Resource base provision can also be successful: this message was conveyed to us by deaf young people at our Deaf Learners Conference 2015, ran in partnership with Education Scotland. However, currently less than half of local authorities in Scotland have a resource base. In order for resource base provision to be a genuine option for more deaf learners more resource bases would need to be established with investment and restructure. It would also be critical that peripatetic services and schools are supported to promote positive outcomes for the deaf children they work with. We would welcome the opportunity to share effective practice in this respect through our professional members network as well as provide further information and resources around supporting the achievement of deaf children in educational settings. These resources include Quality Standards for deaf children and young people in both resource provision,² and specialist teaching and support services.³
- The Deaf Learners Conference in 2015 brought together over 70 deaf pupils to discuss their education experiences. Lack of deaf awareness from teachers was identified as a top challenge for deaf young people. A lack of deaf awareness also created challenges with supportive technology, with pupils describing experiences of teachers being unable to use FM systems/radio aids either consistently or at all. High quality deaf awareness training for mainstream teachers is fundamental to improving deaf pupils' education outcomes.
- We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is currently working on an Action Plan which will seek to address the committee's Inquiry recommendations. We hope this Action Plan will help reduce the inequity in support available for deaf young people across local authorities. We agreed with many of the recommendations outlined in the Inquiry report including:-
 - The routine inspection of peripatetic hearing impairment education services;
 - Improving data on the number and qualifications of Teachers of the Deaf and professionals working with deaf learners.
- Reduction in specialist supports available to mainstream schools is of real concern. We are becoming increasingly aware that services are being affected by restructure and proposed redesign and/or budget reduction. We strongly recommend that investment into these crucial services is maintained. However, where change does happen, we recommend authorities take a partnership approach with families and carry out comprehensive equality impact assessments and children's rights and wellbeing assessments.
- The new legislation under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 marks an opportunity to strengthen early years provision for deaf children and their families. This was not directly addressed within the Committee's Report, although this was discussed at some length during the Inquiry proceedings. We are currently calling for early years guidance to be developed and endorsed by the Scottish Government to support deaf children and their families at this crucial time.

**For more information contact:
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² NDCS Quality Standards: Resource Provision for deaf children and young people in mainstream schools

³ NDCS Quality Standards: Specialist teaching and support services