

## **PLANS FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS**

### **A consultation for young people**

#### **Response from a group of 10 deaf pupils at Llanishen High School, Cardiff**

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru facilitated a discussion on the Welsh Government's proposals for reform of additional learning needs with a group of 10 pupils at the Hearing Impaired Unit at Llanishen High School, Cardiff. The ages of the pupils ranged from 12 to 16.

The discussion focussed on the three goals outlined in the children and young people's consultation document

Goal 1 – a single law about how to support children and young people aged 0 – 25 who need help with learning

Goal 2 – One system of working together so that all services can step in early with the right support for children and young people who need help with learning.

Goal 3 – Clear information, advice and support which is fair to everyone if things go wrong or they don't like a decision

### **Summary of discussion**

#### **Goal 1:**

Much of the discussion focussed on the concept of person centred planning, which is central to the proposed reforms. At present most of the pupils are involved in deciding what kind of support they need, largely through discussions with their parents who then liaise with teachers at school.

There are occasions when pupils decide that the support that is provided in their IEP or statement is not what they want or need. One example cited was the use of radio aids in classrooms. A group of pupils were having problems with their radio aids and didn't want to wear them. One pupil said,

“I stopped wearing them. We were talking to some of the [hearing impaired] unit teachers and said that we didn't want to wear them. One of the reasons was the radio aids were making a crackly sound and it was interfering with us, we couldn't actually hear or understand what the other teacher was saying, so we found that a little bit annoying... What's the point of wearing radio aids when we can hear well without them?”

The pupils didn't stop wearing the radio aids immediately – a diary was kept for a while and several different options were tried. Eventually it was agreed that the pupils could manage well without a radio aid. The pupils felt happy that they were able to change elements of their IEP through negotiation with the teachers.

In another case concerning radio aids a pupil had been using a radio aid in primary school but had found it annoying and had stopped using it. When she moved to secondary school she had not been wearing a radio aid in primary school for some time. But as time progressed the pupil realised that she would benefit from a radio aid and she asked the staff at the Hearing Impaired Unit if she could start using one again. When asked how she felt being able to decide herself she said, "Brilliant, I felt more confident."

Another pupil was studying for GCSE and finding one of the subjects difficult and was keen to drop the subject in order to focus her attention on English. It was a long process of negotiation between the pupil, her parents and teachers but eventually the pupil was allowed to drop the difficult subject so she could have a better chance of getting good grades in English and be able to return to the sixth form. The pupil was very proud that she was able to assert her wishes and be at the centre of planning her education and learning needs.

One pupil had issues with her music exam when she was asked to listen to sounds and music, which she found difficult because of her hearing impairment. The pupil was confident enough to tell the teachers about the difficulty and had a choice to disapply if she wanted.

Llanishen High School has found an innovative method of ensuring that deaf pupils' learning needs are widely known across the school. A video was made with one deaf pupil explaining to teachers how his needs could be met.

"In the video I asked them to explain things to me in an easier way and to face me when speaking to me".

The school has also introduced a one page pupil profile document where pupils with learning needs can write about themselves, what they are good at, what they want teachers to know and what support they need. Most of the pupils in the group had completed this form and welcomed the opportunity to write the document.

"It was quite a good idea. Everybody needs to know what they want to make things go better in future"

When asked how they felt about the government wanting to put children and young people at the centre of planning their additional learning needs all the pupils liked the idea, but one pupil said,

"I don't believe it. They don't want to pay more, they haven't enough money."

## **Goal 2:**

The pupils welcomed the idea of all information about their needs being in one document, including health and social care needs.

“Yes it should go on the profile – so they know why they’re on medication”

All the pupils in the group had an opportunity to take part in their annual review, even if it was only for a short time. They felt that it was important for all people involved in providing support for them to be at these meetings

“In primary we had a speech and language therapist who helped us pronounce words. I have problems with s and k. They know what my problem is going to be. Because they record it there I’m happy for them to be there [at the annual review] so you can say what you need”

One pupil in the group was about to leave Llanishen High School for college. When talking about the transition he said,

“I asked the teacher [at the Hearing Impaired Unit] to write a form about me to get the support. I talked to the college about the support I need. I was quite nervous and a bit worried about what will happen in the future. I think a better system is needed for that”

## **Goal 3:**

When talking about what happens when things go wrong, or they are not happy with the support they get, at the moment the pupils depended on speaking to their parents who then come to the school to sort out the issues.

The pupils who had had problems with the radio aids were happy that the issue had been sorted quickly in the school.

The main issue for the deaf pupils at Llanishen High School was the lack of deaf awareness amongst staff and pupils. In May 2014 the deaf pupils created their own morning assembly to coincide with Deaf Awareness Week highlighting what was difficult for them in school and what people could do to make their lives better. A poster competition was held with hearing pupils designing a deaf awareness poster. The winning poster is attached and will be put in each classroom in Llanishen High School.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

The teachers and pupils found the children and young people’s consultation document very difficult to understand. These pupils do not have a learning disability; they have a hearing impairment which means they need additional support in class. The group would have preferred a document that was easily understood and written in a truly child-friendly way.

NDCS Cymru also has concerns about the consultation exercise with children and young people in schools and colleges and whether deaf children and young people were involved in the process and their views and opinions heard.

NDCS Cymru would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government on the next phase of the consultation on the Draft Code of Practice to ensure that the documents and process are truly child-friendly and that deaf children and young people are properly involved.

## **About Us**

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of deaf children and their families. In referring to "deaf", we refer to all levels of hearing loss, including mild, moderate, severe, profound, and temporary hearing loss.

There are around 3,000 deaf children in Wales. 90% of deaf children are born to hearing families with little or no prior experience of deafness.

Deafness is a low incidence SEN / ALN and disability. This means that mainstream schools and local authorities are likely to be less familiar with the needs of deaf children. Around 90% of deaf children attend mainstream schools where, in many cases, they may be the only deaf child in that school. As a result, deaf children are particularly reliant on specialist support services for deaf children, which employ Teachers of the Deaf and other specialist staff, in order to ensure that their families and teachers get the advice and support they need.

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