

## Independent Review of Assessment and the National Curriculum Wales Call for Evidence

### Response from National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru.

**Q1a. Besides qualifications, what are the three most important things young people should gain as a result of their time in school?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

NDCS Cymru is responding from a deaf perspective but believes the 3 identified areas will have relevance to all children and young people.

1. An ability to communicate confidently with a range of people including friends, family and in the wider community. Despite the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme's existence in Wales since 2003 (leading to the earlier identification of deafness) and despite great advances in hearing technology, too many deaf children are still starting school with poorly developed language skills and some leave school never having caught up. The curriculum must be responsive to the varying needs of deaf children.
2. Good social, psychological and emotional development (i.e. children having confidence in themselves, positive self-esteem and resilience) so that young deaf people can contribute positively to their community on an equal basis with their peers. It is cited that over 40% of deaf children experience mental health problems compared to 25% of hearing children – *Mental Health and Deafness: Towards Equity and Access, Department of health (2005)*.
3. An enjoyment of learning that leads on to a desire for and enjoyment in life-long learning. This may be fostered by success in a range of areas in school both within and beyond the curriculum, but will also be facilitated by all staff and parents having high expectations of what deaf children can achieve and never regarding deafness as a reason for lower attainment.

**Q1b. Do you think these things will remain important in ten years?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

Yes. NDCS Cymru believes that these 3 areas are fundamental to the well-being of deaf children and young people and so will always be important elements in deaf children and young people becoming fulfilled, independent adults who make useful and valuable contributions to their community and wider society.

**Q2a. What are the three best things about education in Wales?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

1. As highlighted in response to question 1 above, communication is crucial to the educational and emotional development of deaf children and young people, therefore NDCS Cymru welcomes the inclusion of oracy in the Literacy and Numeracy framework across all phases / stages as such an emphasis is crucial for deaf children and young people.
2. Children in Wales have the opportunity to be bilingual from an early age giving them access to two languages and two cultures. The benefits of being bilingual are widely documented with studies showing that the bilingual brain can have better attention and task-switching capacities than the monolingual brain, thanks to its developed ability to inhibit one language while using another. In addition, bilingualism has positive effects at both ends of the age spectrum: bilingual children as young as seven months can better adjust to environmental changes, while in older age bilingual people can experience less cognitive decline. It is of vital importance that deaf children, whatever their family language, can take advantage of this unique opportunity in Wales to become bilingual in Welsh and English, if that is the choice of the parents. In order for that to happen deaf children must have the support of fully qualified Teachers of the Deaf and other support staff who can work in Welsh as well as in English. Every year, the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE - of which NDCS is a member) conducts surveys of local authorities across Wales and the UK about the number of deaf children and young people they support and the level of service that they provide. The most recent survey for 2013 indicates some concern about the lack of support for deaf children through the medium of Welsh.

*“There is some concern about the lack of Welsh language provision, particularly in the area of specialist support staff. Although the situation with Welsh language support from Teachers of the Deaf is slightly better it is still a matter of concern that 44% of services cannot provide peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf support. There are also difficulties in many areas in recruiting, including securing supply cover. 11 services of the 14 which replied could not provide teaching assistant and communication support worker peripatetic support in Welsh and in resource provision no service could provide both teaching assistant and communication support in Welsh.” CRIDE Survey Wales 2013.*

[http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional\\_support/national\\_data/uk\\_education\\_.html](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/uk_education_.html)

**Q2b. What are the three main things that we need to change to improve education in Wales? How would you change them?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

1. From the point of view of deaf children NDCS Cymru would wish to see all teaching and support staff in schools having deaf awareness training. 80% of all school children will experience an episode of “glue ear” by the time they are 10 years old. (*Surgical Management of Otitis Media with Effusion in Children. Clinical Guideline, National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (2008)*) Glue ear can cause temporary deafness which can last from a few days to several months and can also recur. This temporary deafness can have a serious impact on a child’s learning and development. Deaf awareness training for teachers and support staff would enable them to identify signs of deafness and equip them with the knowledge of how to address any issues arising from temporary deafness. The vast majority of

deaf pupils attend mainstream schools. For deaf children to be fully included in all school activities it would also be beneficial for their hearing peers to have an awareness of the issues that face deaf children in their day to day lives.

2. Deaf children should have sufficient access to fully qualified specialist Teachers of the Deaf (ToD). The caseloads for ToDs vary enormously in size from area to area. In recent years more children with glue ear (see 1 above) have been given hearing aids whilst waiting for treatment, such as an operation to insert grommets. This means that the workload of ToDs has increased as they have to train parents, teachers and support staff in how to look after hearing aids. There is also concern, outlined in CRIDE reports (see Q2a above) that the ToD workforce is ageing and several areas of Wales are experiencing problems in recruitment.

3. One of the most significant barriers to progress in a deaf child's education is poor acoustics in schools, nurseries and colleges. Noisy, echoing school buildings create a barrier to learning for *all* children, but present a particular barrier for deaf children. Although building regulations set minimum acoustic standards for new school buildings and major refurbishments, these standards are often ignored. Following calls from NDCS Cymru, the Welsh Government now requires that, as a condition of funding, schools built through its 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme demonstrate compliance with the standards. But this requirement only affects schools built through this particular funding programme. We wish to see improved acoustic standards in ALL schools, colleges and nurseries.

All children require a good listening environment. To learn, they need to hear the teacher. This obvious statement is supported by a body of academic research. (e.g. *Dockrell, JE & Shield, BM (2006) Acoustical Barriers in Classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom, British Educational Research Journal 32 (3), pp 509–525.*) Children with other additional learning needs, such as autism, also benefit from a good acoustic environment, as do children who are not learning through their first language. Research also points to the link between good pupil behaviour and good school acoustics. (*UK Government Department for Education and Skills, The Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline, chaired by Sir Alan Steer (2005). Learning Behaviour, page 77*)

NDCS Cymru published a report on Acoustics in Schools in 2012 which can be found here:

[http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about\\_us/campaign\\_with\\_us/wales/sounds\\_good/index.html](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about_us/campaign_with_us/wales/sounds_good/index.html)

**Q3a. How much freedom should schools be given to decide for themselves what they should teach?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

NDCS Cymru believes it is helpful, especially from the perspective of deaf children and young people, for all schools to have a framework within which to plan as this will generally be of a developmental, incremental nature and so will ensure progression (a layering on) of knowledge of skills. Deaf children, in particular, require this approach as, generally, they are unable to benefit from the 'incidental' learning in the environment (e.g. from radio, television and 'snatched' conversations) that is available to their hearing peers. Such frameworks ensure that all necessary pre-learning has taken place, ensuring more equity of access for deaf children. In addition, it is also helpful to have a common framework when children transfer to new schools either during a phase/stage or at a normal transition point.

However, NDCS believes that it is appropriate for schools to have the freedom on **how to teach** within such frameworks.

**Q3b. Is it important that all children in Wales learn the same thing as each other until the age of 16?**

Yes X

No

NDCS Cymru believes that if children are taught the same curriculum it ensures equal opportunities and inclusion for all children (including deaf children) as it removes the post code lottery effect. However, this requires teaching staff to be alert to the individual needs of all their pupils and to differentiate between those children who may need to progress through the curriculum at a slower rate than their peers and those children who should be able to access the curriculum at the appropriate level but require some focussed teaching in order to do so. A significant number of deaf children may be in the latter category due to delays in their language and communication skills.

Deafness is not a learning disability but too many deaf children are not achieving the same educational attainment levels as their hearing peers. NDCS Cymru has been calculating the relative gap in educational attainment for several years. It is encouraging to see that the gap is narrowing, especially at Foundation Phase, but it is still a grave concern that there is a 27% relative gap in attainment in the number achieving A\*-C in English/Welsh, Maths and Science at GCSE.

[http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about\\_us/campaign\\_with\\_us/wales/close\\_the\\_gap/attainment\\_data\\_2013.html](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about_us/campaign_with_us/wales/close_the_gap/attainment_data_2013.html))

Deaf children often require support to access the curriculum, but are capable of achieving on a par with their peers. It is important to ensure that these pupils are given the necessary support not just to progress, but ultimately to reach their full potential. Care should be taken not to lower expectations with regard to the progression and attainment of deaf pupils by assuming that deaf pupils cannot achieve the same age-related expectations as their hearing peers.

**Q4a. In Wales, children aged 3 to 7 study broad Areas of Learning in the Foundation Phase. This is followed by a focus on individual subjects for the rest of their primary and secondary education. Do you think this is the right way to arrange our curriculum?**

Yes X

No

**Q4b. If not, what alternative models would you suggest?**

**Q5. Should any subjects be added to or removed from the curriculum?**

Yes

No

Please give a reason(s) for your answer

**Q6. Children come from different backgrounds and have different talents and abilities. How can we make sure that their education helps all of them to achieve the best they can?**

Deafness is not a learning disability but many deaf children will need varying degrees support to ensure equality of access the curriculum. This support is provided by Teachers of the Deaf, Communication Support Workers, Learning Support Assistants, Speech and Language Therapists, Audiologists and others. Deafness is also a low incidence disability therefore there might only be one or two deaf children in a school. The general school workforce also needs to be aware of the challenges deaf pupils face at various stages in their education. There are around 3,000 deaf children in Wales, but 80% of **all** children will experience some kind of temporary deafness before they are 10 years old. The deafness might last from a few days to several months and also might recur. Temporary hearing loss can have a significant impact on a child's learning and speech and language development, therefore early identification is crucial. It is important to ensure that deaf pupils, whether with permanent or temporary hearing loss, are given the necessary support not just to progress, but ultimately to reach their full potential.

A matter of concern to NDCS Cymru is the lack of specialist support for deaf children and young people who access the curriculum using British Sign Language (BSL). CRIDE reports (see above) document the skill levels of ToDs and support staff in BSL and we are concerned that many have a low level of understanding of BSL. In the 2013 CRIDE report for Wales it is reported that only 7% of ToDs and 5% of other support staff have Level 3 or above in BSL.

**Q7. What information do you need to know about children's educational achievement as they progress through school?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

NDCS Cymru would suggest the following information would be required:

- The **current level of attainment** and whether or not this is at a level appropriate for his / her age and ability
- Whether or not there is **evidence of progress** from the previous report and, if so, whether or not it is at a similar pace or greater
- If there is / has been an attainment gap – whether or not it is getting smaller or bigger or remaining at the same level
- A description of areas of strength and identification of any challenging areas
- The child's / young person's level of application and level of enjoyment in the different areas of the curriculum.
- How the child interacts with peers and adults in class and small group situations.
- Any modifications, particular resources or technology used to aid learning.

**Q8. Do you feel we currently have the right balance in schools between assessment and teaching/learning?** Please give a reason(s) for your answer

## **Personal details**

**To help our analysis please let us know who completed this response form.**

Contact details (Optional):

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This response is from (name): National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

## **An Organisation**

**Name and role of the person completing the questionnaire**

Elin Wyn, Policy & Campaigns Advisor, NDCS Cymru.

## **C. An Organisation**

**Name of organisation**

National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

**Which of the following best describes your organisation?**

Third sector

## **Additional Information**

**Please use this space to record any other ideas/comments you would like to make about the issues raised by this review.**

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for every deaf child.

There are around 3,000 deaf children in Wales. Over 90% of deaf children attend mainstream schools where they may be the only deaf child in attendance. Many deaf children therefore rely on support, direct or indirect, from specialist Teachers of the Deaf. Teachers of the Deaf have a wide-ranging role which includes advising mainstream teachers on how to adapt their strategies to ensure that deaf children are able to access the curriculum.

In this response, we confine our comments to those questions directly relevant to children and young people who are deaf. By deafness we mean all types levels of hearing loss from mild to profound, including temporary hearing loss.