



Meeting the needs of deaf children as schools re-open

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Introduction

The UK Governments have set out different plans and ambitions for when and how children will return to school and colleges. We know that professionals will share our ambition that deaf children should return with the same opportunity to achieve as other children.

Professionals will be carrying out risk assessments to determine how their own setting will re-open. This risk assessment may raise questions over how any specialist support that deaf children receive can be provided in a way that minimises any potential risk to public health. This briefing sets out a number of questions that settings will want to consider, along with some possible mitigating actions, to inform any such risk assessment they may be carrying out.

Whilst it is not our role to give public health advice, it is our expectation that there will be a consideration around the risks to individual deaf children if they do not receive specialist support as usual, and that such risks are balanced against any public health concerns. We believe that any reduction in specialist support should be a last resort, given that it may fundamentally undermine how deaf children are able to access learning in the classroom. It may also have a significant impact on the mental health of deaf children if they are unable to understand their teachers or peers whilst at school.

This briefing has been developed by the National Deaf Children's Society with support from the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP). It focuses on support for deaf children in mainstream schools. However, many of the principles and suggestions may also be helpful for deaf children in other types of education settings.

Principles

Later in this briefing, we set out some specific questions that schools and colleges may want to consider. We do not provide any definitive answers, as this will depend on the individual context. However, there are a number of principles that we believe should be taken into account in making any decisions.

1. There should be no blanket policies (for example, a ban on all external visitors). Instead, we believe that any policies should take into account the individual needs of deaf children, and, as set out earlier, balance the risks to public health against the risks to individual children not getting the support they need.
2. Teachers of the Deaf should be involved in any decisions on how support will be provided.
3. Parents and deaf children should also be involved in any such decisions and kept fully informed. Parents and deaf children may have their own suggestions for how support could be provided, which should be taken seriously.
4. There should be a can-do approach. We encourage professionals to continue to be creative, pragmatic and flexible in ensuring that individual deaf children receive the support they need, as much as possible.

5. Any reduction in specialist support should be a last-resort and with a full awareness of the impact that it will have on individual deaf children. Putting deaf children in a situation where they cannot understand their teachers or their peers should be seen as both unacceptable and untenable. Where a decision has been made there is no other alternative but to temporarily reduce some specialist support, we expect there to be a clear audit trail in place that sets out what mitigating actions are being put into place. Action planning should be SMART. We also expect there to be a plan in place to ensure support is provided to enable deaf children catch up. This might involve additional catch-up support or one-to-one tuition that is tailored to their individual needs.

Key issues and risks

The table below sets out some specific issues and risks, key questions to explore in considering this risk and possible mitigating action. It is not intended to be exhaustive and it is hoped it will prompt discussion and collaboration between schools, Teachers of the Deaf, deaf young people and families. As set out earlier, we encourage professionals to be creative, pragmatic and flexible in ensuring that individual deaf children receive the support they need, as much as possible.

Issue/risk	Key issues and questions	Possible mitigating actions
<p>Reduced access to specialist support where this is provided by external specialist visiting a school site (e.g. a peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf)</p>	<p>What is the impact to the individual child if the Teacher of the Deaf or any other external specialist is not able to provide face-to-face support to an individual child and/or school staff?</p> <p>Is there a risk that reduced access will impede the child's ability to access learning?</p> <p>Note that, in England and Wales, government guidance explicitly states that peripatetic teachers can move between schoolsⁱ.</p>	<p>To carry out any meetings in the school in a well-ventilated room that can be easily cleaned afterwards. It should be noted that meetings outside may be problematic for deaf children unless the level of background noise is very low.</p> <p>To ask visitors to confirm they will follow social distancing requirements and provide records for any test and trace efforts that may be needed.</p> <p>To conduct meetings, including one-to-ones with pupils, virtually. This assumes that the child or school staff will be provided with the necessary IT equipment and time to be able to do this effectively. Any safeguarding policies should be followed but should be proportionate to the situation and balanced against the risk to individual children if they do not receive the specialist support they need. Safeguarding precautions that could be followed might include, for example, ensuring children are in a 'shared space' for any virtual meetings.</p> <p>Where social distancing isn't possible as they enter the school, asking Teachers of the Deaf or other external specialist staff to wear a face covering as they enter and move through the school. The face covering should be removed when engaging with the deaf child.</p>

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<p>Reduced access to specialist equipment that needs to be passed between individuals (such as radio aids)</p>	<p>What is the impact to the child, both in terms of access to education and their emotional wellbeing, if they are not able to hear their teacher clearly?</p> <p>Note that if there are any changes to the classroom acoustics and/or in light of social distancing requirements, the use of radio aids is likely to become more, not less, important, including among children who may not have previously used radio aids.</p>	<p>Emphasising usual hygiene requirements – i.e. regular handwashing.</p> <p>Providing hand gel with a radio aid so that a teacher can easily clean their hands each time they handle the radio aid.</p> <p>Providing wipes so that a radio aid can be cleaned before and after it is used. Note that this must be done carefully, following guidance provided by manufacturers, to avoid damage to the device. You should seek advice and support from your local specialist education service for deaf children on this. In addition, the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) have also provided guidanceⁱⁱ.</p> <p>Where practical, arranging for an adult, usually the teacher, to take responsibility for handling the radio aid and holding it towards another person if/when others are speaking.</p> <p>Some radio aids have a conference or ‘pointing’ functionality enabled. For older children, asking them to take responsibility for positioning any radio aids that have this functionality device in a way that it can pick up the teacher’s voice clearly, as well as peers in any group discussions, without the teacher having to handle it may be an option. However:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This relies on the teacher staying close to where the radio aid is • It also assumes that the deaf young person is a confident user of the radio aid who can be relied on to move the radio aid to where it needs to be. <p>Reminding teachers of the importance to revoice or paraphrase what other pupils have said in any classroom discussions, or allowing deaf pupils time to turn around and face the pupil speaking.</p>

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<p>Trouble-shooting technology issues</p>	<p>For younger children, what steps can be taken within the school to ensure that staff are able to troubleshoot any issues with the child's hearing technology (where they have already been trained to do so)?</p> <p>What is the impact to the child, both in terms of access to education and their emotional wellbeing, if their hearing technology stops working whilst at school?</p>	<p>Asking parents to carry out basic checks before the school day. The child's Teacher of the Deaf or audiologist should be able to provide advice on what this should involve for each child.</p> <p>Depending on their age, encouraging children to be as independent as possible in using their hearing technology.</p> <p>Where it is necessary for school staff to troubleshoot any issues during the day, ensuring that the usual hygiene requirements are in place – i.e. regular handwashing before and after handling the equipment.</p> <p>Providing parents with information on how they can trouble-shoot any basic issues with hearing technology if issues become apparent at home.</p>

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<p>Reduced access to specialist support within the school (e.g. teaching assistants or communication support workers)</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that some teaching assistants may be asked to lead small groups or 'bubbles' of children, under teacher supervision</p> <p>What will the impact be on a deaf child if they do not receive the usual support from a teaching assistant or communication support worker? What is the risk that reduction in this support will result in the child not being able to understand or access learning?</p> <p>In England, guidance explicitly limits the redeployment of teaching assistants for children with SENDⁱⁱⁱ</p>	<p>Our view is that, where teaching assistants or communication support workers have a specific role in directly supporting individual deaf children, they should not be redeployed to other roles. In many cases, the support from a teaching assistant or communication support worker may be listed in a child's statement or plan. Steps should be taken to ensure that any teaching assistant or communication support worker with responsibility for ensuring a particular deaf child can participate in school is in the same 'bubble' as the child.</p> <p>Where a teaching assistant has a more generic role that doesn't involve providing direct individual support to an individual deaf child, depending on the nature of the task and individual needs, considering if it's most beneficial to the child if they are in the same group as their usual teacher or teaching assistant. This might involve grouping children who most benefit from teaching assistant support in the same bubble.</p> <p>Additional flexibility with the curriculum to ensure targeted catch-up support or individual one-to-one tuition is in place.</p>

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<p>Specialist support for children in resource provisions</p>	<p>Children in resource provisions traditionally receive specialist support in a range of different ways, between the mainstream classroom and in the resource provision. Support in the resource provision may be provided to deaf children of different age groups.</p> <p>In England, guidance allows for the intermixing of children of different age groups for the purpose of specialist support^{iv}.</p>	<p>Schools with resource provisions will need to think carefully about how this specialist support can continue to be provided whilst adhering to social distancing principles as much as possible.</p> <p>Ensuring social distancing and hygiene principles are followed when deaf children enter the resource provision classroom.</p> <p>Considering timetabling of lessons to minimise changes and intermixing, where possible.</p>

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<p>Temporary learning spaces and changes to classroom layouts</p>	<p>We understand that, in some areas, consideration is being given to deliver teaching and learning in temporary learning spaces to create additional room, or to delivering lessons outside.</p> <p>We also know that in many areas classroom layouts are being changed so that all pupils face forward. This may make it harder for deaf pupils to lipread or understand their peers.</p> <p>What will the acoustic conditions be like in any temporary learning spaces used? Portakabins and village halls, for example, are known to be 'echoey' and difficult listening environments</p>	<p>Identifying which rooms have optimal learning conditions and ensuring that groups or bubbles with deaf children are prioritised for such rooms.</p> <p>Ensuring that children's listening, language and communication needs are taken into account when considering seating position, potential sources of background noise and how information is delivered and presented in any temporary learning spaces.</p> <p>Ensuring that radio aids are used effectively.</p> <p>Reminding teachers of the importance to revoice or paraphrase what other pupils have said in any classroom discussions, or allowing deaf pupils time to turn around and face the pupil speaking.</p> <p>Seeking advice on the acoustics of any temporary learning space from a Teacher of the Deaf or education audiologists. It should be noted that portable soundfield systems will not work well in any temporary learning spaces that already have poor acoustics and may make the situation worse.</p>

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<p>Accessibility of remote learning</p>	<p>A blended learning approach may be in place in some areas, where children are onsite for part of the time and then at home for the other. In addition, there is also a possibility that some schools may be forced to close again temporarily in the event of any local lockdowns.</p> <p>What steps will be taken to ensure that such materials are both suitably differentiated for deaf children and also accessible to them?</p> <p>In England, guidance sets out the need to provide additional support for children with SEND^v for any remote learning.</p>	<p>Seeking advice from Teachers of the Deaf on differentiation of home learning materials, drawing on advice from UK Governments, the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf and the National Deaf Children’s Society.</p> <p>Close liaison with families, as appropriate, so that they are able to support their child’s learning as much as possible.</p> <p>Arranging for specialist support to be provided remotely (e.g. from a communication support worker or Teacher of the Deaf). Steps should be taken to ensure that both parties have robust IT equipment in place to allow this and any other necessary equipment, for example headphones that fit over hearing aids. Any safeguarding policies should be followed but should be proportionate to the situation and balanced against the risk to individual children if they do not receive the specialist support they need. Safeguarding precautions that could be followed might include, for example, ensuring children are in a ‘shared space’ for any virtual meetings.</p> <p>Ensuring that children can take radio aids home to use to access any remote learning opportunities. Ensuring that deaf children have any necessarily additional equipment (for example, leads to connect the radio aid to a laptop). Asking families and deaf young people to sign an agreement to ensure that radio aids are brought back to school.</p> <p>Where signposting to online learning resources or using school produced videos, checking that these are accessible to deaf children. At the minimum, we would expect subtitles to be provided and, where deaf children use sign language, for there to be an interpreted version.</p> <p>Where live virtual lessons are taking place, funding additional communication support (such as remote speech-to-text reporter) and/or ensuring that existing support (such as a BSL interpreter or communication support worker) can be easily seen. Alternatively, some platforms have speech-recognition technology enabled. These are not always 100% accurate, however, so ongoing feedback from the student will be needed. The choice of platform should be driven by the young person as much as possible and practical.</p>

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<p>One-to-one tuition and catch up programmes</p>	<p>Many deaf children will be eligible for formal tuition and catch-up programmes of the kind that is delivered to all children.</p> <p>What steps will be taken to ensure that the person delivering tuition or catch-up is deaf aware and that any such intervention is tailored to the needs of deaf children?</p>	<p>Providing tutors with deaf awareness information and training, as well as clear advice on the impact that deafness has on individual children’s learning. Advice from a Teacher of the Deaf should be sought to support this.</p> <p>School catch up programmes and interventions need to be accessible to deaf children. Advice from a Teacher of the Deaf should be sought to support this.</p>
<p>Emotional wellbeing of deaf children</p>	<p>Deaf children are already known to be at risk of lower emotional wellbeing. Lockdown is likely to have had a negative impact on many children’s emotional wellbeing. Deaf children may have felt particularly isolated and lonely during this time</p> <p>Is there a need to carry out an assessment and/or to amend the child’s statement or plan?</p>	<p>Establish peer support programme for deaf children, as appropriate and in line with social distancing requirements</p> <p>Where classes are broken up into smaller groups or ‘bubbles’, ensuring that a deaf child is in a group as one or two friends who the child can easily understand or who can provide peer support.</p> <p>Ensuring that any pastoral/support programmes or interventions take into account the needs of deaf children. Similarly, ensuring that any school counsellors are deaf aware and are able to meet the needs of deaf children. Some interventions such as ‘virtual circle time’ may be inaccessible to deaf children and risk causing distress. Advice from the child’s Teacher of the Deaf should be sought.</p> <p>Considering if the school or service needs to make a referral to further support, including from deaf CAMHS (England) or any nominated contacts for mental health support for deaf children in your area.</p>

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<p>Face masks and coverings</p>	<p>The use of face masks and coverings is not recommended for use in schools by any of the UK Governments, except in limited circumstances. However, it is not proscribed.</p> <p>The use of face masks or coverings would have a very significant impact on the ability of deaf children to communicate, to the extent that attendance at school or college may be redundant.</p>	<p>If a decision was made for teachers to wear face masks in education, we would recommend that a meeting take place between the education setting, the family and a Teacher of the Deaf to identify the risks to deaf children’s access to learning and emotional wellbeing, and to identify alternative arrangements (such as one-to-one tuition)</p> <p>Where face masks or coverings are used by other staff on site (such as catering staff), there should be specific consideration of mitigating actions that can be taken to ensure that deaf children are able to understand (for example, giving their dinner order separately). Staff should be provided with deaf awareness advice. Clear face masks should ideally be worn, if possible.</p>

Statutory plans and reasonable/best endeavours – a quick note

Under the Coronavirus Act, local authorities in England and Northern Ireland are able to instead use reasonable or best endeavours if coronavirus prevents them from being able to meet the requirements set out in a child's Education, Health and Care plan or statement. The Coronavirus Act allows local authorities in Wales to do the same. However, at the time of writing, these powers are not in force.

These are or will be time-limited powers. At the time of writing, in England, the suspension of EHC plans is expected to end at the end of July.

There are a number of key considerations to bear in mind if a decision is made to exercise reasonable or best endeavours.

- Education settings and local authorities must look at each case individually to see what could be reasonably provided if what is normally provided or required is no longer possible. Specific levels of need or vulnerability should be taken into account. There should be no 'blanket' policies or wholesale cancellation of support, plans or statements across an area.
- Education settings and local authorities should work with families as much as possible to agree any changes. Families may have their own suggestions and ideas for how things could be done differently.
- If what is normally provided or required is no longer possible, families should be given the reasons for this in writing, along with an explanation of what reasonable or best endeavours the local authority have used to ensure that the required support is still, as much as possible, provided, along with details of what will be provided instead.
- A consideration of how to respond to the individual needs of children in creative and flexible ways, as many education settings and local authorities already are. This includes drawing on the wider skills of other staff or other families as appropriate.
- Whether any reasonable or best endeavours themselves are likely to be accessible to deaf children and young people. It's important to recognise that the needs of deaf children will vary – what's accessible to one child may not be accessible to another.
- The new laws do not give local authorities the power to amend the contents of a plan or statement. This means that, once any suspension is lifted, a child's plan/statement will have the same legal status that it did before. This is the case even if a parent accepted that changes were needed in the short-term, in response to the spread of coronavirus.

More information

The National Deaf Children's Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)^{vi} provides more information on coronavirus and support for deaf children and is regularly updated, in response to any changes in government guidance and/or feedback from professionals.

You can also contact the National Deaf Children's Society [helpline](#)^{vii} if you would like further information, advice or support. You can also [refer families](#)^{viii} to them if they would benefit from their support.

A range of coronavirus-related resources are also available through [BATOD](#)^{ix} and the [National Sensory Impairment Partnership](#)^x.

Endnotes

ⁱ England: “Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and/or other temporary staff can move between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils with SEND should provide interventions as usual.” ...

“Where it is necessary to use supply staff and to welcome visitors to the school such as peripatetic teachers, those individuals will be expected to comply with the school’s arrangements for managing and minimising risk, including taking particular care to maintain distance from other staff and pupils.”

www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools

Wales: “Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and/or other temporary staff can move between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for learners with SEN should provide interventions as usual. Schools should consider how to manage other visitors to the site, such as contractors and ensure site guidance on social/physical distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival. Where visits can happen outside of school hours, they should. A record should be kept of all visitors.”

<https://gov.wales/new-guidance-support-september-schools-return>

ⁱⁱ www.batod.org.uk/resource/uk-assistive-listening-technology-working-group-and-batod-joint-advice/

ⁱⁱⁱ “Schools should ensure that appropriate support is made available for pupils with SEND, for example by deploying teaching assistants and enabling specialist staff from both within and outside the school to work with pupils in different classes or year groups.” ...

“Teaching assistants may also be deployed to lead groups or cover lessons, under the direction and supervision of a qualified, or nominated, teacher (under the Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations 2012 for maintained schools and non-maintained special schools and in accordance with the freedoms provided under the funding agreement for academies). **Any redeployments should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND.**” (bold text added for emphasis)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools

^{iv} “Both the approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance are not ‘all-or-nothing’ options, and will still bring benefits even if implemented partially. Some schools may keep children in their class groups for the majority of the classroom time, but also allow mixing into wider groups for specialist teaching, wraparound care and transport, or for boarding pupils in one group residentially and another during the school day ... Endeavouring to keep these groups at least partially separate and minimising contacts between children will still offer public health benefits as it reduces the network of possible direct transmission.”

www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools

^v “In developing these contingency plans, we expect schools to ... recognise that younger pupils and some pupils with SEND may not be able to access remote education without adult support, and so schools should work with families to deliver a broad and ambitious curriculum.”

www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools

^{vi} www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/

^{vii} www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline

^{viii} www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/referral-form-for-professionals/

^{ix} www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/

^x www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources