



# Parent/Carer Advisory Panel Survey 22 July 2020

## Introduction

Following on from the presentation of the Operational guidance and the Learning guidance, and reflecting on your experience this survey explores your views and offers you a further opportunity to feedback your thoughts on the return of learners to school in the Autumn, including any potential implications for you as parents or carers.

This information will help the Welsh Government in communicating with parents more broadly and in supporting schools.

All information will be treated anonymously and will only be used to inform the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19.

The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Many thanks in advance for your contribution.

## Filtering & Demographics

Why do we need this information? The following questions will help us to explore how views and perceptions vary across different educational settings and parts of the country. All information will be treated anonymously.

### 1. Did you attend the Parent and Carer Advisory Panel meeting on Wednesday?

Yes

No

### 2. In what role are you responding to this survey? Select more than one if relevant:

Parent or carer

Parent governor

Organisation, please specify: National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

Other, please specify:  Click or tap here to enter text.

### 3. Which type of school does your child attend? Select more than one if relevant:

Primary School – Welsh Medium

Primary School – English Medium

Secondary School – Welsh Medium

Secondary School – English Medium

Specialist School



3-18 category – Welsh Medium

3-18 category – English Medium

Other, please specify  All relevant to our membership (aged 0-25)

**4. In which county does your school reside?**

Isle of Anglesey

Gwynedd

Conwy

Denbighshire

Flintshire

Wrexham

Powys

Ceredigion

Pembrokeshire

Carmarthenshire

Swansea

Neath Port Talbot

Bridgend

Vale of Glamorgan

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Merthyr Tydfil

Cardiff

Caerphilly

Blaenau Gwent

Torfaen

Monmouthshire

Newport

We cover all of Wales.



## Communicating with parents

### 5. As parents, what are the key concerns for you about learners returning to school in autumn?

We are aware that there are mixed views among parents around the return to school in September and there are some concerns that are specific to families with deaf learners. Key points the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru wishes to raise in this regard include:

- During lockdown many of our learners were not accessing/were accessing reduced levels of the specialist support they would usually receive. We are also aware that families may have faced accessibility difficulties with remote online learning. Welsh Government statistics demonstrate significant attainment gaps between deaf learners and their hearing peers. We are concerned that recent events may have exacerbated this. As such, we are keen to secure prioritised investment in catch-up provision for these vulnerable learners.
- New measures introduced in schools to reduce contact need careful consideration to ensure the needs of deaf learners (and indeed the needs of ALN learners more generally) are considered. For example, consideration of contact groups must consider learner access to support staff or resource bases. The National Deaf Children's Society has produced a checklist of considerations for schools in planning their operations and set ups for September while considering the needs of deaf learners. We would urge that the Welsh Government also looks to include these imperative considerations within its guidance to schools. Our guidance is available at [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-final.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-final.pdf) (in English) and in Welsh at <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6020/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-ndcs-guidance-final-welsh.pdf>.
- It will be imperative that schools are clearly urged to involve specialists like Teachers of the Deaf when planning how schools will operate in September.
- Many of our learners attend schools outside of their catchment area in order to access specialist provision such as hearing impaired resource bases. Ensuring that, where needed, these learners are still provided with travel to school is essential if they are to be at no disadvantage to their peers. Furthermore, there will need to be careful consideration of communication arrangements while using transport. The National Deaf Children's Society understands, for example, that taxi drivers are required to wear face coverings (although regulations allow for coverings to be removed for communication purposes). Face coverings present significant communication barriers for deaf children and young people. It will be imperative that local authorities work with transport providers to highlight where learners travelling with the provider have communication needs and to advise accordingly. The National Deaf Children's Society has created a short video on communication and facemasks at <https://www.facebook.com/112180125505122/videos/3087775494640238>. For more information, visit <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/the-impact-of-face-masks-on-deaf-children/>
- We are mindful that teachers may have contamination concerns around using equipment such as radio aids. This equipment is fundamental for many of our



learners – and even more so in the context of social distancing. We are keen to ensure that teaching staff are aware that this equipment can be safely wiped down. However, this must be done carefully to avoid damage to the radio aid and so it will be importance for staff have access to clear guidance on this. More information on this is available at: <https://www.batod.org.uk/resource/uk-assistive-listening-technology-working-group-and-batod-joint-advice/>.

- The National Deaf Children’s Society is mindful that lockdown has presented many emotional challenges for the whole population. For deaf children and young people, there may have been other unique challenges (for example, learners who use BSL/sign language at school may have faced increased feelings of isolation if family members are not signers). We are keen to ensure that measures to support emotional wellbeing during these difficult times take account of the needs of deaf learners and are accessible to them.
- Due to lockdown, deaf children and young people moving into a new education setting this September will not have benefitted from the support they would usually have done in making this transition. For example, opportunities to visit the new school, meet key staff, as well as establish and prepare for communication and technology needs. It will be important to ensure arrangements are discussed before learners start back in September and that new settings are linking in with specialists such as teachers of the deaf ahead of the new term. Schools should be encouraged to reach out to these learners over the summer.
- Many of our learners and teaching staff rely significantly on support from peripatetic specialists. We are aware that many schools across the country had been anxious and hesitant to permit visiting staff on site due to coronavirus. It is, therefore, very reassuring to see that the Welsh Government recently issued guidance on this point, encouraging schools to permit visiting staff with certain precautions in place. We urge that this guidance is repeated as is necessary to ensure that this important message reaches schools across the country.
- We understand that the Welsh Government is preparing for a second lockdown, should the pandemic develop further. We appreciate that very many professionals worked hard to deliver as best as they could for deaf children in extremely difficult circumstances this year. However, in preparing for a second lockdown, steps can be taken to ensure certain issues are not repeated. In particular, we would be keen to ensure that local authorities and schools are instructed to allow children to take radio aids (where they are used) home as these can be extremely beneficial to the learning environment. We are also aware that during lockdown there was a postcode lottery as to whether children were able to access specialist support remotely. This was largely due to authorities holding differing views and policies around the safeguarding and remote video calls. The National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru believes that wherever possible, support should be delivered on a face to face basis. However, under lockdown where this is not possible, video support can be a viable alternative. While there are of course safeguarding measures associated with this, there are precautions that can be taken and the risk of not providing any support to the child should also be considered.
- It is imperative to ensure that home learning is accessible with visual content and subtitles provided as is appropriate. For virtual lessons, it is important to consider communication support as is appropriate to the individual’s needs – for example,



BSL interpretation/Communication Support Worker online, booking speech to text reporting.

- Many professionals have been required to work in alternative ways due to the restrictions of the pandemic and these efforts must be recognised and applauded. However, we are keen to ensure that, as the need for remote services is no longer driven by public health concerns, these alternative ways of providing support should not become the norm for other reasons, such as cost saving. It is imperative that, wherever public health allows, deaf children and young people are able to return to receiving the type of support they require.
- Given the economic uncertainty at this time, members across the UK are also anxious about the future of vital support services. Specialist support from professionals such as Teachers of the Deaf and Speech and Language Therapy play a crucial role for many deaf children and young people.

## **6. As parents, what are the main benefits for learners in returning to schools in autumn?**

Many of our members have been concerned about their child's education falling behind – particularly where they have not been able to access specialist support during lockdown. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru urges the Welsh Government to place a particular emphasis on supporting ALN and vulnerable learners in returning to school. We would also welcome more information on the recent investments announced by the Minister and how funding within this will be attributed to supporting these learners. It will be important that Teachers of the Deaf are involved and mobilised in any such initiatives if deaf children are to benefit.

Deafness can often be associated with other disabilities and more complex needs. As such (and indeed for other reasons), some families of deaf learners may be taking a more cautious approach to returning to school. Where this is the case, it is fundamental that schools and specialist support services reach out to these learners and support them as is appropriate to their circumstances.

## **7. What information do parents need?**

It will be important to ensure that families of children with ALN are provided with clear and appropriate information and assurances on how their child's specific needs will be met in the context of school changes in September. For example, this may include: how contact groupings will take account of requirements for support; trouble shooting and monitoring hearing technology, arrangement for visits from specialists, information on how 'catch up' interventions will benefit their child.

Schools must be encouraged to have an open line of communication with families so that they can raise any concerns about how new arrangements at the school might impact on their child's individual needs.



Where local authorities provide transport for families in order to access school, clear communication needs to be given on how this will be provided in September and new measures that are put in place must be discussed with families so that they can highlight access concerns (for example the need for a taxi driver to be aware of the barriers presented in communication when wearing a face mask).

Information provided must meet with any communication needs parents have.

### **8. In your view what would be the best way of communicating with parents?**

It is important that clear messaging is received from all levels. Clear messaging from Welsh Government and local authorities is imperative in providing consistency and avoiding postcode lotteries. Information directly from schools is also important so that parents understand local arrangements and how the set up in their own school will work for their child.

Where learners access specialist support, it is important that they receive clear information on this too, so that they are not left wondering how arrangements meet their child's individual needs. Open dialogue between schools, specialist professionals and parents is crucial to ensure new ways of operating in school can meet their child's needs.

### **9. How do we reach parents during the summer?**

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

### **10. How would parents/carers like to be kept informed and receive information on arrangements for schools reopening in the Autumn?**

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

### **11. How can we reach less engaged parents – do you have examples of what works?**

Ensuring that any communication needs that parents may have are met is crucial.

### **12. What is your understanding of the term 'blended learning'?**



The National Deaf Children's Society understands that the term "blended learning" has been used to describe a combination of learning in school and remotely from home.

We understand that, while the intention is for schools to open fully in September, depending on how the pandemic develops, the Welsh Government may consider returning to a blended approach to learning. We would urge that, if this approach is taken, clear guidance and consideration will be needed to ensure learners with ALN, including deaf learners are supported appropriately. For example, as raised earlier in this response, it will be important to ensure that key technology such as radio aids is able to move between school and home; to ensure that teachers work with specialists like Teachers of the Deaf to tailor work set for home appropriately, and to ensure access to support for learners from specialist professionals as is appropriate to the context.

Within the blended approach it is imperative that materials provided take account of accessibility needs, such as subtitles. Virtual lessons should also allow for communication needs that a learner may have, for example, BSL interpretation/the communication support worker online/ Speech to text reporting.

In setting remote learning, teachers should worth and consult with specialists such as Teachers of the Deaf.

### **13. What worked well and where do improvements need to be considered, if a blended learning approach is needed in the future?**

As outlined elsewhere in this response, we appreciate that under lockdown very many professionals worked hard to provide support to families in very difficult circumstances. It is reassuring if the Welsh Government is planning ahead in case of this eventuality reoccurring. Guidance on this approach to troll out examples of good practice and to avoid repeating certain pitfalls would be most welcome should there be a return to the blended approach.

#### **Examples of good practice included:**

- Schools working with Teachers of the Deaf to ensure resources sent home are accessible
- Teachers of the Deaf checking in with families and advising as appropriate
- Teachers of the Deaf providing "drive by" assistance in the form of repairs/dropping of materials
- Local authorities recognising the importance of allowing radio aid equipment to be allowed home where children use them. Some areas do not allow this for insurance reasons. The National Deaf Children's Society is aware of examples where local authorities have been able to obtain a bulk and economically effective insurance policy to cover radio aids for their region. If this is to be a barrier, local authorities should look to proactively address this issue. Pandemic aside, it is always helpful for a radio aid to assist with learning outside of the school context.



**Things that could be improved for the future:**

- Open dialogue with families about what their child's support needs are and how they can be reasonably addressed.
- Support from a Teacher of the Deaf is most effective/necessary in a face to face context. And wherever possible, this should be recognised and enabled (putting any necessary precautions in place). However, where there is no other way to access specialist support other than remotely, it is imperative that professionals feel able to provide this. In the recent school terms, local authorities took differing approaches to video calls and whether or not to permit them given safeguarding concerns. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru takes safeguarding concerns very seriously, but believes there are mitigating measures that can be put in place. There are also risks associated with not providing access to specialist support and this needs to be acknowledged. Clear guidance from the Welsh Government on this point would, in the event of a future lockdown, instil professionals with the confidence to provide remote video support.
- It will be important that wherever hub provision is being provided, advice is sought from any specialist professionals involved in children's education who may be attending the hub.
- Decisions around how education and learning is delivered needs to be considered against a risk assessment that takes into account the needs of ALN learners. This includes careful consideration of how contact groups and learning spaces are arranged and of any redeployment of specialist staff.

The National Deaf Children's Society very much welcomes the opportunity to have contributed to this consultation. We would be happy to discuss any of these matters further with the Welsh Government. Please contact Debbie Thomas, Head of Policy and Influencing for Wales at the National Deaf Children's Society at [Debbie.Thomas@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:Debbie.Thomas@ndcs.org.uk).

**Many thanks for taking the time to complete the survey.**

**Please send your completed survey to [Caryl.TudorJones@gov.wales](mailto:Caryl.TudorJones@gov.wales)**