

# Impact of coronavirus on education support for deaf children

National Deaf Children's Society briefing (May 2021)



## Summary

We ran a third education survey of parents of deaf children in April/May 2021 which received responses from over 450 parents in England. This followed two surveys we ran during autumn term last year.

Parents continued to report barriers to their deaf child's learning through reduced specialist support and the use of face masks/coverings in education. Parents also highlighted the need for additional one-to-one or group support, with support and involvement from a Teacher of the Deaf, to help them 'catch-up' from the past year.

## Key findings

### Teacher of the Deaf support

Where a Teacher of the Deaf would normally visit the school/college to provide support to the child and/or to teachers, 42% of parents reported that this was not currently happening. This has fallen from 50% in December 2020 but still remains high.

Of the parents that reported that visits were not taking place in spring 2021, 38% reported that support was being provided remotely instead.

It was clear from the comments that there were significant variations in the specialist support provided. Many parents reported that their child's Teacher of the Deaf has been very supportive during the pandemic and that there was good communication between the Teacher of the Deaf and the school/college. At the same time, others reported that their child has not received a visit from their Teacher of the Deaf since the start of the pandemic, that there was little contact with the family, or that support had been drastically limited to 'technical support' only.

### Face masks/coverings in classrooms

The following figures provide a snapshot of the position from mid-April to early May – before guidance changed on the 17<sup>th</sup> May to no longer recommend that face coverings be worn in classrooms in secondary schools and colleges.

- Overall, 56% of parents reported that some or all teachers were wearing face masks/coverings in classrooms. In colleges and secondary schools, this figure stood at 87% and 72%. The figure for primary schools was 38%, even though guidance has never recommended the use of face coverings in primary school classrooms.
- Parents indicated that, where face masks/coverings were being worn in the classroom, teachers were:
  - removing their face mask or covering when communicating with a deaf child (19%)
  - wearing clear face masks (26%)
  - wearing face shields/visors (34%)
  - none of the above (27%).
- Parents reported that face masks/coverings were having a negative impact on their child's learning (71%), ability to understand their teacher (77%), ability to communicate with their peers (62%) and on their emotional wellbeing (66%).

Some parents reported that they felt they had to be proactive in reminding the school/college of the difficulties that face masks and coverings can cause, challenging them when necessary. One parent said that they bought clear face masks for their child's teachers themselves.

### **Resource bases for deaf children**

Where their child was in a resource base, 29% reported that their child was not receiving the same support in class or from the resource base as before. Reasons for not receiving the same support included:

- less support available in small groups or one-to-one sessions, or one-to-one support not being provided throughout the whole day as before
- impact of bubble restrictions
- fewer speech and language therapy sessions.

Given that most children in a resource base will have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, the above indicates that statutory provision is not being provided as required in several cases.

### **Support within schools during the national lockdown**

A number of deaf children continued to attend school during the last national lockdown (beginning January 2021). Of these, 19% of parents felt that their child's progress was better than usual, 36% felt it was the same whilst 45% felt their child was making worse progress than usual.

Where support was better than usual, this was attributed to smaller class sizes or more one-to-one support. Parents spoke about how fewer students in small groups or 'bubbles' resulted in a quieter listening environment with less distractions and disruption. Parents also reported that their children were receiving more, and better focused, attention from teachers and/or teaching support staff. They also felt that children were better able to learn at their own pace and that a simplified curriculum and slower teaching pace worked well. Some parents report additional benefits of better social interaction with peers and increased confidence in a smaller group.

### **Home learning**

In the comments, other parents spoke of how home learning had benefited their child. Reasons for this included:

- quieter learning environment, with fewer distractions. Better able to concentrate
- less 'listening fatigue'. The availability of captions was seen as positive in some cases
- able to work at their own pace and independently (e.g. to pause and rewind lessons themselves if needed), with more time to complete set work
- able to lipread teachers (as teachers not wearing face masks during virtual lessons).

It should be noted that experiences varied hugely, with other parents reporting challenges around home learning around inaccessible content or reduced classroom support.

### **Catch-up support**

18% of parents reported that their child was receiving some kind of catch-up or tuition support. This has risen only slightly from 14% in the November/December survey.

When asked what catch-up support was being provided, most common answers included additional one-to-one or small group support, additional lessons after school or during the weekend, and/or additional lessons focusing on English and Maths.

Of these receiving additional catch-up support in spring 2021, 54% felt that positive steps had been taken to make sure this support was appropriate and accessible to their deaf child.

We asked parents for their thoughts on what catch-up support, in an ideal world, they would like to see introduced for their child. The most common answer by far was around increased one-to-one or small group support for deaf children during school hours. Many indicated that they wished this to be provided by a Teacher of the Deaf.

Other common answers included:

- increased focus on social, emotional and mental health, and enrichment activities
- catch up sessions outside of school day
- increased deaf awareness
- increased (or restored) access to speech and language therapy
- more targeted work/materials to use at home
- additional tuition for English and Maths
- additional time to complete education.

### **Radio aids**

Of children who would normally use a radio aid in the classroom, 11% reported that teachers were not currently using the radio aid with the child.

### **Attendance**

95% of parents reported that their child was currently attending school or college at the time the survey was completed. Reasons given for not attending included:

- child is shielding
- family is concerned about the risk to the child or family's health
- child is normally home-educated.

### **Concluding thoughts**

#### **Specialist support**

Department for Education guidance has been clear that peripatetic specialist should be allowed to provide support as usual in schools and colleges. However, our casework indicates that, even since this survey closed, that this is still not always happening. This remains an ongoing frustration. We urge the Government to continue to monitor the provision of specialist support within schools and colleges.

#### **Face masks/coverings**

With the change in guidance, we hope to see a fall in the number of face masks/coverings being worn in education. However, we anticipate that they will still be used in some areas. As such, we will continue to call on schools and colleges to ensure that all necessary reasonable adjustments are being made. We

welcome the recent changes to government guidance, which now set out some key adjustments to consider, whilst also highlighting the potential benefits of transparent face coverings.

### **Catch-up support**

Parents of deaf children support the provision of additional one-to-one or small group support. They also highlighted the need to involve Teachers of the Deaf in this. At the same time, our findings indicate that many deaf children have yet to benefit from any kind of catch-up support.

Most deaf children (around 80%) are educated in mainstream settings. The rationale for providing additional catch-up funding for children with SEND in special schools but not to other children with SEND in mainstream schools is not clear to us. In addition, as far as we can tell, very little funding for catch-up support has reached local authority specialist education services, either from the Department or via individual schools. We believe that action is needed by the Department for Education to ensure catch-up support for deaf young people is sufficient and targeted, with appropriate input from Teachers of the Deaf.