



4 February 2021

Dear colleague

## **Meeting the needs of deaf children and young people during spring term 2021**

This is an open letter to you from three leading organisations supporting deaf children and young people in the UK: the National Deaf Children's Society, the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP).

By deaf child, we mean any child or young person with any level of hearing loss. With over 1,400 deaf children across Northern Ireland, of which over 80% attend mainstream schools<sup>i</sup>, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support for deaf students over the past year.

The current situation continues to impose a number of huge challenges. This letter provides a reminder of some key points on the needs of deaf children for you to consider.

### **Remote education**

A National Deaf Children's Society [checklist](#)<sup>ii</sup> provides practical advice on how you can ensure that any remote teaching is deaf-friendly. As you will see, there are a range of simple steps that can be taken that will likely benefit other children and young people in their class.

We urge schools and colleges to consider the accessibility of any online education resources that children and young people are being directed to. A number of providers – including Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize – have taken some steps in this area to, for example, ensure content is subtitled. The National Deaf Children's Society have also produced [guidelines on accessible content](#)<sup>iii</sup> which may also be helpful.

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf from the Education Authority Sensory Service will be able to provide further advice and support.

If deaf children and young people are struggling to access remote education, schools and colleges should give consideration to allowing them to come into school/college as a 'vulnerable' learner. This may be helpful in terms of enabling access to specialist support (for example, a teaching assistant, communication support worker or Teacher of the Deaf) where needed.

### **Peripatetic support for deaf students**

Many deaf children and young people rely on specialist support from a range of professionals, including peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf, speech and language therapists, teaching assistants and communication support workers. We expect schools and colleges to do everything they can to arrange and facilitate access to this specialist support. This applies whether deaf children and young people are being educated at school/college or remotely.

It is important to be clear that government guidance<sup>iv</sup> in Northern Ireland does not give any specific guidance around peripatetic (visiting) Teachers of the Deaf support to schools and colleges. This gives schools and colleges discretion in this area.

Our advice is that schools and colleges should **not** impose any blanket approaches in this area. Instead, schools and colleges should consider individual risks to deaf children and young people if support is not provided face-to-face.

Whilst support to deaf children and young people can sometimes be provided remotely, this is not always the most optimal approach. Reasons why a face-to-face visit may be more effective include:

- the child or young person finds it difficult to access sound or see lip patterns/signs clearly on a screen
- the need to provide coaching or demonstrate or model good practice which cannot be done effectively remotely
- when fitting or checking equipment, such as radio aids.

We acknowledge that there may be times when it is necessary for specialist support to be provided remotely to deaf children and young people instead. We expect that schools and colleges will do everything possible to facilitate this.

### **Face masks and coverings**

Teaching is based on being able to communicate clearly to students and clear communication is especially important for deaf children and young people. The use of face masks or coverings would have a very significant impact on the ability of deaf children and young people to communicate, to the extent that attendance at school or college may become redundant.

At the time of writing, it is compulsory for post-primary pupils to wear face coverings in school and at drop off/pick up areas, unless an exemption applies. For younger children, face coverings are still not recommended in routine classroom settings but the Government has said that it is “acceptable” for staff and pupils to use face coverings during the routine school day if they wish.

It is not our role to provide or comment on public health issues. We ask that, if face masks or coverings are being worn in your education setting, reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that deaf children and young people can continue to access learning.

These reasonable adjustments may include, for example, wearing clear face masks or shields, increased use of radio aids technology, additional deaf awareness training. Schools and colleges should also be aware of the exemption in place that allows face masks and coverings to be temporarily removed if needed to communicate with someone who relies on lipreading.

To identify which reasonable adjustments will be most effective, it will be important that a discussion takes place with the student, family and a Teacher of the Deaf. [Detailed guidance](#)<sup>v</sup> on mitigating the impact of face coverings on the education of deaf children (in all settings) was issued by the Department as an annex to new guidance for special schools.

More information is available in the National Deaf Children’s Society [position paper](#)<sup>vi</sup> on face masks and coverings in education.

### **Catch up support**

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf will have a key role to play in providing advice on and support for any catch-up programmes or tuition that may be in place for any individual deaf children and young people. This will be especially important if catch-up support or tuition is being provided by someone who has not worked with a deaf child before.

## Exams and assessments

It will be important that any grades awarded to deaf young people fairly reflect their abilities and achievements. Although the detail of how grades will be awarded is still being established by the CCEA, we ask that:

- appropriate access arrangements are in place for any 'mini-exams' that may be used and/or that the accessibility of any previous mock exams are taken into account before determining a grade
- advice from a Teacher of the Deaf (or another appropriate specialist) is sought on the evidence used for by schools and colleges for grading.

Failing to take these steps could provide grounds for appeal for any deaf young person who is not satisfied with their eventual grade.

## More information

Our guidance provides further suggestions on mitigating steps on the above and other areas that would enable you to ensure that deaf children and young people can continue to access education.

- [Guidance for schools](#)<sup>vii</sup>
- [Guidance for colleges](#)<sup>viii</sup>

The National Deaf Children's Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)<sup>ix</sup> also 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. A range of coronavirus-related resources are also available through [BATOD](#)<sup>x</sup> and the [NatSIP](#)<sup>xi</sup>.

As well as contacting the [Sensory Service in Northern Ireland](#)<sup>xii</sup>, you can also contact the National Deaf Children's Society [helpline](#)<sup>xiii</sup> if you would like further information, advice or support.

We thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Ferguson, Policy and Campaigns Officer (Northern Ireland), National Deaf Children's Society

Steph Halder, President, BATOD

Lindsey Rousseau, Facilitator, NatSIP

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- <sup>i</sup> Including children in mainstream schools with resource provisions. Source: [www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE) or [www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/](http://www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/).
- <sup>iii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/deaf-friendly-remote-learning-a-checklist-for-teachers/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/deaf-friendly-remote-learning-a-checklist-for-teachers/)
- <sup>iii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/how-to-make-your-resources-accessible-to-deaf-children-and-young-people/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/how-to-make-your-resources-accessible-to-deaf-children-and-young-people/)
- <sup>iv</sup> [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-school-and-educational-settings-northern-ireland](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-school-and-educational-settings-northern-ireland)
- <sup>v</sup> [www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/supplementary-guidance-for-special-schools-%2820-january-2021%29.pdf](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/supplementary-guidance-for-special-schools-%2820-january-2021%29.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6209/face-covering-in-education-position-paper.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6209/face-covering-in-education-position-paper.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021docx.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021docx.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/)
- <sup>x</sup> [www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/](http://www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/)
- <sup>xi</sup> [www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources](http://www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources)
- <sup>xii</sup> [www.eani.org.uk/services/pupil-support-services/sensory-service](http://www.eani.org.uk/services/pupil-support-services/sensory-service)
- <sup>xiii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline)