**Virtual School Sensory Support**

**Face Coverings and Communication**

This advice aims to support children and young people who are deaf with communication whilst we are a mask wearing society.

**Face coverings are a challenge for children and young people who are deaf as they can:**

* Obstruct access to lip-reading and gesture
* Distort speech
* Make speech unintelligible

Whilst we are concerned about the communication challenges that face coverings present for children and young people who are deaf; we also respect that people may choose, or be advised, to wear them for their own protection or for the protection of others.

DfE guidance states that it is a reasonable adjustment for teachers not to wear a mask if teaching a deaf child, which we urge you to consider if your staff, SMT and the family are in agreement. However, we also recognise that in some circumstances staff may be reticent to remove their mask.

When wearing face coverings please be aware that your voice will be distorted and muffled. When wearing a face covering, a talker needs to take extra care in their speech production (regardless of the level of deafness of the listener). ‘Extra care’ includes a range of factors detailed below:

1. Ensure children and young people who are deaf are as close to the person speaking as possible (following socially distancing guidelines where appropriate).
2. Face children and young people who are deaf when speaking to them.
3. Reduce the background noise as much as possible.
4. Make sure you have the attention of the children and young people who are deaf before beginning to speak.
5. Talk at a normal pace and volume; do not shout, over-emphasise or exaggerate words.
6. Ensure only one person speaks at a time.
7. Allow time for processing information.
8. Check comprehension with open questions.
9. Repeat / rephrase remarks if not understood.
10. Ensure any hearing devices are being worn and are working.
11. If feasible, consider live captioning, so that what you say is displayed on a device.
12. If the child or young person has a radio aid system, please make full use of this.

Please be also be mindful of the social implications. Talk to any children and young people who are deaf about what they feel would support them whilst mask wearing is required / prevalent.

 *For further support and guidance please contact your Teacher of the Deaf.*