



15 June 2021

Dear colleague

## **Meeting the needs of deaf students in schools and colleges during summer 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).

As previously, we wish to take the opportunity to highlight steps that should be taken to ensure that deaf students continue to receive the support they need, despite ongoing coronavirus concerns and challenges. We are especially mindful of the growing concerns about new variants of coronavirus and how these might impact on existing plans to ease coronavirus restrictions.

By deaf student, we mean any child or young person with any level of hearing loss. With over 3,600 deaf children across Scotland, of which over 90% attend mainstream settings<sup>i</sup>, we would like to again take this opportunity to thank you for your support for deaf students over the past year.

### **Face coverings**

As you will appreciate, the use of face coverings has a significant impact on deaf students in terms of access to learning but also their social and emotional wellbeing. We acknowledge the importance of public health and appreciate the steps that professionals have taken to minimise the impact of face coverings on deaf students.

This is an area where guidance can change quickly. However, at the time of writing, government guidance states face coverings should be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools in classrooms, in communal areas and when moving about the school. In colleges, they should be worn in communal areas and where social distancing of two metres is not possible.

Schools have been told to specifically and carefully consider the impact of using face coverings with deaf children and should explore reasonable adjustments when these present a barrier to learning. Schools can also consider the use of transparent or see-through face coverings.

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 peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf.

More information is available in the National Deaf Children's Society [position paper](#)<sup>ii</sup> on face masks and coverings in education. Separately, the National Deaf Children's [blog](#)<sup>iii</sup> provides information on commercial providers of clear face masks.

### **Specialist support**

Many deaf students 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. We hope the expansion of the vaccination programme and widespread use of lateral tests has removed any outstanding barriers in this area.

It is important to be clear that government guidance<sup>iv</sup> does not prohibit visits from peripatetic (visiting) Teachers of the Deaf or speech and language therapists to schools and colleges. Instead, it states that "movement between schools should be kept to a minimum, until further notice". This gives schools and colleges some 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.

### **Exams and assessments**

It will be important that any grades awarded to deaf students as part of the Alternative Certification Model fairly reflect their abilities and achievements. 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 by schools and colleges for grading.

Failing to take these steps may provide grounds for an appeal by a deaf student.

### **Catch up support**

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf and sensory support services will continue to 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 students. 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.

### **More information**

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

- [Guidance for schools](#)<sup>v</sup>
- [Guidance for colleges](#)<sup>vi</sup>

The National Deaf Children's Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)<sup>vii</sup> also provides more information on coronavirus and support for deaf students 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>viii</sup> and the [NatSIP](#)<sup>ix</sup>.

As well as contacting your local specialist education service for deaf children, you can also contact the National Deaf Children's Society [helpline](#)<sup>x</sup> if you would like further information, advice or support.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Lois Drake, Policy and Campaigns Officer (Scotland), National Deaf Children's Society

Martine Monksfield, 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>ii</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>iii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/clear-face-masks-and-face-coverings-where-to-buy-and-what-to-look-for/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/clear-face-masks-and-face-coverings-where-to-buy-and-what-to-look-for/)

<sup>iv</sup> [www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/)

<sup>v</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>vi</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021.docx.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021.docx.pdf)

<sup>vii</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>viii</sup> [www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/](http://www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/)

<sup>ix</sup> [www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources](http://www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources)

<sup>x</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline)