



24 May 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 1,400 deaf children across Northern Ireland, of which over 80% attend mainstream settingsⁱ, 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, it is compulsory for post primary pupils to wear face coverings in school and at drop off/pick up areas unless an exemption applies.

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.

[Detailed guidance](#)ⁱⁱ on mitigating the impact of face coverings on the education of deaf children was issued by the Department of Education as an annex to revised guidance for schools.

More information is available in the National Deaf Children's Society [position paper](#)ⁱⁱⁱ on face masks and coverings in education. Separately, the National Deaf Children's [blog](#)^{iv} 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.

It is important to be clear that government guidance^v 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.

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

Exams and assessments

It will be important that any grades awarded to deaf students fairly reflect their abilities and achievements. CCEA is clear^{vi} that *“here students have agreed access arrangements or reasonable adjustments (for example a reader or scribe), the centre must make every effort to ensure that these arrangements are in place when assessments are being taken”*. As such, we ask that:

- appropriate access arrangements are in place if any CCEA assessment resources or past paper questions and mark schemes are used and 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 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](#)^{vii}
- [Guidance for colleges](#)^{viii}

The National Deaf Children's Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)^{ix} 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](#)^x and the [NatSIP](#)^{xi}.

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

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

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

Martine Monksfield, President, BATOD

Lindsey Rousseau, Facilitator, NatSIP

ⁱ Including children in mainstream schools with resource provisions. Source: www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE or www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/.

ⁱⁱ www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Coronavirus%20Guidance%20for%20Schools%20and%20Educational%20Settings%20-%20March%202021.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6209/face-covering-in-education-position-paper.pdf

^{iv} www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/clear-face-masks-and-face-coverings-where-to-buy-and-what-to-look-for/

^v www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-school-and-educational-settings-northern-ireland

^{vi} <https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/General/GCSE%2C%20AS%20and%20A%20Level%20Awarding%20Summer%202021%20Alternative%20Arrangements%20-%20Process%20for%20Heads%20of%20Centre%20%28Revised%20Version%202.0%29.pdf>

^{vii} www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021.pdf

^{viii} www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021.docx.pdf

^{ix} www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/

^x www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/

^{xi} www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources

^{xii} www.eani.org.uk/services/pupil-support-services/sensory-service

^{xiii} www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline