



3 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 around 2,500 deaf children and young people across Wales, of which nearly 90% 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, [government guidance](#)ⁱⁱ states that face coverings should be worn by pupils over the age of 11 on school transport. They should also be worn anywhere on the school estate, by students and staff, where social distancing is not possible, apart from at mealtimes and outside. Otherwise, Welsh Government guidance does not require their use in the classroom, although individuals may choose to wear them.

As the Welsh Government states: *“the impact of wearing a face covering for a deaf learner or learners with any level of hearing loss should be carefully considered, as communication for many deaf people relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly.”*

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 students 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.

The Welsh Government has confirmed to the National Deaf Children's Society that where local authorities (or schools) have purchased clear facemasks the local authority finance team can recoup costs for this from the Welsh Government local government hardship fund.

More information on face masks and coverings in education is available in the National Deaf Children's Society [position paper](#)ⁱⁱⁱ. 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. We hope the expansion of the vaccination programme and widespread use of lateral tests has removed any outstanding barriers in this area.

[Welsh Government guidance](#)^v has been clear that peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf should be allowed entry into schools and colleges:

“Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and/or other temporary staff can move between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain social distance from other staff and learners wherever possible. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for learners with SEN should provide interventions as usual and in accordance with the setting's risk assessment. Schools should:

- *consider how to manage other visitors to the site, such as contractors*
- *ensure that site guidance on social/physical distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival*
- *ensure that signage is used and prominently displayed on the premises*

Where possible, visits should happen outside of school hours. A record should be kept of all visitors as this may be needed at a future point to assist the Welsh Government's TTP strategy.”

Exams and assessments

It will be important that any grades awarded to deaf young people 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 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](#)^{vi} (English)
- [Guidance for schools](#)^{vii} (Welsh)
- [Guidance for colleges](#)^{viii} (English)
- [Guidance for colleges](#)^{ix} (Welsh)

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

As well as contacting your local specialist education service for deaf children, 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,

Debbie Thomas, Head of Policy and Influencing (Wales), National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

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/. (webpages in English)

ⁱⁱ <https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-html> (English) or <https://llyw.cymru/canllawiau-gweithredol-i-ysgolion-lleoliadau-html> (Welsh)

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

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

^v <https://gov.wales/guidance-learning-schools-and-settings-coronavirus> (English) or <https://llyw.cymru/canllawiau-gweithredol-i-ysgolion-lleoliadau-html> (Welsh)

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

^{vii} www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6020/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021-welsh.pdf (Welsh)

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

^{ix} www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6054/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021-welsh.pdf (Welsh)

^x www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/ (webpage in English)

^{xi} www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/ (webpage in English)

^{xii} www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources (webpage in English)

^{xiii} www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline (webpage in English) (Welsh)