



Paper to local authorities on SEND reform implementation

Summary

This paper sets out our position on the implementation of the SEND reforms and what these mean for children and young people with sensory impairment. It reminds local authorities that existing legal duties towards children and young people with SEND remain unchanged and that the reforms should be used as an opportunity to strengthen, rather than reduce, access to the specialist support that children and young people with sensory impairment need to achieve positive outcomes.

By sensory impairment, we mean deaf children with any level of hearing loss, children with vision impairment or children with multi-sensory impairment/deafblindness. Sensory impairment should be seen as separate and distinct from issues around sensory integration or sensory processing disorders.

Background

As local authorities consider the implementation of the SEND reform, we are aware that many are already making changes to local SEND provision and support. It is encouraging to see that many services are already placing the needs of children and young people with sensory impairment at the heart of their planning and delivery. We would like to highlight the importance of building on this good practice and ensuring that the needs of these children and young people remain a central consideration in the ongoing development of services.

Sensory impairment is a low-incidence need, and every child has unique strengths and experiences. While the impact of any kind of sensory impairment on learning, communication, language development, social inclusion and emotional wellbeing varies from child to child, children with sensory impairment thrive when they receive the right support at the right time. This is why ongoing, personalised support remains so important. Specialist teachers play a vital role in working alongside children, families and education settings to tailor support to individual needs. This support helps children and young people with sensory impairment to develop confidence, overcome barriers and achieve positive outcomes.

Our position

The British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD), the National Deaf Children's Society and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) welcome the opportunities to create a more inclusive and accessible education system for all children and young people with SEND. We are encouraged by several aspects of the proposed reforms, which have the potential to improve outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment. In particular, initiatives such as the Experts at Hand funding may help increase workforce capacity, place a greater focus on inclusive teaching approaches and raise awareness of sensory impairment across the education workforce, further strengthening support for learners with sensory impairment.

However, we are concerned that as local authorities redesign provision and consider new models of delivery, there may be a risk that the focus on universal approaches could inadvertently lead to a reduction in input from specialist teachers for children with sensory impairment. Whilst greater

awareness within schools, inclusive classroom practices and increased staff confidence are all highly valuable, they are not a substitute for ongoing specialist assessment, monitoring, advice and direct intervention from Qualified Teachers of the Deaf or Qualified Teachers of children with vision or multi-sensory impairment.

We are concerned in particular that local authorities may make or be considering changes to funding arrangements which inadvertently negatively impact on the viability of specialist sensory services. This brings a number of risks, particularly to the vital early intervention support that specialist teachers provide to families with children with sensory impairment in the early years.

We remind local authorities that existing SEND legislation and statutory guidance remain fully in place as reforms continue to be developed and implemented. Local authorities retain their duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice to identify, assess and secure the provision required to meet children's special educational needs. As local areas plan and implement changes, it is vital that existing legal duties continue to be met and that reforms are used as an opportunity to strengthen access to the specialist support that children and young people with sensory impairment need to thrive. Doing so will help maintain confidence in the SEND system among families and so reduce the risk of any short-term increases in requests for statutory assessments or placements before any changes are made to SEND legislation.

Our call to action

The specialist needs of children and young people with sensory impairment and their families should be explicitly considered throughout the discussion, planning, implementation and evaluation of local reforms.

If and as local authorities develop their response or plan implementation of SEND reforms, we call on local areas to carefully consider:

- How will children and young people with sensory impairment continue to access specialist, long-term support that is tailored to their individual needs, including home visiting support in the early years, support within education settings, and post-16 provision?
- How will Family Hubs work in partnership with specialist teachers to provide effective support for children and young people with sensory impairment, and their families?
- How will specialists continue to play a central role in delivering specialist support and improving outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment, including in the vital early years?
- What opportunities will there be for children and young people with sensory impairment, and their families to contribute their experiences and help shape local developments?
- How will you measure the impact of service changes and identify opportunities to further improve outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment?

We are keen to work collaboratively with local areas to understand the opportunities and challenges presented by the reforms and to identify approaches that strengthen both inclusive practice and specialist provision.

In addition, Children's Hearing Services Working Groups (CHSWGs) can provide an important mechanism for ensuring the needs of deaf children are considered.

Together, we have an opportunity to create services that are both inclusive and specialist. Services that recognise the value of effective inclusion whilst safeguarding the vital role of specialist teachers. By keeping children and young people with sensory impairment at the heart of local decision making, we can ensure that SEND reforms deliver meaningful and lasting improvements in outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment.

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