

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad: [A oes gan blant a phobl ifanc anabl fynediad cyfartal at addysg a gofal plant?](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for the inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)

AEC 42

Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol i Blant Byddar Cymru

Response from: National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

Evidence from the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru, to the Children and Young People Education Committee Inquiry into childcare and education access for disabled children and young people, and the extent to which childcare providers, schools and local authorities meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Date: 27.9.2023, Stakeholder Event to share User experiences

FAO: Deputy Clerk Sarah Bartlett

Introduction

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children, young people, and their families. We support children and young people with all levels of deafness, from mild through to profound, including those with temporary hearing loss and a unilateral loss. We use the term deafness to refer to all levels of hearing loss.

Deafness is not a learning disability, and, with appropriate support, deaf learners should achieve on a par with their hearing peers of the same ability.

How we work

We work across the UK and internationally, supporting deaf children and their families from birth through to independence. We work closely with families of deaf children and young people and with organisations and professionals across education, health, and social care services. We seek to raise awareness of deaf children's needs with key decision makers, commissioners and those responsible for achieving the life chances and positive outcomes for deaf children. In Wales we have dedicated officers working directly with families with deaf children.

Our response to the Inquiry

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru welcomes the opportunity to contribute user evidence to the Inquiry.

There are at least 2,329 deaf children in Wales. Our response to the Inquiry has drawn directly from our understanding of the experiences of families with deaf children living in Wales. We would like to share evidence around your key areas of interest:

Key areas of interest:

- 1. The extent to which children and learners are currently able to access all parts of childcare and education provision, including the way in which the curriculum is taught and extra-curricular activities.**
- 2. The extent to which there is adequate provision for children with different types of disabilities.**

Summary of user evidence:

There are at least 2,329 deaf children in Wales.
81% of school-aged deaf children attend mainstream schools.
9% attend mainstream schools with resource provisions,
fewer than 1% attend special schools for deaf children (outside of Wales) whilst **10%** attend special schools not specifically for deaf children
1% are home educated. (CRIDE report 2022,
<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/professionals/research-and-data/cride-reports/>)

However, families have shared with us the difficulties they have experienced in finding the right education setting for their deaf child.

Common experiences include:

- *Inconsistency between local authorities with regard to making sure deaf children are assessed and awarded an IDP, outlining specifically (not generally) what their needs are and how services and settings are to meet these needs. Some families have challenged decisions made by their local authority, taking their appeals to a tribunal.*
- *The large mainstream classrooms and open plan learning spaces such as halls, reception areas, and corridors, are not always acoustically accessible. This means some deaf children are missing out on hearing key teaching points, crucial instructions, safety information and are often unable to access incidental conversations.*
- *Parents tell us they want their schools to work in partnership with the specialist education service, and/or external organisations so their deaf child can access the essential support they need. One parent told us they had to fight for their child to enter primary school with an IDP in place. Parents say they want their deaf children to 'thrive, not just simply cope'.*

We want the Senedd Inquiry Committee to prompt a review of the education provision available for deaf children in Wales and prevent a further decline to the number of settings that can meet their needs. There are a reported 19

resource provisions for deaf children in Wales. This is down from 20 in 2021 and down from 24 in 2019. Looking at the spread of resource provisions across Wales, on average, there is one resource provision for every 122 deaf children. (<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/8416/cride-2022-wales-report-final-english.pdf>)

Key areas of interest:

- 3. The extent to which children and young people have been excluded from aspects of education or childcare due to their disability or neurodivergence.**

Summary of user evidence:

Families have shared with us their experiences of exclusion due to their deaf child's disability.

Common experiences include:

- *Many families indicate that when specialist communication support staff such as British Sign Language (BSL) Communicators, and/or Communication Support Workers leave their posts in education setting they have not been replaced. This is leaving deaf children without access to communication support in their education setting.*
- *Some deaf children have experienced school exclusion when they have no access to specialist communication support.*
- *Families are concerned their deaf children are relying heavily on the specialist communication support staff in school as other staff or pupils cannot sign. E.g. one family of a profoundly deaf child who uses BSL as their first language is concerned their child is isolated at school. Their child does not integrate with peers, does not take part in any extra-curricular activities or clubs, does not have any special friends, and only has direct communication with the BSL support staff. This is having a significant impact on their child's development and mental health and wellbeing.*
- *Childhood deafness is a low incidence disability, and many deaf children are the only deaf child in a mainstream school. Families tell us their child is without deaf peers and is struggling with deaf identity. One family indicated their child's school lacks deaf awareness and understanding is contributing to their child not using their hearing technology at school, which excludes their deaf child from many aspects of school life.*

We want the Senedd Inquiry Committee to commit to helping families, schools, and communities to be able to communicate with and include deaf children in all aspects of their life. However, 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who have little or no prior knowledge of deafness. This includes no previous experience of using sign language to include British Sign Language and /or Family Sign Language. Findings from our recent

CRIDE 2022 survey (<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/8416/cride-2022-wales-report-final-english.pdf>) highlighted 13 specialist education services in Wales (87%) said they neither fund or commission courses through an external provider for families to enable them to learn sign language. This means many families must pay to learn how to communicate with their deaf child. We want this Inquiry to prompt for the tuition of signed communication support to be freely available at the earliest point for all families of deaf children who want it.

Key areas of interest:

- 4. The impact of any lack of or limited access on a child or young person's mental health and well-being and educational outcomes.**
- 5. The barriers for schools and childcare providers in offering accessible provision.**

Summary of user evidence:

Deafness is not a learning disability and with the right support at the right time deaf children can achieve on a par with their hearing peers of the same ability. However, when deaf children's needs are not met, deaf children experience significant barriers.

Common experiences include:

- *Families indicate there are limited resources and limited access to specialist provision which can leave deaf children struggling in mainstream. One family shared their experience indicating their deaf child found mainstream school inaccessible / too difficult to attend, which led to their child regularly missing school and compromising their educational outcomes.*
- *Again, the lack of access to specialist education support in the classroom left a deaf learner without support to access the curriculum and feeling excluded. In turn this led to poor attendance at school, which directly impacted on the child's development, educational outcomes and exacerbated their poor mental health, low self-esteem, and social isolation.*
- *Parents of deaf children report some school settings don't understand the benefits specialist education support, such as Teachers of the Deaf, specialist teaching assistants, or communication support workers could provide. They suggest deaf children are not always getting the essential support they need to succeed in school.*

Teachers of the deaf play a vital role in supporting deaf children and their families. However, the numbers of teachers of the deaf available to support deaf children and their families are declining. In Wales, Teacher of the Deaf numbers have reduced by 1 in 5 (20%) since 2011. Furthermore, one-third of

Teachers of the Deaf are set to retire in the next decade or so. Without immediate action deaf children's education is at risk (<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/8416/cride-2022-wales-report-final-english.pdf>). We are calling on the Senedd Inquiry Committee to prompt for a review of the specialist education workforce supporting deaf children and work with NDCS and other partners and providers to develop a robust plan for a sustainable Teacher of the Deaf and specialist workforce.

Summary of recommendations:

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru is keen to assist the Senedd and the Welsh Government to achieve equal access for disabled children and young people and to support providers, schools and local authorities meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010. We suggest the following recommendations:

- 1. We want the Senedd Inquiry Committee to prompt a review of the education provision available for deaf children in Wales and prevent a further decline to the number of settings that can meet their needs.**
- 2. We want the Senedd Inquiry Committee to commit to helping families, schools, and communities to be able to communicate with and include deaf children in all aspects of their life, and to prompt for the tuition of signed communication support to be freely available at the earliest point for all families of deaf children who want it.**
- 3. We are calling on the Senedd Inquiry Committee to prompt for a review of the specialist education workforce supporting deaf children and work with NDCS and other partners and providers to develop a robust plan for a sustainable Teacher of the Deaf and specialist workforce.**

For further discussion and/or clarification please contact us on:

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