

Close the Gap Petition

Introduction

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru presents our **Close the Gap!** petition to the Petitions Committee on behalf of deaf children and young people throughout Wales. We present the petition today (7 May 2013) as it is both Deaf Awareness Week and two years since 55 of the 60 current Assembly Members pledged to take action to *Close the Gap* in educational attainment between deaf pupils and other children.

Still, too many deaf children and young people are not reaching their full potential. Welsh Government statistics (first published in 2009) demonstrate that there is a significant attainment gap between deaf pupils and their peers at every Key Stage. In 2012, deaf pupils were 26% less likely to achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, and **41%** less likely to achieve GCSE higher grade passes in core subjects English/Welsh, Maths and Science.¹

This gap in attainment is not acceptable. Our petition is calling for a strategy to address the barriers that deaf children and young people face at school and college and to **Close the Gap!**

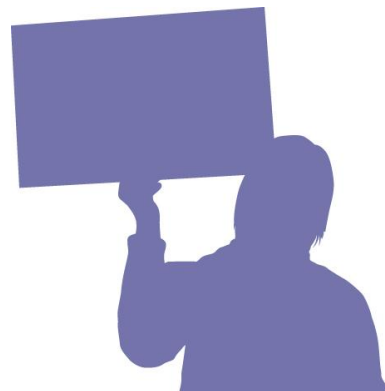
NDCS Cymru has asked the experts – deaf young people themselves – to tell us about what key points must be included in a strategy.

Our experts identified four key points, which are outlined in our accompanying video:

1. We need appropriate support in school and college.
2. We need all classrooms to have good acoustics.
3. Some of us use sign language. Help us encourage our hearing peers and teachers to learn sign.
4. We need more teachers and pupils to be deaf aware.

Too many deaf children and young people in Wales are facing barriers in these important areas and are, therefore, not reaching their full potential at school and college.

This short paper provides more background information on the topics identified by the experts in our video. It outlines the different types of barriers that deaf young people face within these areas and makes suggestions on how to develop a strategy to address these barriers.



To watch our video and find out more information, please visit www.ndcs.org.uk/CloseTheGapWales

1. We need appropriate support in school and college

The young deaf people who feature in our video each access different types and levels of support, yet they all wanted to tell us how important their support is to them.

I want to show the Welsh Government how hard it is in school for young deaf people.
- Jodie

I want to tell the politicians why deaf people need better facilities in schools in Wales.
- Daniyaal

The background

Every deaf child is different. Some deaf children and young people use assistive listening devices like hearing aids or cochlear implants, others do not. Some deaf children and young people use speech and lip-read, some sign and others may do all of these things.

As there are no specialist schools for the deaf in Wales, some attend specialist schools across the border, but the vast majority of deaf children in Wales attend mainstream schools. Some attend mainstream schools with a specialist resource base for deaf pupils, while others may be the only deaf child in the whole school.

Deafness affects children and young people in different ways. As a result, the support a deaf pupil requires will depend

on his/her individual needs. Deaf children may need a range of different types of support. The following types of support should be available:

- **Teacher of the Deaf.** These professionals specialise in ensuring that the curriculum is accessible to deaf children and young people. They may advise mainstream teachers and may also provide direct support to a deaf child.
- **Speech and language therapist.** These professionals can help deaf children and young people who may experience difficulties in speech development due to limited access to sound.
- **Technology.** Many deaf children rely on the sounds that they can access to help them communicate. Assistive listening equipment, such as radio aids or sound field systems can be important for these pupils.
- **Communication Support Worker/Interpreter.** These professionals are distinctly different from a Teacher of the Deaf. They are not teaching professionals, rather they specialise in communicating/translating what is said in the classroom and can be imperative for deaf young people who sign.
- **Note-taker.** Many deaf young people at college require a note-taker. This is because it is not possible to simultaneously lip-read/watch an interpreter and take notes.

What are the barriers?

Deaf children and young people are often not receiving the support they need at school or college. Without appropriate support, deaf children and young people face significant barriers in accessing the curriculum and in reaching their full potential.

Accessing support can be difficult in Wales for a number of reasons. Firstly, Teachers of the Deaf are often stretched to capacity and limited in number. NDCS Cymru is concerned that this situation is likely to worsen as local authorities face difficult budgetary decisions.

Secondly, local authorities can experience difficulties in recruiting Communication Support Workers, especially those with an appropriate level of sign language. A survey conducted by the Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) in 2012 revealed that there are only 6.5 full time equivalent Communication Support Workers in post across the principality.ⁱⁱ It is not uncommon for a deaf child to be supported by a Communication Support Worker, or even a teaching assistant, who has only a very basic level of sign language. NDCS Cymru is concerned about the impact that this has both on a pupil's access to the curriculum and on the pupil's ability to further develop his/her preferred language.

Deaf children and young people should be entitled to a personalised plan outlining their support requirements for school (either an Individual Education Plan or a Statement, depending on their level of need.) However, in practice, many deaf children and young people are either not receiving such plans, or receive plans which lack specific detail on the level of support they require. NDCS Cymru is keen to ensure that any changes within the planned ALN reform will work effectively for deaf children and

their families. However, having seen the current proposals, we are concerned that these issues could continue under the reformed system. We are particularly keen to ensure that under the new system:

- It is clearly stated that deaf children and young people are entitled to a support plan.
- Appropriate specialist professionals are identified to contribute to a deaf child's support plan.
- The new support plan provides clear information on the type and level of support that the child or young person will receive.
- Deaf children, young people and their families have appropriate rights to challenge the support they are given. We consider that ensuring such rights are in place does not necessarily increase the number of appeals, but rather encourages compliance with the Code of Practice.

We also have concerns around securing specialist support for post-16 students in Wales. The Welsh Government is devolving funding for placements at specialist colleges to local authorities as part of the Revenue Support Grant. In addition, funding for the support of students in mainstream colleges which was previously allocated centrally through the LLDD Supplementary Fund is set to be devolved to Colleges. Although NDCS Cymru is not against the devolution of this funding, we urge that monitoring measures are put in place to ensure that local authorities and Colleges meet their new responsibilities in this regard.

NDCS Cymru is also concerned about whether or not schools are appropriately held to account in relation to the support that they offer deaf pupils. Indeed, under

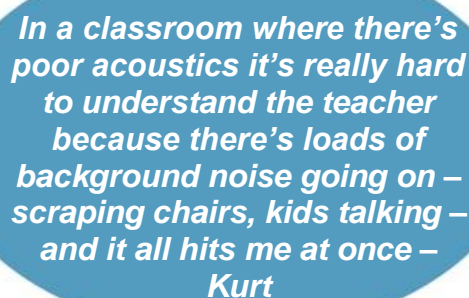
the current Estyn inspection system, there is a lack of information and emphasis on special educational needs.

Suggestions

- That the Welsh Government reviews whether the availability and skill set of key specialist professionals (as outlined above) are appropriate to the needs of the young deaf population in Wales.ⁱⁱⁱ Such a review could consider whether national standards and further training opportunities are required to improve the availability of such support.
- That the Welsh Government works with NDCS Cymru to overcome our concerns in relation to the ALN Reforms. In particular, we would welcome assurances around the right of appeal and the development of disability specific pathways. Originally, it was proposed that specific guidance would be made to outline referral pathways and clarify how the new system would apply to different groups of children and young people. We understand that the proposals may now be dropped. We urge that the Welsh Government goes ahead with producing a provision pathway for deaf children and young people, so that there is clarity over type of support deaf children may need and which professionals should be involved in assessing their needs.
- That, in devolving funding to support post-16 students with special educational needs, the Welsh Government puts in place monitoring measures to ensure local authorities and colleges appropriately meet their responsibilities to support these students.
- That the Welsh Government encourages Estyn to consider how inspections of schools with deaf pupils on roll, and of local authority specialist support services could include an improved examination of the support that is provided to deaf children and young people.

2. We need all classrooms to have good acoustics

Most of the experts in our video use hearing aids, cochlear implants or radio aids. They talked about how difficult it can be to concentrate in noisy classrooms.



In a classroom where there's poor acoustics it's really hard to understand the teacher because there's loads of background noise going on – scraping chairs, kids talking – and it all hits me at once –
Kurt

The background

Many deaf children and young people use the sound they can access to help understand what is being communicated. This can be a difficult skill to develop, requiring a lot of concentration. In rooms where there are poor acoustics, it can be even more difficult for deaf children to access sound.

It should be acknowledged that while many children use assistive listening devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, these devices are not a “cure” for deafness. They do not restore “typical” hearing levels. In fact, in rooms where there are poor acoustics, these devices can be rendered useless. Hearing aids tend to amplify all noises, so deaf children and young people have told us that they turn their aids off in classrooms with poor acoustics. Other technological devices, such as soundfield systems, also require a good acoustic environment to be effective.

It should be noted that good acoustics are also important for many other vulnerable groups of learners, including the 80% of all children who experience temporary hearing loss through glue ear.^{iv}

NDCS Cymru has been campaigning on the issue of school acoustics, along with the support of ten other organisations,^v and is pleased that the issue has received cross party support. In total, 39 Assembly Members have shown their support for good acoustics in school, college and nursery buildings.^{vi}

What are the barriers?

Although building regulations stipulate that new school buildings must meet a minimum acoustic standard, these standards are often ignored as there is no mandatory requirement for demonstrating compliance with the standards.

Our survey of local authorities in Wales highlighted that of the 262 schools built between 2003 and 2010, only 11% had been tested for compliance with acoustic standards and only 31% had involved any consultation with an acoustician.^{vii}

NDCS Cymru is pleased to have worked with the Welsh Government in relation to schools built under the 21st Century Schools Programme. Schools built under this programme are now contractually obliged to demonstrate compliance with acoustic standards. We consider that this has been a positive step forward in putting acoustics on the agenda. However, we are aware that this will only affect schools funded in this way and are conscious that our research revealed unwillingness among officials to meet standards where it was not considered mandatory.

Now that building regulations have been devolved, we are urging the Welsh Government to go one step further. Ensuring that the same requirement is placed into statutory regulations will mean that all schools can *sound good* regardless of how they are funded.

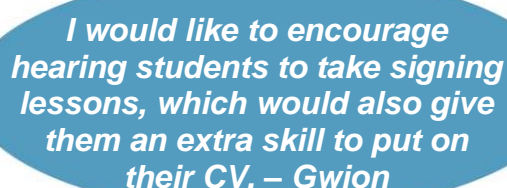
We are also conscious of steps that could be taken to improve acoustics in existing school, college and nursery buildings and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government to promote our toolkit for schools looking to improve the acoustics in their building.

Suggestions

- That the Welsh Government uses its powers over building regulations to strengthen acoustic standards. This will ensure that all school, college and nursery buildings are required to demonstrate compliance with acoustic standards – regardless of how they are funded.
- That the Welsh Government works with NDCS Cymru to raise awareness among head teachers about some of the measures they can take to improve the acoustics in pre-existing school buildings.

3. Some of us use sign language. Help us encourage our hearing peers and teachers to learn sign

Our group of experts communicate in different ways – speech, sign, or a mixture of both.



I would like to encourage hearing students to take signing lessons, which would also give them an extra skill to put on their CV. – Gwion

The background

Deaf children will communicate in different ways. Some deaf young people use sign language as their first and preferred language.

Recognised as an official language in Wales in January 2004, British Sign Language (BSL) is distinctly different from English. It is a language in its own right with its own vocabulary and grammatical structure. For some deaf people, BSL is also closely interlinked with Deaf culture. Many deaf young people who are not first language signers may choose to use sign language socially. For these young people sign language can be a way of connecting with a deaf identity and/or the deaf community.

Some deaf children and young people communicate with Sign Supported English/Welsh, which uses BSL signs in conjunction with the grammatical

structure of the English or Welsh language.

What are the barriers?

Since there are no schools for the deaf in Wales, the vast majority of deaf pupils attend a mainstream school or a mainstream school with a specialist resource base. Being surrounded by hearing pupils can mean that deaf young people are vulnerable to feelings of isolation.

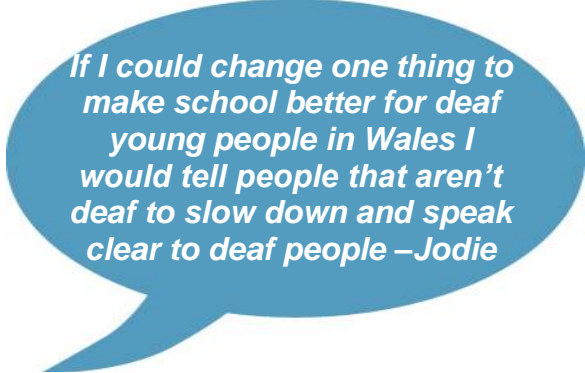
Ensuring that other young people in the school can use sign language helps deaf young people who use sign to feel more included. It is also good practice for staff other than the specialist support teachers to learn some basic sign. The idea behind this is not to replace the need for specialist support teachers, as a high level of sign is required to appropriately support a BSL pupil (see section one of this paper). Moreover, the idea is around ensuring that deaf young people are encompassed in all aspects of school life.

Suggestions


- NDCS Cymru would urge the Welsh Government to encourage more teachers and pupils to learn to sign.
- NDCS Cymru would welcome a review of the availability of BSL courses in Wales and consideration of how access to such classes could be improved.

4. We need more teachers and pupils to be deaf aware.

Deaf awareness is about understanding how difficult communication can be for deaf people and knowing some simple but effective ways of ensuring that deaf people are included in conversations and activities. Our experts highlighted how important this is for all deaf children and young people.



If I could change one thing to make school better for deaf young people in Wales I would tell people that aren't deaf to slow down and speak clear to deaf people –Jodie



I would like to make people aware that I am the same as everyone else, being deaf is no big deal – Ryan

The background

Across the UK, deaf young people often tell us that they need more teachers and pupils to understand what it is like being deaf so that they can communicate more easily with everyone at school.

A lack of deaf awareness can affect a child's ability to access lessons. For example, if a teacher is facing away from the class when talking, deaf

children and young people will miss what is being said.

A lack of deaf awareness is also a barrier for deaf children and young people in social situations at school. For example, it may be difficult to lip-read in a group discussion and deaf young people will miss out on some information that others may over-hear. Also, without appropriate awareness, games such as football can be difficult if the deaf young person cannot hear instructions or the referee's whistle.

What are the barriers?

In an environment where teachers and pupils are not deaf aware, deaf children and young people can experience access difficulties both inside and outside the classroom. This leaves deaf young people more vulnerable to low educational attainment, feelings of isolation and experiences of being bullied.

In some instances, deaf awareness is not just about including a deaf child, but can also be about acknowledging that a child has a hearing loss in the first place. Many deaf young people use assistive listening devices and attend a mainstream school where they may be the only deaf pupil on roll. Generally, there is a lack of awareness that assistive listening devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants do not restore "typical" hearing levels. Therefore, it is often not acknowledged that a deaf child requires any additional communication support.

It should also be noted that 80% of all children will experience a temporary hearing loss through glue ear at some point before they reach the age of ten.^{viii} For many children, this period of temporary hearing loss can be repeated or sustained, and can have a serious

impact on their access to lessons. Ensuring that teachers are aware of glue ear and basic deaf awareness tips would help to minimise the impact of glue ear for these children. Potentially, with a greater level of awareness, teachers can also play a role in helping to identify children who are experiencing a hearing loss. Hearing loss can all too often be misinterpreted as shyness, a short attention span, or general misbehaviour.

Suggestions

- Given the high incidence of temporary deafness and the fact that the vast majority of deaf children in Wales attend mainstream schools, we consider it imperative that teachers receive a basic level of deaf awareness training. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers including basic information on deafness within the ITT, NQT or the new Masters in Education course. NDCS Cymru has worked on some resources for newly qualified teachers with Bridgend County Borough Council and would welcome the opportunity to provide some similar resources and information on a Wales-wide basis.
- NDCS Cymru is disappointed that, as we understand, the new training for ALNCos (Additional Learning Needs Coordinators) that has been developed as part of the ALN reforms does not include any information on deafness. We strongly urge the Welsh Government to reconsider this point. ALNCos play an important role as the central contact in a school for special educational needs. It is imperative that they are aware of the fact that deaf young people can face substantial barriers, and that they know how to access further

information to ensure their school is inclusive of a young deaf person.

- NDCS has worked with deaf young people to develop our UK-wide “Look Smile Chat” resources. These resources aim to help schools teach their pupils about deaf awareness. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government to encourage schools throughout Wales to use these resources.

More information

Thank you for reading this paper and for watching our video petition. We hope that the Welsh Government will work with us to take action on these barriers for deaf children and young people all over Wales.

For more information please contact campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk, or call 029 20373474.

Thank you.

Annex

Attainment Gap statistics

Key Stage 4

Data on the attainment levels of deaf pupils is available from 2005. It demonstrates that the gap in attainment between deaf pupils and their peers is relatively consistent. Although, the gap dropped significantly in 2011, we are disappointed that this gap has again widened. In 2012, deaf pupils were 26% less likely to achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C than other children.

We are even more concerned that the gap in attainment for higher grade passes in core subjects English/Welsh, Maths and Science has widened to 41%. This is the highest it has been since records began.

Year	Attainment gap for achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (%)	Attainment gap for achieving A*-C grades in English/Welsh, Maths and Science (%)
2012	26	41
2011	12	19
2010	29	33
2009	15	13
2008	30	27
2007	27	27
2006	26	38
2005	29	36

Key Stages 1- 3

We are pleased to have seen some improvement over the past few years in the attainment of deaf pupils at Key Stages 1-3. However, we remain concerned that the gap in attainment is still unacceptably high for deaf pupils at every Key Stage level.

In 2012:

- Deaf pupils at Key Stage 1 were 15% less likely to achieve the Foundation Phase Indicator
- Deaf pupils at Key Stage 2 were 15% less likely to achieve the Core Subject Indicator
- Deaf pupils at Key Stage 3 were 19% less likely to achieve the Core Subject Indicator.

* Please Note:

All figures show how much less likely it is (as a percentage) that deaf children will achieve as well as their hearing peers.

The data specifically excludes special educational need (SEN) types other than deafness in order to draw the simplest comparison. It compares the attainment of deaf pupils who have no other additional SEN with the attainment levels of pupils who have no registered SEN.

The “Foundation Phase Indicator” refers to reaching the expected level or above in English/Welsh, Personal and Social Development and Maths.

The “Core Subject Indicator” refers to achieving the expected level or above in English or Welsh (first language), Mathematics and Science in combination. The expected level of the majority of pupils is level 4 at Key Stage 2 and level 5 at Key Stage 3.

More detailed information on this attainment data is available at www.ndcs.org.uk/ClosetheGapWales

References

- ⁱ For more information on attainment data, please visit http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/education_data_in.html.
- ⁱⁱ The CRIDE (Consortium for Research in Deaf Education) report on 2012 survey on educational provision for deaf children in Wales is available at http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/uk_education.html.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Data on the numbers of specialist professionals working across Wales is available from the Consortium of Research into Deaf Education and could be utilised in such a review.
- ^{iv} Clinical Guideline, National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (2008), *Surgical management of otitis media with effusion in children*, page 1, section 1.1.
- ^v These organisations include: Action on Hearing Loss Cymru, Afasic Cymru, Autism Cymru, BATOD, Deaf Access Cymru, Down's Syndrome Association, National Autistic Society Cymru, North Wales Deaf Association, RNIB Cymru, SENSE Cymru.
- ^{vi} For more information, visit http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about_us/campaign_with_us/wales/sounds_good/index.html
- ^{vii} NDCS Cymru (December 2011) *Let's Make a New Year's Resolution that Sounds Good!*
- ^{viii} Clinical Guideline, National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (2008), *Surgical management of otitis media with effusion in children*, page 1, section 1.1.