

**ANN JONES AM/AC**  
**Vale of Clwyd / Dyffryn Clwyd**

Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
Cymru

National  
Assembly for  
Wales



William Powell AM  
Chair of the Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales

30<sup>th</sup> September 2013

*Dear William*

**RE: P-04-481**

Thank you for your letter with regards to the above petition.

As Chair of the Cross Party Group on Deaf Issues, the attainment gap between deaf pupils and their hearing peers is a matter of great concern. I am fully supportive of the petition before you.

I am particularly concerned that deaf pupils are 41% less likely than their peers to gain A\*-C's in English/Welsh, Maths and Science. It is absolutely vital that all young people are at least, qualified to GCSE level in these core subjects. It is my opinion that any strategy to close the gap in educational attainment must focus on the core subjects and then look at closing the gap in all subjects more widely. As is widely accepted, young people without these key qualifications are disadvantaged in continuing their education and in the job market.

I fully support the evidence given to you so far and what the petitioners have called for. It is important that there is appropriate support for deaf pupils such as schools employing teaching assistants who can use British Sign Language (BSL). I acknowledge that schools will have tight budgets at the present moment in time, but one-on-one support is a lifeline for many deaf children. Reasonable adjustments for deaf children in lessons could be made – ie. Additional support and time for deaf children when completing English/Welsh speaking and listening assessments.

Good acoustics are important for children with partial hearing loss and in schools with older buildings where acoustics maybe poor, make it much harder for children to learn. In any new school construction or refurbishment, classrooms should be assessed for the quality of its acoustics.

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Many deaf children suffer from lack of confidence and often feel isolated from their peers. In discussions I have had with children who are deaf, the use of some sign language (basic phrases) by teachers and their peers are greatly appreciated as they see it as people making an effort to communicate with them. I believe teachers and some chosen peers should be offered basic BSL courses as a number of children have told me that they would find this very reassuring.

Another element that needs to be considered is that pupils are receiving an adequate level of pastoral care. Due to the heightened risk of isolation and loneliness, it is important that pastoral staff take extra care to ensure that pupils are coping with their academic work and are playing a full part in school life. Deaf pupils can also be at a greater risk of being affected by bullying, and I believe that this must be monitored closely by pastoral staff.

Finally, the gap in educational attainment between deaf children and their hearing peers should be of great concern to all across the education sector. Deafness is not a learning disability. The attainment gap is not one that is endemic and with additional support, reasonable adjustments and proper planning, there is absolutely no reason that an attainment gap exists.

I look forward to seeing the committee's consideration of the petition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ann Jones', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Ann Jones AM**  
**Chair of the Cross Party Group on Deaf Issues**