

William Powell AM  
Chair, Petitions Committee,  
National Assembly for Wales,  
Pierhead St.,  
Cardiff CF99 1NA

26.02.2014

Ref: P-04-481

Dear Mr Powell,

Thank you for your letter sent on February 21<sup>st</sup> with regard to the Close the Gap petition P-04-481.

We welcome your intention to commission a piece of work on the issues facing deaf pupils in Wales. Throughout this process we have involved the young people who created and presented the petition in May 2013. Once again we have asked them to identify their priorities.

The two key issues for deaf children and young people are lack of deaf awareness and poor acoustics in schools.

Deaf children and young people tell us that they wished teachers; support staff and fellow pupils had some awareness of what it is to be deaf. Simple things like knowing how to speak with a deaf child; knowing how to include deaf children in group activities and good communication in the classroom would make a world of difference for deaf children and young people. Most deaf children attend mainstream schools with 85% in schools where there is no specialist provision. We would welcome your report looking at how deaf awareness training can be introduced for staff and pupils in all schools in Wales.

Poor acoustics in schools can make life extremely difficult for deaf children. When a child wears a hearing aid the device amplifies all sounds. One pupil told us, "When there is too much noise in the classroom my ears are painful and hurt so much I have to take my hearing aids out, then I can't hear the teacher." In such circumstances it is no wonder that the educational attainment of deaf pupils falls behind that of hearing pupils. Good acoustics in a classroom is of benefit to all pupils and staff.

As you know, Building Regulations were devolved to Wales on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2011. We are keen to see the regulations concerning acoustics in new build schools, which are contained in Building Bulletin 93 (BB93), strengthened and extended to cover all new nurseries, schools and college buildings. We would also wish to see more rigorous compliance with BB93 including mandatory pre-completion testing to ensure new buildings achieve the acoustic standards.

BB93 only applies to new buildings and as so many school premises in Wales are in older buildings we would wish to see steps being taken to improve the acoustic environment in these settings. We are more than willing to provide our toolkit for improving acoustics to schools in Wales.



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Good acoustics in schools, nurseries and colleges will not only benefit deaf children and young people. It will improve the teaching environment for all pupils and staff. 10 organisations have supported our campaigns to improve acoustics in schools: 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 and SENSE Cymru.

The National Assembly has an opportunity to make a difference not only to the lives of deaf children and young people but to all pupils in Wales.

If the research team that is preparing the report wish to have further information we are more than happy to work with them to provide background information and resources.

Looking forward to hearing from you

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c.c. Ann Jones AM, Chair APGDI