

Children, Young People and Education Committee Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements and Implementation in Wales



Response by NDCS Cymru

November 2016

About Us

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth until independence.

In referring to deaf, we refer to all levels of hearing loss including mild to profound, unilateral and temporary.

Response

Welsh Government statistics demonstrate attainment gaps between deaf pupils and their peers at every Key Stage.¹ Deafness is not a learning disability and with appropriate support deaf pupils can achieve on a par with their peers.

It is, therefore, imperative that the implementation of the curriculum review and assessment arrangements gives due consideration to the distinct needs of this vulnerable group of learners, helping to close, and not widen, the attainment gap between deaf pupils and their peers.

The work of the Pioneers schools network in designing and developing the new curriculum

NDCS Cymru is pleased that the pioneer schools include a selection of schools with a hearing impairment resource base. However, we seek assurance that the benefit of including these schools is being realised. In particular, it is important that staff within the resource bases, including Teachers of the Deaf, are involved in considering and feeding back on the project. In addition, peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf, supporting deaf pupils in the other pioneer schools and mainstream schools generally, would provide another rich source of valuable comment.

The interface with effective professional learning for the education workforce and initial teacher education and training

In light of the Curriculum review, Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers, and the ongoing ALN Reforms, it will be increasingly important to raise disability awareness (including deaf

¹ For more information, please visit http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/index.html.

awareness) amongst the general education workforce. Deafness is often referred to as the “invisible disability” and it’s a common misconception that assistive devices such as hearing aids restore typical hearing levels - they do not. The vast majority of deaf pupils attend mainstream schools, so it’s imperative that all frontline staff have a basic level of deaf awareness and knowledge of the specialist professionals/provision pathway available to support deaf pupils. In addition, 80% of children will experience glue ear by the age of ten with the resulting temporary deafness often lasting many months or even years. Not only then does temporary deafness have a significant effect on a pupil’s learning experience, but its prevalence further emphasises the need for comprehensive deaf awareness amongst school staff.

Many deaf young people tell us that a lack of deaf awareness among teachers creates a significant barrier preventing them from reaching their full potential, so we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government to ensure that basic deaf awareness is improved among the general education workforce.

Governance arrangements for implementation and the role of the Independent Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group

NDCS Cymru would welcome the opportunity to work with these groups to highlight the needs of deaf learners.

Other issues of concern and/or importance regarding the development of the new Curriculum in Wales

NDCS Cymru is concerned by proposals to monitor performance on a sampling basis only. Sampling alone would create difficulty in tracking the performance of deaf children (and other disability groups) and in comparing performance with that of hearing peers. These learners demonstrate significant attainment gaps and it is, therefore, essential to collect comprehensive attainment data as a means of recognising and addressing the barriers faced.

We believe that the introduction of progression steps along a continuum of learning has benefits if it leads to a seamless learning journey and enables teachers and support staff to focus on the needs of the individual learner. However, we are concerned that this system could pander to low expectations of deaf learners, and must insist that deaf pupils are supported to achieve their full potential with goals set sufficiently high.

We agree that the curriculum must be diverse and underpinned by a flexible pedagogy to enable well-trained teachers to be alert and reactive to the needs of the individual deaf learner and would wish to highlight that NDCS Cymru offers a range of free resources to support professionals in this way.

Further information

For further information about the issues raised in this response, please do not hesitate to contact us at campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk.

