Attainment of Deaf Pupils

Submission from Clydeview Academy Deaf Education Department (Garvel Deaf Centre), Inverclyde.

Functional Language

Of critical importance to deaf children is ensuring that they do not suffer from language deprivation in the early years. Language deprivation can have long lasting and devastating effects on all areas of child development including working memory and literacy skills. Practitioners should be aiming to ensure that deaf children are developing language, whether spoken, signed or both at an age appropriate rate. Certainly, deaf children should have a functional language by age 5 in order to ensure that deaf pupils do not suffer from language deprivation.

Action points:

- Pre-5 practitioners and Crosshouse Cochlear Implant team may benefit from CPD training in order to raise awareness that use of BSL and development of spoken language are not mutually exclusive.
- Inspections of services should include pre-5 services for deaf children and peripatetic services with a view to establishing that deaf children are acquiring language at an age appropriate rate.
- Criteria should be produced to establish age-appropriate language acquisition for deaf children in the early stages to ensure that decisions are made about children’s access to sign language swiftly and depending on the child’s communication needs, rather than service ideology.

Levels of BSL

All services should be able to provide the full range of communication strategies for deaf pupils in order that all pupils’ needs can be met. This means that Teachers of the Deaf /Communication Support Workers should have or be working towards a minimum standard of BSL higher than level 1 (the current minimum level). Teachers working with BSL using pupils should have or be working towards a minimum level of level 3 BSL.

Level 6 courses aimed at Teachers of Deaf pupils should be appropriate and relevant to a school educational setting.
Services for Deaf Children

All deaf pupils should have the option of attending a resource base/deaf unit, whether in their own local authority or a nearby authority in order to ensure a deaf peer group where appropriate, which can have a positive effect on pupil wellbeing.

Deaf Tutors

Deaf tutors should be employed by services for deaf children to ensure there is a positive role model for deaf children. Their role could become quite prominent in schools if schools decide to introduce BSL as part of the 1 +2 Language policy.

Action Points:

- Training should be provided for deaf tutors working in schools, especially those who may be delivering BSL courses to deaf and hearing pupils.

- Guidelines should be produced on best practice of supporting deaf tutors and the work they do within schools.

Assessment

- The SQA could reconsider the use of subtitles in English listening assessments to ensure deaf students access to information presented in video format as it would be used in everyday life.

- SQA BSL courses should be updated to include National 4 and National 5 BSL courses.

The Listening Environment

- The use of Dragonsoftware Number 13 speech recognition software by mainstream teachers to "subtitle" lessons as they are being delivered could be trialled for effectiveness.
• Effective support of children with mild/moderate hearing losses may include Soundfield systems for unaided children, especially those developing language in the early stages and closer monitoring of language development in these children.

• Programmes of auditory skills development in place where appropriate, including pupils with mild and moderate losses and those with Auditory Processing Disorder.

• Deaf pupils should have regular access to an Educational Audiologist where appropriate.

• Educational Audiologists should be consulted at the design stage of new school buildings in order to maximise the listening and therefore learning environment for all pupils, not just pupils with hearing loss.

Other agencies

• Deaf pupils should have access to specialist Speech and Language Therapists who are competent BSL users in order to develop the language and communication skills – not just speech sounds - of all deaf pupils regardless of their mode of communication.