Deaf Action welcomes the Inquiry into Attainment of School Pupils with a Sensory Impairment, and presents a concise overview of changes that, in our view, would go some way to addressing the current inequality in outcomes for deaf pupils.

1. It is our view that one of the major obstacles to educational attainment for deaf children is that during the early years, it is very common for there to be no effective shared language between child and parents/carers. Too many deaf children enter education without a functional language. Educational interventions at this stage are often too late, and rely on rectifying a deficit which might have been avoided. It is essential that language is established early, as with the normal development of hearing children who use a spoken language, or deaf children within deaf families who use a signed language.

2. Deaf children should have access to a visual language such as BSL during the early years, as this is reliably accessible for all deaf children, while spoken languages are not. Having established a visual language, further learning can be achieved successfully, including English literacy.


4. Deaf Action uses charitable funds to run family BSL courses, where parents, grandparents and carers learn BSL, as do (in separate sessions) children, followed by whole group activity where children and adults work together to consolidate learning. Courses such as these should be available to families upon diagnosis of deafness and funded from statutory sources, and not depend on the intermittent availability of charitable funds.

5. Professionals involved in the lives of deaf children should have access to training and up-to-date research, such as that surrounding the benefits of bilingualism. Some families have told us they are still being provided with outdated and inaccurate views, for example that learning a signed language will have a negative impact on acquisition of English.

6. It should be understood that deafness is not in itself a cognitive or learning disability, and educational expectations of deaf children should be the same as their hearing peers.

7. There should be sufficient numbers of Teachers of Deaf Children with sufficient capacity to support deaf children in all parts of Scotland.

8. Teachers of deaf children should be suitably qualified and have fluency in British Sign Language and proficiency in all forms of communication used by deaf pupils. They should have in-depth awareness, including of deaf cultural norms.

9. Where children learn in a mainstream setting, appropriate full-time communication support should be provided.
10 In mainstream settings, all school staff should take part in Deaf Awareness training where there is one or more deaf pupils in a school. This should include use of appropriate technology.

11 As is common in many parts of the world, deaf teachers should be trained and deployed in the education of deaf children. The Moray House course to train deaf teachers in Scotland, which ended many years ago, should be reinstated.

12 British Sign Language should be promoted as an academic subject for deaf and hearing pupils, on a par with other modern languages. BSL qualifications, even at the higher levels attainable within Scottish Schools, is currently not accepted for entry to Scottish Universities.

13 It is important to take a rights-based approach to the education of deaf children, where the focus is on equality. Historic “reasonable adjustment” approaches limit support to what it is expedient for services to provide.

14 We refer to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, access to education. This article states that “States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

- Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
- Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
- Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.”