EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into attainment of school pupils with a sensory impairment – Call for views

The Committee is holding a short inquiry to consider how the attainment levels of school pupils with a hearing and/or a visual impairment can be improved. We invite you to give us concise and specific suggestions about what could be done to improve the attainment of children with a sensory impairment.

The deadline for responses is Wednesday 29 April 2015.

In East Renfrewshire, almost all children with a sensory impairment are educated in mainstream establishments; all children for whom a sensory impairment is their only additional support need perform as well as and, in some cases, better than their peers without a sensory impairment and this has been the case since close monitoring of their attainment on an authority basis began in 2008.

There are many positives for children and young people with a sensory impairment supported in East Renfrewshire schools.

- We hold comprehensive data on the attainment of all children through analysis of baseline, standardised tests at P3, P5, P7 and S2, SQA results and now in its second year, developmental milestones. This data is collated by the authority’s Education Management and Improvement Service and a Senior Educational Psychologist with specialised knowledge of sensory impairment. The educational psychologist uses this information in discussion with sensory impairment staff to help target support and intervention and monitor progress over time. The sensory impairment staff also use other assessments for language development to identify specific gaps.
- Children and young people with a visual impairment have the support of a Mobility Officer at points of transition and for developing independence.
- Children and young people with a hearing impairment have the support of an educational audiologist.
- The authority ensures that up to date equipment to enable children and young people with a sensory impairment to fully access the curriculum is made available to them.
- Some children and young people have other barriers to their learning. All educational establishments in the authority operate a staged intervention approach for planning to meet needs and specialist staff participate in planning and review alongside school and nursery colleagues.
- Our sensory impairment teachers regularly deliver high quality awareness raising and training for teachers and Pupil Support Assistants who work directly with children and young people which is very well received. Staff are aware of the need to have high expectations of learners while understanding how their impairment can impact on their learning, such as concentration fatigue.
- The service supports and empowers children and young people to make their views known through a ‘Getting It Right For Me’ so that staff are aware of how their impairment impacts on their learning.
- Our Sensory Impairment Service holds regular Friendship groups for children from across the authority to meet others who have a similar impairment so they know they are not alone in what they are experiencing.
- For children and young people with a visual impairment, liaison with health colleagues is working very well with the introduction of Functional Vision clinics, Low Vision Aid clinics and the Visual Impairment Resource Group.
- For children and young people with a hearing impairment, there is good sharing of information between audiology departments and teachers of those with a hearing impairment.
- The Sensory Impairment Service has developed strong links with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, Visibility Scotland and the National Deaf Children’s Society which has helped to enhance children and young people’s experience and participation.

In discussion with the staff of the Sensory Support Service and their link senior educational psychologist, the following suggestions were put forward as ways in which the attainment levels of school pupils with a hearing and/or a visual impairment can be improved.

- There should be greater focus on early intervention as more children are being diagnosed with hearing losses via newborn hearing screening.
- There are many more children being diagnosed with a conductive hearing loss who display auditory processing disorder (APD) type difficulties; these children could benefit from programmes worked on at home and in the school or nursery. Children with conductive losses also benefit from the fitting of hearing devices such as hearing aids and radio aid/soundfield systems to support listening.
- Children with suspected APD are not tested until they are seven and there should be interventions before then. Many children with cognitive visual impairment (CVI) also make good progress if supported early enough.
- While information sharing is good from hospital audiology departments, the same is not true if children and young people are seen at ear, nose and throat (ENT) departments and as a result, some learners with HI are not known to the service. A community audiology referral pathway should be developed.
- While developments in technology have had considerable positive impact for all learners, accessibility options for VI are still not standard on networked computers in schools; each computer has to be set individually and these settings are lost after another person has logged on.
- Wifi should be available in all educational establishments to support staff to upload apps, texts and materials.
- Scotland should consider the introduction of building guidelines such as Building Bulletin 93 which is mandatory in England. New builds should not feature open plan which can be a challenging environment for learners with a range of other additional support needs, not only sensory impairment.
- The government should consider introducing a ‘Deaf Friendly’ and a ‘VI Friendly’ award or accreditation for educational establishments along the lines of Sports Scotland’s Gold Sports award which has no cost and is not overly bureaucratic to pursue. As with other suggestions, a deaf or VI friendly
approach benefits a range of learners, not only those with sensory impairment.

➢ Sensory impairment awareness should be a mandatory part of training for senior managers.
➢ Teachers who have a VI or HI qualification should have accreditation above the Professional Standard and there should be incentives to encourage more teachers to undertake the training.