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.

Response on behalf of
Falkirk Council Education Services Management Team

Part 1: Visual Impairment

There is a national shortage and aging profile of qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired. These teachers have a deep knowledge and understanding of a child or young person’s level of visual impairment and the implications for their social and emotional wellbeing and educational needs. They provide vital support to children and families from diagnosis to school leaving age and assist parents to develop the skills required to compensate for their child’s visual impairment from the earliest stages.

Falkirk recognises the importance and impact that these specialised staff make to the progress and attainment of visually impaired children or young people. A strategic plan and allocated funding is therefore in place in Falkirk to ensure the continuity of the excellent provision which was reflected in the HMIe report for the Sensory Service.

In order to raise attainment a similar strategic plan at a national level should be in place to ensure equity for visually impaired children or young people across the country. The government can support this in the following ways:

**Training and Continuing Professional Development**

- Provide ring-fenced budgets for training Teachers of the Visually Impaired.
- Teacher of the Visually Impaired training should be reviewed to include placements and more modules specific to visual impairment
- Provide funding for training Teachers of the Visually Impaired and support staff in Braille to Grade 2 where necessary.
- Advise that all those managing a service should have appropriate training to understand the issues affecting visually impaired children or young people.
**Staffing and Resources**

- Increase Teacher of the Visually Impaired and suitably qualified support staff input at 0-3 years for Early Intervention.
- Ensure children and young people with all levels of visual impairment have access to a qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired throughout their education.
- Ensure access to Habilitation and rehabilitation workers for all visually impaired children and young people who require it across the country.
- Provide funding to purchase appropriate technology and ensure compatibility with school networks.
- Provide Counselling Services as and when necessary to visually impaired children, young people and families at critical times such as diagnosis, deterioration or sudden loss of vision.
- Encourage Councils to increase the number of resource bases in schools across the country for those who require the highest level of support.
- Regulate qualifications and pay scales for support assistants who require Grade 2 Braille.

**Curriculum and Planning**

- Ensure equity of access to curriculum materials in an appropriate format for individual visually impaired children or young people.
- Recognise that children who have a more severe visual impairment may benefit from a reduced number of subjects in order to learn the additional skills required to access the curriculum and achieve higher qualifications.
- Ensure all new build schools are Visual Impairment-friendly.
- Reinforce the measures within the Children and Young People’s Act (2014) to ensure increased and improved liaison between Health, Education and other agencies regarding sharing information.

**Tertiary Education**

- Introduce input from Teachers of the Visually Impaired for deaf young people 16-18 years old in college to minimise drop out from courses due to lack of support.
- Ensure all tertiary education students have access to Disabled Student Allowance. (Currently provided for university students but not college students.)
- All sectors of education and initial training to have mandatory VI Awareness input on a regular basis, perhaps delivered by a third sector organisation.

**Part 2: Hearing Impairment**

There is a national shortage and aging profile of qualified Teachers of the Deaf and Educational Audiologists. These specialised staff have a deep knowledge and understanding of a child or young person’s level of deafness and the implications for their social and emotional wellbeing and educational needs. They provide vital support to children and families from diagnosis to school leaving age and assist parents to manage equipment and develop good communication skills with their children from the earliest stages.

Falkirk recognises the importance and impact that these specialised staff make to the progress and attainment of deaf child and young people. A strategic plan and allocated funding is therefore in
place in Falkirk to ensure the continuity of the excellent provision which was reflected in the HMIe report.

In order to raise attainment a similar strategic plan at a national level should be in place to ensure equity for deaf child and young people across the country.

The government should support this in the following ways:

**Put the Child at the Centre of Educational Planning**
- As education begins in the home the government should provide clear guidance for parents on how to ensure their child has the best possible start to develop language and communication. For example, all parents of deaf children could be guided to use appropriate amplification to ensure their child has access to speech and give them the opportunity to develop spoken language, amongst other strategies. This is in contrast to some prevailing ideologies where parents can opt for their children not to access residual hearing abilities.
- When children require alternative communication such as sign language, parents could be advised to recognise their responsibility to learn sign language and establish good communication with their children

**Training and Continuing Professional Development**
- Provide ring-fenced budgets for training Teachers of the Deaf and Educational Audiologists
- Encourage Scottish Qualifications Authority to develop British Sign Language national qualifications to a 'Higher' level as an option for British Sign Language users.
- Provide funding for training Teachers of the Deaf, Educational Audiologists and support staff in British Sign Language to a high level. Currently all courses, even at university level, are self-funded
- All sectors of education, including initial teacher training, to have mandatory Deaf Awareness input on a regular basis, perhaps delivered by a third sector organisation
- Advise that all those managing any children’s service should have relevant training to understand the issues affecting deaf child and young people

**Staffing and Resources**
- Increase Teachers of the Deaf and suitably qualified support staff input at 0-3 years for Early Intervention.
- Ensure child and young people with all levels of deafness (mild to profound, including those who have a cochlear implant) have access to a qualified Teacher of the Deaf throughout their education.
- Provide funding to purchase appropriate technology.
- Regulate qualifications and pay scales for Communication Support Workers.
- Encourage the training and use of electronic note takers in schools.

**Curriculum and Planning**
- Recognise that child and young people who have a more severe hearing impairment may benefit from a reduced number of subjects in order to learn the additional British Sign Language skills or subject-specific vocabulary required to access the curriculum and achieve higher qualifications.
• Reinforce the measures within the Children and Young People’s Act (2014) to ensure increased and improved liaison between Health, Education and other agencies regarding sharing information.
• Increase the number of resource bases in areas across Scotland for those who require a high level of support, alternative communication or peer support.
• Ensure all new build schools comply with current acoustic guidelines. These usually mitigate against ‘open plan’ designs.
• Ensure an acoustic engineer is employed to check compliance and to advise on new builds.

**Tertiary Education**
• Introduce input from Teachers of the Deaf for deaf young people 16-18 years old in college, as at present many drop out of courses due to lack of support.
• Ensure all tertiary education students have access to Disabled Student Allowance. This is currently provided for university students but not college students.

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