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

Glasgow City Council
Education Services

The support of children with VI/HI is a very specialist area. A number of years ago, taking into consideration the improvements in medical interventions for children with a hearing impairment, that is, better and earlier diagnosis, use of cochlear implants, we reviewed our approaches, We moved towards a more inclusive model with all children learning alongside their peers either in a mainstream school with a visiting teacher of deaf as appropriate to their needs or in specialist provision within a mainstream school. Our VI provision is similar.

We have listed below what we believe are the essential to raise the attainment of children and young people with a sensory impairment.

- Maintain strong partnership work with parents and provide regular opportunities for parents to engage with staff in education.
- Provide support for sighted parents with braille and hearing technology etc. to be able to support their child’s attainment.
- Maintain a pool of qualified teachers of the visually impaired / deaf who can work flexibly across the provision and, collectively, have experience at all levels (pre-school through to secondary education).
- Replacement of highly skilled, fully qualified practitioners who are retiring with qualified teachers who are committed to specialist training in Postgraduate Diploma. Ensure there is highly trained pool of specialist teachers of VI / HI and that this maintained. Note that this can be challenging when incidence is low. Maintaining skills and flexibility in staffing comes at a significant cost to authorities. It requires careful planning and commitment.
- Retention of those staff already skilled in the field wherever relevant and possible.
- Retain staffing flexibility within the staffing complement to cover absences, essential staff training etc.
- Regular opportunities for professional development in their specialism for VI teaching and support staff in the area of assistive technology to ensure that VI learners have access to the most current and practical technologies as well as being able to use them effectively.
- Regular and ongoing professional development to ensure all staff continue to develop and improve their specialist knowledge in HI, BSL and audiology. Professional development needs to be evidence-based, contextualised, and incorporate systematic monitoring of impact and continued support for teachers. Professional development needs to include all aspects of teaching and learning, including the specialism.
• Provision of training for staff and children and young people in all establishments on awareness of HI / VI and how to make the learning environment, ethos and culture as inclusive as possible

• Provision to ensure that the **teaching of key skills** like braille, use of tactile diagram techniques, BSL, basic audiology and associated technology, use of technology is carried out by specialists in the field

• **Transition arrangements** in place at the earliest stage allowing the young person to plan future pathways in discussion with key adults. Transition planning should include a risk assessment and mobility plan (VI) and, ideally, will continue smoothly into post school destinations with continuity of technology provision for VI / HI. Focused work on transitions from pre-school to primary, primary to secondary and secondary to post school.

• Provision of **personal support** for all young people with VI and HI throughout education and into post school destinations to maintain engagement with and reflection on learning and progress. Support should focus on early intervention and wide ranging, sustained support

• **A focus on achievement** in its widest sense as well as academic achievement. Key aspects to consider are progress towards achievement of the skills for life, learning and work, the four capacities and application of learning. Previously, we have had young people who have attained very well however they have found it very challenging to sustain positive destinations

• Engagement from employers, colleges and universities to ensure they support young people to sustain post school destinations and continue to provide the appropriate technology and supports

• Opportunity for learners with a visual / hearing impairment to meet with other young people with HI / VI – establishment of local networks that can be supported and maintained using social media. Support to mainstream schools to promote networking opportunities and engagement with parents from the HI/VI community

• Ensure that VI learners have **access to materials** in their preferred format so that they can access information alongside their peers, with minimal support from a QTVI/Support Worker. There has been a particular challenge with materials for new national courses being available too late for effective adaptation and production of materials for VI learners. This will hopefully improve as staff become more familiar with courses and the materials required.

• Ensure that HI/VI learners have **equality of opportunity** as their sighted peers – trips, clubs, supported study/homework groups etc.

• Ensure that provision is made for independent living training, mobility and orientation development, braille and tactile diagram/ touch typing teaching, instruction in using assistive technology as well as social skills development. Services provided by specialists in the field where possible and appropriate.

• Areas of **Maths, Science and Modern Languages** – particular importance needed in these areas especially for braille users. The skills of a QTVI teacher needs to include braille and tactile diagram competency, detailed subject
knowledge as VI learners will require extra support to catch up with work not completed in class due to the length of time it takes a VI learner to read and process materials and the ability to offer alternative questions if necessary (SQA level work especially) and the ability to communicate effectively and empathetically with VI learners.

- For deaf learners, early intervention is crucial for the development of language whatever mode of communication. Strong partnership working from the earliest stage with agreement on support for learners, clear roles and expectations for all agencies involved and good communication protocols.

- Equality of aspiration with their peers in terms of attainment and achievement, final destinations, positive role models and parental expectations.

- Need clear, objective information for parents from all agencies involved, including voluntary organisations. There needs to be agreement by agencies to ensure there is a clear, consistent message to parents.

- Flexibility in how children can access / opt for changes in their mode of communication – often, it is not a definitive option for some of our young people and we have several young people that switch between modes depending on the content of the lessons / learning environment.

- Focus of resources at early years – opportunity for children at the early stages to learn within their local community with appropriate support.

- Gather and analyse relevant data and evaluation evidence regularly, in partnership with other agencies. Maintain a record of all children with a sensory impairment within the authority to ensure information is up to date and shared across agencies and this is used to inform future planning, resource allocation and can ensure efficient response to change.

Glasgow City Council
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