Attainment of school pupils with a sensory impairment

This submission has been compiled by the staff of the Multi Sensory Service within the Education Department of Dundee City Council.

What can be done to improve the attainment of pupils with hearing and/or visual impairment?

Staffing/support
- Ensure that specialist education services to support these pupils remain focused only on HI and/or VI - not part of generic ASN service
- Maintain adequate numbers of staff - qualified teachers of the deaf and teachers of children/young people with a visual impairment and specialist support staff - in each area of Scotland
- Practise succession planning to allow for the approaching departure of many trained and experienced members of staff who are approaching retirement
- Provide educational audiology support for HI children/young people in each area
- Provide mobility /habilitation support for VI children/young people in each area

Training
- Teachers working with pupils with sensory loss must be appropriately qualified within the mandatory five year period - this should be checked
- Local authorities should give staff access to diploma/masters level courses not to competency route
- Teachers of the deaf should have funding for and access to appropriate training in British Sign Language (Level 3 minimum, as opposed to the current Level 1 required to complete the ToD qualification)
- There must be adequate funding to allow access to specialist training
- There should be greater availability of/access to specialist training courses for continuous lifelong professional learning - courses offered by the Scottish Sensory Centre are now expensive, especially if multiple members of staff are to attend. They are often delivered in the Central Belt, making it difficult for many to attend
- Parents of deaf children should have access to free courses in BSL, presented by qualified deaf tutors
- Specialist teaching and support staff have to be included in training for local and national initiatives in education, with extra time allowed for consideration of the delivery to/impact on the children/young people with sensory loss

Working in nursery and school settings
- Mainstream teachers and support staff are given regular and ongoing opportunities to access awareness raising sessions
- Children/young people are afforded appropriate support/means of communication in learning situations and in assessments
- For deaf pupils, subtitles are used consistently (from an early age) whenever DVDs, recordings of programmes, educational clips are shown (this means that providers/broadcasters have to be educated in the importance of subtitling)
- The acoustics of classrooms/social areas/specialist work areas are of huge importance - appropriate adaptations to the environment should be made and audiological equipment used, to afford the deaf child/young person the best possible access to the teacher’s voice and to those of his /her peers
- Experiential learning should be pursued
- ICT staff within authorities must be aware of - and able to provide - adaptations to technology to meet the particular needs of individual VI pupils, with settings which do not automatically reset at each network update
• Opportunities are available to meet deaf/VI role models
• VI pupils are provided with resources adapted to their specific requirements, which have been prepared far enough in advance
• School staff should be made aware of the social and emotional needs of the individual with HI/VI
• Access to specific programmes of work, e.g. mobility, touch typing, deaf studies will help develop the child/young person’s self confidence and independence
• Although the expectation is for inclusion, specialist teachers and support staff must be able to work with an individual/small group of children at times, to provide tutorial time, going over class input at the appropriate level/pace. This means that a suitable working space - with adequate space, lighting and acoustics - must be available
• Particular support must be given at the time of transition - both smaller transitions between stages within a school and major transitions at key stages

Working with parents
• Early intervention is crucial to allow the best outcomes (social, emotional, educational) for the child, providing support around use of specialist equipment, development of communication, social skills
• Developing supportive relationships with families is the first step to empowering parents/carers to make informed choices for their child
• Good relationships with parents should be developed and maintained so that there is ease of communication at all times
• Parents should be supported to access events/training from voluntary agencies such as RNIB or NDCS, allowing them to meet others in like situations
• Parents have access to adult role models, enabling them to meet deaf/VI people at a later stage in their lives

Working with partners
• All agencies must be working collaboratively, with the child at the centre and his/her parents/carers afforded their place as the child’s prime educators
• Children have the opportunity to be supported by paediatric specialists in HI/VI – paediatricians specialising in audiology and VI, audiologists, orthoptists, ophthalmologists, optometry consultants, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, specialists in community child health, social workers with deaf/VI people
• Shared work on creating pathways/protocols promotes better understanding of the work of partners and its importance in the development of the child/young person – there should be regular review of such documents and practices
• Good communication is essential - to allow for the speedy sharing of relevant information
• Computer systems of the different agencies should be able to “speak” to one another
• There must be regular opportunities to review the child’s progress and to share strategies for improving outcomes

General comments
• All involved with the HI and/or VI child/young person - parents/carers, specialist professionals, mainstream teachers and support staff - must be encouraged to look at the child holistically and to have high expectations of success/achievement
• If at all possible, it is important for the child/young person to meet others with similar needs so that he/she does not feel isolated as e.g. the only deaf child in the school

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