Submission from Scottish Association of Visual Impairment Educators

Comments re the Inquiry into attainment of school pupils with a sensory impairment

Sally Paterson- Chair of SAVIE, QTVI (previously at North Lanarkshire Council VI Service), Resource Centre Manager Royal Blind School.

1. There are significant issues surrounding staffing levels and qualifications. Some authorities consider 3 masters module VI training sufficient, not all demand the 6 modules with grade 2 braille. Some staff have no formal training/ qualification in VI and others on temporary contracts are refused funding to allow for this training and so can be reemployed year on year with no possibility of qualification. Service managers are consistently being replaced by managers untrained in VI with no expectation that this should be a mandatory condition of taking up the post. Similarly, qualified and experienced staff, able to ensure delivery of a high standard of VI education are routinely being prevented from taking up these posts. All the above staff training issues and dilution of training standards and expectations have a very significant impact on the education and therefore attainment of our visually impaired young people.

2. School facilities which are not fit for purpose pose a threat to attainment. Provision in North Lanarkshire for some of the most severely impaired children is in a Victorian age school building. As a popular mainstream provision the school role is above 500. This leaves little, if any, extra provision in terms of necessary practical working space. Class sizes at capacity make it very difficult to provide the best education for these pupils or allow for children to transfer mid session. With no power to cap places and leave more room for pupils and essential VI activities and equipment, attainment suffers.

3. Attainment is suffering through lack of habilitation services. Many VI children have access to a reasonable standard of curricular resources but with little or no time devoted to life/independent living skills, academic achievement is of less value. Statistically VI young people have poor prospects in the job market. It is essential that VI children receive habilitation skills training consistently from an early age. More staff are needed, accessible training opportunities should be provided across the country. This point can also be related to the need for properly qualified school staff with time and the working environment to support the extension of these life skills with their pupils. A much higher value and commitment must be placed on habilitation skills if we are to see an increase in attainment among VI children.

4. Attainment of VI children with additional needs should not be overlooked. With the presumption of mainstream education many VI are staff are trying to support increasing numbers of children with significant additional needs. Due to the diverse range of ages and needs of these VI children it is difficult for staff to be qualified in all areas. VI training provides a broad range of skills but with more children being supported with cortical visual impairments some staff can be less qualified to support these pupils. With more specific training opportunities and room for specialisation of skills children would benefit from enhanced attainment.