Educational Attainment Gap
The role of parents and guardians
NDCS response to call for written evidence

The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this call for written evidence by the Committee on the issue of how parents, guardians and schools can best work together to improve attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

1. Background

1.1. The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow led by Heather Gray. The team has a strong focus on addressing the attainment gap that exists for deaf learners. This includes the work we do with our Young Campaigners who are a group of deaf young people aged 14-20 years old. They call for better services and campaign on issues affecting deaf children in Scotland.

1.2. Please refer to our submission dated 27 February for further background information about NDCS.

2. Context

2.1. Scottish Government data shows that there is a significant attainment gap for hearing impaired school leavers, and the attainment of this group is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland.

2.2. In the 2012/14 year, the average tariff score of deaf school leavers was 289, while the average score for leavers with no additional support needs was 439. In the same year, almost 10% of deaf school leavers left with no school qualifications.

2.3. Deaf school leavers face a significant attainment gap in their post school destinations and employability. According to Scottish Government data, 19% of deaf school leavers found employment upon leaving school last year compared with 25.5% of those leavers with no additional support needs. UK wide employment figures also suggest that only 58% of deaf adults are employed compared with 80% of the hearing adult population.

2.4. NDCS believes that families, and the role of parents and guardians, is the most important influence on deaf children and young people and need clear, balanced information so they can make informed decisions. The role of education and
other services, not just schools, is critical in supporting parents to establish nurturing and inclusive home environments for deaf children in the early years and beyond.

3. whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches);

3.1. Parents and guardians of children with additional support needs, such as those who are deaf, need particular support and knowledge in order to understand how they can help their child’s learning and development. Around 90% of parents of deaf children are hearing, meaning that since their child’s birth they experience barriers in fostering the rich linguistic and communicative environments required to ensure the positive development of their child in the early years.

3.2. As such, parents and guardians of deaf children may require additional support and information to ensure they fully understand the unique ways in which their children learn. Much of the information required by parents of deaf children is specialist in nature, covering issues such as acoustics, hearing technology or how to help deaf children develop new vocabulary given that they often lack the benefit of incidental learning – the unintended learning that happens as a result of hearing the world around them. This specialist information may also cover issues such as working memory, a critical skill children need to develop numeracy skills but one deaf children experience more barriers in developing. These are just a few examples of how the ways in which deaf children learn are different to hearing children and why specialist information and support is required.

3.3. While 80% of deaf children are educated within mainstream schools, deafness is a low incidence need and mainstream teachers are unlikely to gain the experience and develop the knowledge and skills to ensure deaf children can access the curriculum effectively. At the recent Deaf Learners Conference held in partnership by NDCS and Education Scotland, young people identified deaf awareness at their school as one of their top challenges affecting their school experiences. Practitioners within mainstream schools may not hold specialist knowledge in deafness and therefore may not be best placed to support parents in developing their child’s learning with regards to literacy and numeracy. Deaf learners and their parents and guardians often rely on peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf for support.

3.4. Teachers of the Deaf are more likely to be appropriately skilled to support parents. The Scottish Government have recognised the need for teachers working wholly or mainly with deaf children to obtain a mandatory post-graduate qualification in deaf education. Under this legislation, local authorities must ensure that teachers:

(a) acquire knowledge, understanding and skills of a generic or core nature which will provide a sound foundation for teachers to work with children and young persons with additional support needs;
(b) acquire additional specialised knowledge, understanding and skills to enable them to operate as effective teachers of pupils who have hearing impairment, or visual impairment, or both hearing and visual impairment.

3.5. The Scottish Government has also set out the competencies which Teachers of the Deaf should acquire. These include among others:

- a critical knowledge of different types of linguistic and developmental assessments relevant to hearing impaired pupils, and an ability to carry out a range of assessments, and to interpret and use assessment results effectively, applying them to the curriculum and to skills of daily living.

- an ability to interpret and evaluate audiological assessments, and provide professional advice and comment to parents, other professionals, and to the pupils concerned, on the implications of these assessments for pupil audition with amplification;

- an understanding of the linguistic potential of hearing impaired pupils, of barriers to language and literacy acquisition which they may face, and an understanding of the approaches to and processes of language and literacy development;

- an understanding of cognitive/intellectual potential and diversity, both verbal and non-verbal, among hearing impaired pupils, and implications for learning;

3.6. Teachers of the Deaf who are skilled in this way can provide vital support to parents and guardians and their deaf children. However, NDCS is concerned that there are inconsistencies in the delivery of peripatetic services. Investment in these services varies across Scotland, with a third of Teachers of the Deaf not holding the mandatory qualification. Many peripatetic services are being increasingly affected by moves towards an inclusion agenda and subsequent reduction in specialist services, proposed service redesign, staff restructure or proposed budget reduction. In addition, there has been almost the complete withdrawal of Educational Audiology across Scotland and the specialist workforce faces the ongoing problem of its ageing workforce, with over 50% of Teachers of the Deaf due to retire within the next 10 to 15 years.¹

3.7. These peripatetic services are critical to supporting and informing parents and guardians in order that they can better support the learning and development of their deaf children. NDCS recommends that there continues to be investment into these services and that Education Scotland carries out an Aspect Review into education provision for deaf learners to ensure service provision is fit for purpose and to set out recommendations to improve outcomes for deaf learners. This Review could also explore the unique challenges parents of deaf children face in helping raise their children’s attainment, setting out recommendations for improvement.

3.8. The role of the third sector in equipping parents and guardians to support the learning and development of their deaf child is also substantial. NDCS produces a range of resources and publications for parents and guardians with information and advice on how to support their child’s development. These include resources for supporting the development in literacy and numeracy from the early years

¹ Consortium for Research Into Deaf Education, 2014, Scotland Report
right through to secondary age. NDCS also publishes a number of resources around communication, technology, parenting, education and financial support. There is scope to improve how schools and organisations like Education Scotland support parents to access this kind of valuable information by disseminating resources and signposting to third sector organisations.

3.9. The NDCS family support and advice services offer parents and guardians an opportunity to obtain impartial information and advice on how to support their deaf children. NDCS also offers a range of events and courses for parents which aim to empower and inform. These include Family Sign Language courses, Parenting a Deaf Child courses, Newly Identified Weekend events, as well as Pre-school Weekend events and other information days and workshops. These events are often the only information sessions available for parents and guardians of deaf children in their local area and play a critical role in informing parents, and raising their confidence in supporting their children.

3.10. The role of multi-agency working is critical too to support parents and guardians to help raise the attainment of their deaf children. Strong messages are required from professionals across agencies that work with deaf children to highlight factors that influence learning to parents and guardians. Audiologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists, social workers and others all have a role to play in supporting parents. For example, research has found that if a child only wears their hearing aids for 4 hours a day, it would take that child 6 years to acquire the language that a hearing child would develop in one year. There is a significant role for professionals across health, social care, education and the third sector to relay these critical messages to parents to ensure they are supporting the learning and development of their deaf child in the best possible way.

4. whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example);

no comments

5. the extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils;

5.1. Disadvantaged is not defined here, but considering the attainment of deaf children is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland – they are a disadvantaged group. Similarly, given that 90% of parents and guardians of deaf children are hearing and therefore experience challenges in communicating with their child, they are also a disadvantaged group. As discussed above, there is little provision for parents and guardians of deaf children directly from schools. Many parents of deaf children, and those parents with other additional support needs, tell NDCS that they often feel isolated and uninformed. Their child could be the only deaf child in the school and they often feel a lack of opportunity to meet other parents in similar situations, and do not receive information or signposting to support. There is scope to improve how schools are communicating with parents in this respect, and connecting parents in similar situations together through parent forums.
5.2. Parents and guardians of deaf children are not a homogenous group, and within this population there are particular groups of parents that experience additional barriers. For example, recent research from the University of Edinburgh on the post-school destinations of deaf and hard of hearing school leavers found that those from socio-economic deprived backgrounds experienced a double disadvantage as they often experienced a lack of parental support, guidance and advocacy. There is a need to ensure that those parents from lower socio economic backgrounds feel informed and empowered to support their deaf children. The research clearly showed that where parental advocacy was effective, deaf young people saw better outcomes including having appropriate support in place, higher academic attainment and more positive and sustained post school destinations being achieved.

5.3. In addition, those parents and guardians from black and minority ethnic backgrounds may experience additional cultural and linguistic barriers. Having English as an additional language, or in some cases the cultural perceptions and stigma attached to deafness may impact on how a parent is able to support their deaf child. There is a need for schools to identify those parents experiencing these additional barriers and understand how to signpost and engage with these groups. NDCS for example delivers a BME Volunteer Network through which we support parents and guardians of deaf children who do not have English as their first language. Our volunteers can support families by providing translation and one to one support in 12 community languages including Urdu, Arabic and Polish. NDCS also supports the Scottish Minority Deaf Children’s Society which is a national group for families with deaf children with English as an additional language, through this group families can access information, events and contact other parents in similar situations. Improving how schools signpost parents to organisations like NDCS can facilitate more parents to feel equipped to support their children.

5.4. Another group of parents and guardians who experience additional barriers are those who are deaf themselves. These individuals may require communication support to engage with schools which can be time-consuming and expensive to arrange. For those with British Sign Language as their first language, understanding written communications from the school in English may also be challenging and important information may not be fully conveyed to parents if this is not addressed. Schools should be aware of this group of parents and make appropriate provision to meet their needs to ensure they have all the information they need to best support their deaf child.

6. whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland;

6.1. There is a clear power imbalance between parents and professionals that can prevent beneficial partnership working. NDCS is often told by parents that when they are concerned about an issue, such as the level of support their child is received, they may feel ambivalent about formally raising the issue incase there are negative implications such as undermining their relationship with

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2 University of Edinburgh, 2013. *Post-school transitions of people who are deaf and hard of hearing*
professionals and ultimately affecting the support their child receives. Where schools and local authorities are working to genuinely embed the principle of co-production and partnership working there are clear benefits for parents, guardians, children and young people.

6.2. In England for example, through the Aiming High for Disabled Children project co-production has been embedded across the country by way of central government funding which established local parents of disabled children forums. These forums have had much success in fostering positive partnership working between parents, local services and schools. Scotland would benefit from a similar project which would increase the networks that exist for parents and formalise how these work together with local services.

7. Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment;

No comments

8. Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment.

8.1. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act places the GIRFEC principles into statute, and these include the need for children and families to always know where they can find help, and puts the child or young person, and their family at the centre. Local authorities are at different stages in implementing GIRFEC, and how consistently this is achieved across Scotland will have a great impact on the ethos services display with regards to involving and supporting parents and ultimately how equipped they are to help raise their child’s attainment. Similarly throughout the implementation of GIRFEC more work is required to ensure parents are aware of the GIRFEC guidance and framework and understand how best to use it.

8.2. There are currently no minimum standards or national guidance in Scotland on how to provide effective support to deaf learners. Peripatetic services for deaf learners are not regularly inspected or quality assured through a national framework. In addition, despite the introduction of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening in 2005, there are no accompanying set of standards or guidance in terms of how to support families and deaf children in the early years. The absence of this kind of national guidance means parents often are not clear about the types of support their child should receive and therefore how and when they should challenge services to ensure support is in place. The development of this guidance by the Scottish Government would support both local authorities and parents to help raise the attainment of deaf learners.

8.3. More support for parents and guardians of deaf children in the early years is also critical to ensure they are equipped from the earliest stage to support their child’s learning and development. There is, for example, currently no nationally funded classes to teach parents of deaf children Family Sign Language. NDCS
recommends that the Scottish Government invests in this vital opportunity for families with deaf children.

8.4. The emotional health and wellbeing of deaf learners is critical to their confidence and achievement. 40% of deaf young people are likely to experience mental ill health compared with 25% of other young people. At the recent Deaf Learners Conference, another key theme which emerged from the young people who attended was the impact of bullying and social isolation on their confidence and wellbeing. Parents need more support to identify and address issues affecting their child’s wellbeing, this could include more tailored parenting courses, more peer support opportunities as well as more specific information about the emotional health and wellbeing of deaf young people and how to support this.

8.5. The Attainment Scotland Fund presents significant opportunities to address the achievement and attainment of the lowest attaining groups in Scotland. At the moment the fund is set up to target local authorities where there are the largest numbers of young people from the most deprived socio-economic backgrounds. However it is unclear how the funds will be used to address the attainment of disabled learners, such as those who are deaf, whose attainment is among the lowest of all. Deafness is not correlated to socio-economic deprivation and so targeting funds in this way may not benefit these learners. NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government invests a portion of the Scotland Attainment Fund into a pilot to improve the attainment of a group of learners with a particular additional support need such as hearing or sensory impairment.

8.6. There is a need to strengthen the information made available to parents so ensure they are fully equipped and empowered to help raise the attainment of their children. Parents and guardians of deaf children and those with children with other additional support needs are often looking for a local central hub of information where they can find tailored information to their needs according to their local area. While these kinds of information hubs are currently being developed across England through the Local Offer initiative there is no equivalent consistent information provision in Scotland.

8.7. NDCS recommends that resource is invested into setting up active local parent forums and that local authorities are encouraged to embed co-production practice with these forums as a key partner. The National Parent Forum Scotland does have some local groups across Scotland which would be a good starting point for this development.

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