



21 August 2020

Dear colleague

Meeting the needs of deaf children and young people as schools and colleges re-open in Wales

This is an open letter to you from three leading organisations supporting deaf children and young people in the UK: the National Deaf Children's Society, the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP).

By deaf child, we mean any child or young person with any level of hearing loss. With around 2,500 deaf children across Wales, of which nearly 90% attend mainstream schoolsⁱ, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support for deaf students over the recent challenging months and signpost you to some guidance we have developed that may be helpful as schools and colleges re-open.

We know you will share our ambition that deaf students should return with the same opportunity to achieve as other students. We also know that the re-opening of schools and colleges presents a number of challenges in how to manage the risk of further transmission of coronavirus. It is not our role to give public health advice. However, we believe it is important that there is a consideration around risks to individual deaf students if they do not receive specialist support and that such risks are balanced against any public health concerns.

Our guidance sets out some specific issues to consider for risk assessments you are carrying out, as well as mitigating steps that can be taken in response to particular concerns:

- [Guidance for schools](#)ⁱⁱ (English)
- [Guidance for schools](#)ⁱⁱⁱ (Welsh)
- [Guidance for colleges](#)^{iv} (English)
- [Guidance for colleges](#)^v (Welsh)

Below we set out some very specific points that we would like to highlight:

Peripatetic (visiting teacher) support for deaf students

Government guidance^{vi} has been clear that peripatetic (visiting) Teachers of the Deaf should be allowed entry into schools and colleges, providing a number of precautions are taken:

"Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and/or other temporary staff can move between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for learners with SEN should provide interventions as usual. Schools should consider how to manage other visitors to the site, such as contractors and ensure site guidance on social/physical distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival. Where visits can happen outside of school hours, they should. A record should be kept of all visitors."

We welcome this advice, particularly in light of the fact that the specialist support that deaf children normally receive – across audiology, education and technology - may have been severely limited since the coronavirus lockdown began. Schools and colleges clearly have a vital role to play in re-establishing important routines and specialist support that enable deaf students to access learning.

We acknowledge that, in some cases, schools and colleges may prefer specialist support to be provided remotely instead or that, in some cases, there is no alternative because of, for example, any local lockdowns or because children are shielding or self-isolating. Our advice is that schools and colleges should **not** impose any blanket approaches in this area. Instead, schools and colleges should consider individual risks to deaf students if support is not provided face-to-face. Whilst support to deaf students can sometimes be provided remotely (and is preferable to providing no support at all), this is not always the most optimal approach. Reasons why a face-to-face visit may be more effective include:

- the student finds it difficult to access sound or see lip patterns/signs clearly on a screen
- the need to provide coaching or demonstrate or model good practice which cannot be done effectively remotely
- to carry out accurate and effective assessments and monitoring
- when fitting or checking equipment, such as radio aids.

More generally, we encourage schools and colleges to involve Teachers of the Deaf in any discussions around risk assessments for individual deaf students, as well as around any wider changes to teaching and learning and any catch-up programmes of support being introduced.

Specialist equipment

Many deaf students will use radio aid hearing technology to help them hear their teacher clearly over any background noise. This will usually require the device to be passed between the student and teacher. It will be important to emphasise hygiene requirements – i.e. regular handwashing – when handling radio aids. Radio aids can also be cleaned before and after they are used. Please note this must be done carefully to avoid damage to the device. A Teacher of the Deaf or Educational Audiologist can provide advice on this. In addition, the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) has also provided [guidance](#)^{vii}.

Remote learning

We acknowledge the possibility that some schools and colleges may be forced to close again temporarily in the event of any local lockdowns. There may also be a return to remote or blended learning. As you will appreciate, this can pose a number of specific challenges for many deaf students and their families. It is important there is thought on how this can be made accessible to them. You may wish to review the National Deaf Children's Society [checklist](#)^{viii} of issues to consider.

In terms of any safeguarding issues that may arise from providing remote support, we recognise any policies in this area must be followed. We believe, however, this should be proportionate to the situation and balanced against risk to individual children if they do not receive the specialist support they need, as much as possible.

Face masks and coverings

Our reading of the government guidance^{ix} is that face masks or coverings are not required in education, except in situations where social distancing is difficult or when needed to meet a child's personal care needs.

As the Government states: *“the impact of wearing a face coverings for a deaf learner or learners with any level of hearing loss should be carefully considered”*. Teaching is based on being able to communicate clearly to students and clear communication is especially important for deaf children and young people. The use of face masks or coverings would have a very significant impact on the ability of deaf children and young people to communicate, to the extent that attendance at school or college may be redundant.

We acknowledge the sensitivities around this area. We ask that, if face masks or coverings are being worn in your education setting, a discussion takes place with the student, family and a Teacher of the Deaf to identify the risks to the deaf student’s access to learning and emotional wellbeing and identify alternative arrangements that still allow them full access to education.

More information

The National Deaf Children’s Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)^x provides more information on coronavirus and support for deaf children and is regularly updated, in response to any changes in government guidance and/or feedback from professionals. A range of coronavirus-related resources are also available through [BATOD](#)^{xi} and the [NatSIP](#)^{xii}.

As well as contacting your local authority specialist education service for deaf children, you can also contact the National Deaf Children’s Society [helpline](#)^{xiii} if you would like further information, advice or support.

We thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Debbie Thomas, Head of Policy and Influencing (Wales), National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru

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- ⁱ Including children in mainstream schools with resource provisions. Source: www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE or www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/.
- ⁱⁱ www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-final.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6020/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-ndcs-guidance-final-welsh.pdf
- ^{iv} www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/return-to-college-guidance-english-finaldocx.pdf
- ^v www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6054/return-to-college-guidance-welsh-final.pdf
- ^{vi} <https://gov.wales/new-guidance-support-september-schools-return>
- ^{vii} www.batod.org.uk/resource/uk-assistive-listening-technology-working-group-and-batod-joint-advice/
- ^{viii} www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/deaf-friendly-remote-learning-a-checklist-for-teachers/
- ^{ix} <https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-covid-19>
- ^x www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/
- ^{xi} www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/
- ^{xii} www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources
- ^{xiii} www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline