

Survey reveals communication is paramount for deaf children's development

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A small scale survey carried out by The Office for Standards in Education has revealed that early diagnosis and access to communication support is the key for insuring deaf children's well-being and life progression.

Inspectors found that a diagnosis at birth was crucial to securing access and benefiting from the newborn hearing screening programme. The Ofsted inspectors found that each local authority was providing effective communication between specialist education and health support services.

Ofsted found that specialist support from 'teachers of the deaf' was an important factor and pivotal role in providing support and spreading awareness among teachers and staff working with deaf children.

Deputy Chief Inspector for Ofsted, John Goldup welcomed to report and said.

"This report provides some excellent examples of good support services for deaf children. What was clear was the commitment and determination from professionals and parents to work together to ensure that children's needs were met."

"The expertise of staff helped to provide children with the right support at the right time. Staff empathised and understood the impact on children of being deaf, and recognised the importance for these children to find their own identity through contact with other deaf children and having access to deaf adults as role models."

Deafness itself is not a barrier to educational achievement. In the cases looked at there were examples of effective working across local authority boundaries to enable children to attend the right school for them. When children were diagnosed early, placed in the right school, with parent or carer involvement and with the right support, deaf children can achieve just as well as their hearing peers.

For example, in one case a child was making very good progress when he moved to a specialist school for deaf children. He was taking A levels and was predicted to gain a C in mathematics, which was a huge improvement since year 10 when his best attainment in maths was an E (at that point he had not become deaf). He planned to study computer science and had received offers from universities.

Training staff who work with deaf children was important to providing effective support. Whenever a deaf child started nursery or school the specialist education support team undertook deaf awareness training with all the staff working with the child, tailored for each child's particular needs. As well as this, specialist staff and social workers for deaf children had appropriate professional training which kept their knowledge and skills up to date.

However, while the report found many examples of effective joint working to support deaf children, the quality assurance and evaluation of impact of services was not well developed. Overall, the auditing and reporting of the quality of multi-agency services were underdeveloped.

Notes to Editors:

1. The report Communication is the key can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Inspectors visited three local authorities including Hounslow, Newcastle and Suffolk. They examined 13 cases in depth. These cases were selected by local authorities as examples of good practice with deaf children. In each local authority inspectors examined children's social care and education case records. In addition, inspectors met with a wide range of health, education and social care professionals and staff. They also met directly with seven children, observing five children with parents and/or professionals and met with 12 parents.

There are 34,927 deaf children in England and around 19% have some form of additional special educational need. Eighty-one per cent of school-aged children are in mainstream education and while the educational attainment of deaf children is improving year on year, it continues to lag well behind that of

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their hearing peers.

Models of service delivery varied as did the range of educational provision which children attended. All had teams of specialist teachers of deaf children who provided outreach support to children at home and in various education settings. They also worked with teachers, parents and carers to develop their understanding and skills in supporting the children. All had specialist education resource centres for deaf children. Children attended a mix of mainstream schools, special schools or non-maintained schools for deaf children.

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Company Contact:

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Falcon PR

T. 01617433638

E. hello@falcon-pr.co.uk

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