



24 May 2021

Dear colleague

## **Meeting the needs of deaf students in schools and colleges during summer term 2021**

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).

As previously, we wish to take the opportunity to highlight steps that should be taken to ensure that deaf students continue to receive the support they need, despite ongoing coronavirus concerns and challenges. We are especially mindful of the growing concerns about new variants of coronavirus and how these might impact on existing plans to ease coronavirus restrictions.

By deaf student, we mean any child or young person with any level of hearing loss. With over 46,000 deaf children and young people across England, of which nearly 85% attend mainstream settings<sup>i</sup>, we would like to again take this opportunity to thank you for your support for deaf students over the past year.

### **Face coverings**

As you will appreciate, the use of face coverings has a significant impact on deaf students in terms of access to learning but also their social and emotional wellbeing. We acknowledge the importance of public health and appreciate the steps that professionals have taken to minimise the impact of face coverings on deaf students.

Department for Education [guidance](#)<sup>ii</sup> has recently changed to no longer recommend face coverings be worn in secondary or college classrooms or by students in communal areas. However, we recognise that face coverings may sometimes continue to be worn, especially in areas where there are localised outbreaks.

As before, there is an exemption in place that would allow staff and other pupils to remove their face covering when communicating with a deaf student. However, we know many deaf students may feel uncomfortable asking others to temporarily remove their face covering. We are pleased that Department for Education guidance now also:

1. Sets out the legal duty to make reasonable adjustments and importance of discussing these with the student and their families. It will also be important to seek advice from your local sensory support service, where possible. Guidance now provides examples of reasonable adjustments, shown at the end of this letter.
2. Highlights the potential benefits of wearing transparent face coverings in supporting communication. If face coverings are being worn, we would encourage you to, as much as possible, make transparent face

coverings available. The National Deaf Children's [blog](#)<sup>iii</sup> provides information on commercial providers of clear face masks.

3. Acknowledges that a face shield or visor can be considered as an alternative to the exemption, providing that a risk assessment is carried out.

## Specialist support

Many deaf students rely on specialist support from a range of professionals, including peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf, speech and language therapists, teaching assistants and communication support workers. We expect schools and colleges to do everything they can to arrange and facilitate access to this specialist support. We hope the expansion of the vaccination programme and widespread use of lateral tests has removed any outstanding barriers in this area.

Government guidance for [schools](#)<sup>iv</sup> and [colleges](#)<sup>v</sup> continues to be clear that peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf should be allowed entry into education settings:

*“Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils with SEND should provide interventions as usual. They, as well as supply teachers, peripatetic teachers or other temporary staff, can move between settings. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff.”*

## Exams and assessments

It will be important that any grades awarded to deaf students fairly reflect their abilities and achievements. The Department for Education has [emphasised](#)<sup>vi</sup> the need for reasonable adjustments to be made for disabled students in how grades are determined.

Ofqual has also set out the need<sup>vii</sup> for Heads of Centres to consult with specialists and SENCOs in the grading of disabled students. In this context, specialists will include peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf or any other specialist professional working closely with a deaf student.

Failing to take these steps may provide grounds for an appeal by a deaf student.

## Catch up support

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf and sensory support services will continue to have a key role to play in providing advice on and support for any catch-up programmes or tuition that may be in place for any individual deaf students. This will be especially important if catch-up support or tuition is being provided by someone who has not worked with a deaf child before.

## More information

Our guidance provides further suggestions on mitigating steps on the above and other areas that would enable you to ensure that deaf students can continue to access education.

- [Guidance for schools](#)<sup>viii</sup>
- [Guidance for colleges](#)<sup>ix</sup>

The National Deaf Children's Society [coronavirus blog for professionals](#)<sup>x</sup> also provides more information on coronavirus and support for deaf students 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](#)<sup>xi</sup> and the [NatSIP](#)<sup>xii</sup>.

As well as contacting your local specialist education service for deaf children, you can also contact the National Deaf Children's Society [helpline](#)<sup>xiii</sup> if you would like further information, advice or support.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thacker, Deputy Director, Local Engagement, National Deaf Children's Society

Martine Monksfield, President, BATOD

Lindsey Rousseau, Facilitator, NatSIP

## Annex: Reasonable adjustments where face coverings are being worn

Taken from Department for Education [guidance](#)<sup>xiv</sup> on face coverings in education

*“The following is a non-exhaustive list which provides examples of possible adjustments:*

- *the provision and effective use of assistive listening devices, such as radio aids*
- *an increased focus on the listening environment, minimising all unnecessary background noise - steps should be taken so that children with hearing loss are taught in classrooms with the best possible acoustic conditions*
- *allowing the use of speech-recognition apps on mobile devices and tablets in classrooms, taking into account possible variations in the effectiveness of such apps in different classroom situations*
- *additional communication support, including remote speech-to-text reporters or sign language interpreters.*

*Where appropriate, education settings should discuss with pupils and parents the types of reasonable adjustments that are being considered to support an individual.”*

The National Deaf Children’s Society has produced [an infographic](#)<sup>xv</sup> for teachers which summarises these and other reasonable adjustments.

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<sup>i</sup> Including children in mainstream schools with resource provisions. Source: [www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE) or [www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/](http://www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/).

<sup>ii</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education)

<sup>iii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/clear-face-masks-and-face-coverings-where-to-buy-and-what-to-look-for/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/clear-face-masks-and-face-coverings-where-to-buy-and-what-to-look-for/)

<sup>iv</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak)

<sup>v</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision)

<sup>vi</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/964583/Letter from Gavin Williamson to Ofqual.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964583/Letter_from_Gavin_Williamson_to_Ofqual.pdf)

Key excerpt: *“In line with requirements in a normal year, I expect teachers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students under the Equality Act, in relation to work set where the need for such adjustments has been identified. Where this has not been possible in relation to evidence already collected, or where a student is unwell at the time of a forthcoming assessment, I expect teachers to substitute this evidence where possible, but if necessary, to either take account of the impact of the absence of the reasonable adjustment in the judgement they make, or disregard that evidence so as not to prejudice the overall judgement.”*

<sup>vii</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021)

<sup>viii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6009/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-schools-february-2021.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021.docx.pdf](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6053/education-and-coronavirus-advice-to-colleges-february-2021.docx.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-support-for-deaf-children-information-for-professionals/)

<sup>xi</sup> [www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/](http://www.batod.org.uk/resource/suggested-resources-from-batod-members/)

<sup>xii</sup> [www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources](http://www.natsip.org.uk/coronavirus-advice-and-resources)

<sup>xiii</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/helpline)

<sup>xiv</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education)

<sup>xv</sup> [www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6851/reasonable-adjustments-in-schools-and-colleges-infographic.png](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6851/reasonable-adjustments-in-schools-and-colleges-infographic.png)