

A New Way Forward for Deaf and Hard Of Hearing Children in Irish Schools

For the first time in Ireland, the future direction for the education of over 3,000 Deaf and hard of hearing children has been mapped out by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

Launching the policy advice, Ms Teresa Griffin, CEO, NCSE stated that “We want to transform the education system to enable Deaf and hard of hearing children achieve at the same levels as all other children. Deaf and hard of hearing children must be exposed to language – signed or spoken or both – from as early as possible”. Ms Griffin said that the NCSE paper sets out “clear messages about what must be put in place for this goal to be achieved.”

The significance of today’s paper is highlighted by the findings of a key study in the US, which suggests that the level of reading for 17-18 year olds who are Deaf and hard of hearing is the same as that of hearing children aged 9. However, with effective early intervention and skilled teaching, the average language and early reading skills of young children with a hearing loss has been found to be similar to hearing children.

Teresa McDonnell – a parent of a Deaf child – welcomed the publication of the policy advice saying “We have been waiting a long time for this advice. We now look forward to the Minister taking the policy advice on board and a real difference in academic outcomes for our children.”

The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., welcomed the publication of the NCSE’s report and said: ‘this is a very thoroughly researched and comprehensive report which addresses all of the main issues affecting the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children in Ireland. The report’s recommendations take into account best international practices and outline a clear pathway for the planning of future educational provision. The aim is to remove as many obstacles as possible to ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing children have every opportunity to achieve levels of educational attainment which are on a par with their hearing peers of similar ability’.

Media are invited to attend. Spokespersons can be made available to the media on the day.

Launch details: 3rd February 11:30-13:00, Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

For further information, please contact Jennifer Doran, Head of Research and Communication, National Council for Special Education at 087 1319681 or 046 9486465.

The report can be downloaded from www.ncse.ie on Friday 3rd February at 1pm.

Notes to Editor

Why is this paper so important?

1. Over 3,000 children in Ireland have a permanent hearing loss which can affect their communication and reading skills and their social and emotional development.
2. Research evidence shows that internationally, Deaf and hard of hearing children do not achieve academic outcomes at the same level as hearing children of similar ability. For example, a key study in the US suggests that the level of reading for 17-18 year olds who are Deaf and hard of hearing is the same as that of hearing children aged 9. These difficulties in reading affect students' ability to learn and develop skills in other areas.
3. Where effective early intervention and skilled teaching is provided, the average language and early reading skills of young children with a hearing loss has been found to be similar to hearing children.
4. Following extensive consultation and research, the National Council for Special Education has prepared policy advice to show how Irish Deaf and hard of hearing children can be given the opportunity to achieve academic outcomes similar to their hearing peers.
5. This paper being launched provides a blueprint to guide the development of appropriate early intervention and school services.

What are the other key messages in the paper?

6. **Access to Language:** Research shows that access to any language, oral or signed, is vital and will improve the ability of Deaf and hard of hearing children to benefit from education. The paper recommends that all Deaf and hard of hearing children and their families should be provided with the opportunity to learn sign language from the time of diagnosis. While this scheme currently exists, not all families are aware of and availing of it.

Isolation is a significant difficulty for Deaf and hard of hearing children who communicate through sign language. The paper recommends that a grant should be made available to schools to provide sign language instruction for the hearing children in a class where a sign language user is enrolled.

7. **Access to teachers who understand how Deaf and hard of hearing children think and learn:** Deaf and hard of hearing children think and learn differently to hearing pupils. Research shows that if teachers communicate well in the language used by their students, this represents "best practice" in Deaf education. The paper makes a number of recommendations in relation to teacher training and qualifications to ensure that teachers understand how Deaf and hard of hearing children think and learn in order to support them in the classroom.
8. Many of the recommendations in the paper can be implemented within current resources with no additional cost. Other recommendations do have cost implications. The importance of this paper is that – for the first time – the Department of Education and Skills has advice on how investment in the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children can be targeted effectively to deliver better outcomes. The paper provides a road map to guide future spending decisions as the economic situation improves.