

Written evidence submitted by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)

The Government's Catch-up programme, Education Recovery and Deaf Children

- Deafness is not in itself a learning disability and deaf children cover the same range of abilities as other children, there are a range of different things that will help them many of which work as well for deaf children as for other children.
- Although, as a charity, we are focused on deafness, many of the things we will talk about today will benefit all children. For example, changes to the classroom environment will have wider benefits, as will ensuring accessible online learning becomes the norm.
- As every deaf child is different and as teachers may not always be familiar with the needs of deaf children it is important that schools and colleges receive specialist advice on whether any adjustments are required, depending on the individual needs of deaf children. For deaf children, Teachers of the Deaf will play a key role in providing this advice.

The Need for Tailed Catch-up support

Deaf children and young people have faced significant disadvantages in accessing education since the coronavirus pandemic began, with many struggling to follow online lessons or understand their teachers where face coverings are being worn in classrooms. Ensuring that they receive appropriate and accessible catch-up support must be a priority if we are to prevent further disadvantage.

Deaf students will clearly benefit from many of the same catch-up strategies already being deployed in many schools and colleges – such as small groups, 1-1 support and extra-curricular activities.

However, some interventions may not be appropriate, depending on the individual needs of deaf students. For example, any proposal to lengthen the school day may cause issues for some deaf students in terms of listening fatigue and overload.

Parents of deaf children tell us that they are not always confident that necessary steps are being taken to ensure that catch-up support is appropriate and accessible.

At differing times last year we surveyed more than 580 parents of deaf children aged 4-19 about coronavirus and education support and our snapshot suggests that specialist support for deaf children has been reduced in many schools, whilst the wider use of face masks/coverings is having a negative impact on deaf children's learning and wellbeing.

Some parents did acknowledge the efforts being taken by many staff to ensure a successful return to school but at the same time, parent feedback indicates that too many schools and colleges set blanket policies around specialist support in an inflexible way and that fail to take into account the individual needs of deaf children.

At the time of writing, we do not believe that deaf young people are receiving sufficient or targeted specialist catch-up support. Neither is it clear that any new catch-up or tutoring programmes are sufficient or appropriately modified for deaf young people, with input from Teachers of the Deaf. As far as we can tell, very little funding for catch-up support has been directed to local authority specialist education services, either by UK Governments or via individual schools.

In England, the majority of deaf children and young people (around 80%) are educated in mainstream settings which means, hypothetically, they will be eligible for catch-up support of £80 per pupil. We are sceptical that this will be used to fund targeted interventions that are appropriate for deaf young people. We are also surprised there is no additional catch-up allowance for children and young people on SEN support or with an Education, Health and Care plan, but who are not in specialist provision.

Separately, the Department for Education in England has established a National Tutoring Programme for disadvantaged students. We estimate that around 20% of deaf young people will be eligible for this. We are disappointed that the Education Endowment Foundation and the National Tutoring Programme have not yet responded to requests for information on how tutors will ensure the support they provide is deaf-friendly. We stand ready to provide support and advice.

Action is needed by the UK Governments to ensure catch-up support for deaf young people is sufficient and targeted, with appropriate input from Teachers of the Deaf

NDCS Parents Survey Questions:

Has your child's school or college introduced any kind of 'catch up' programme or tuition support for your child?

- Yes – 18%
- No – 67%

In an ideal world, what support would you like to see introduced to help your child 'catch up' from any challenges they've experienced over the past year? Most common themes:

- Increased 1:1 (or small group) support/interventions during school hours – 90
- Increased focus on social, emotional and mental health & enrichment activities – 29
- Catch up sessions (not deaf specific and outside of school day) – 25
- Increased deaf awareness – 20
- Increased access to speech and language therapy – 13
- Increased, targeted work/materials at home – 12
- Additional tuition for English and maths – 12
- Additional time to complete education – 10
- Remove restrictions (incl. 'bubbles', face masks) – 7
- Allowances around exams – 5
- Access to radio aid – 2
- Captions for online teaching/learning – 2
- Work experience opportunities – 2
- Access to British Sign Language lessons – 1
- Increased funding for Teacher of the Deaf services – 1

The majority of parents report that they would like to see additional support to help their child catch up with lost learning and to close gaps in attainment. Some parents suggest this could take the shape of more general catch up lessons (for all pupils, not deaf specific) and that these could take place outside of regular schools hours, e.g. after school, or during weekends or school holidays.

Most parents would prefer to see these interventions happening as part of the school day, and overwhelmingly parents would like to see extra tuition/support being provided on a 1:1 basis, or in small group settings. Several parents commented that they would like more regular visits from their Teacher of the Deaf – I've included these comments in the tally about 1:1 (or small group) support.

Some parents mention that catch up work could be provided as additional, targeted, resources to be completed at home. A small number of parents report that they would like to see additional online lessons/resources to help their children catch up. Included in this tally are parents who mention that they would like notes from lessons to be made available to send home.

Some parents mention that they would like the focus of any catch up support to be on English and maths specifically.

A large number of parents mention that educational catch up is not their only concern or, for some parents, not their main concern. There are several comments about the impact of the pandemic and coronavirus restrictions on

children's social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Parents would like to see more access to enrichment/extra-curricular activities and an increased focus on social, emotional and mental health support and skills development.

Several parents mention that speech and language therapy has been limited, or not available at all, since the start of the pandemic – parents would like to see this reinstated as a matter of urgency.

Many parents report that they would like to see better deaf awareness at their child's school, including a better understanding of the child's individual needs and how deafness impacts access to learning. In this tally I have included parents who mention that they would like to see more and better communication between themselves and their child's school/college.

Some parents mention that their child is leaving education at the end of this school year, or nearing the end of education, and that they've either missed the chance for catch up support or will not have enough time to catch up before they are due to leave. Parents express that their children have fallen behind over the last year and that catch up support would actually have been beneficial. Some parents feel that there should be an option to spend additional time in education.

Some parents report that they would like to see allowances around GCSE and A level exams, this includes additional tuition before exams, exams to be replaced by teacher assessments, and more time to complete exam years.

Parents mention that they would like to see an end to restrictions as soon as possible, including 'bubble' restrictions and the use of face masks in schools/colleges. Parents also mention that they want teachers to use clear face masks or clear face visors/shields instead of opaque masks.

A few parents mention that their child preferred home learning, e.g. the home listening environment is quieter, parents were able to support the child on a 1:1 basis themselves.

Classroom environment

Parents have told us that changes to the classroom environment during the pandemic has brought some positives for deaf children who did attend school – in particular, smaller class sizes, quieter learning environment and a more relaxed pace of learning, matching the individual needs of children.

Over the longer-term, we'd like to see a focus on how to reduce class sizes. In the short-term, steps to reduce background noise or breaking up classes into smaller groups may be (relatively) easy wins that would benefit all children.

Young people tell us that it also helps if all classes have a continuity of teachers who are more deaf aware and students stay in the same peer group to aid voice familiarity.

Fatigue can be an issue for many deaf children and it also helps to have regular breaks between sessions. Any plans to extend the school day could be problematic for deaf children (and others) unless there are regular breaks or unless there is a more relaxed pace of learning.

Smaller class sizes

Parents report various benefits of smaller class sizes during the last lockdown. Fewer students in small groups ('bubbles') resulted in a quieter listening environment with less distractions and disruption. Parents report that their children were receiving more, and better focused, attention from teachers and/or teaching support staff. Parents mention that children were better able to learn at their own pace and that a simplified curriculum and slower teaching pace worked well.

Some parents report additional benefits of better social interaction with peers and increased confidence in a smaller group. One parent mentions that being in the same 'bubble' throughout the day was less disrupting than having to go into the resource base.

One parent mentions that their child did well in a smaller group setting at school. However, the child regularly had to wear headphones to access some of the virtual learning tasks that were set. They couldn't wear hearing aids at the same time as headphones, and the child is now reluctant to wear their aids as they have gotten out of the habit. The parent reports this is having an impact on the child.

More 1:1 support

Several parents report that their child benefitted from more 1:1 support than before the last lockdown. In some cases a communication support worker or teaching assistant was available to support the child – fewer pupils and less background noise meant that this support worked better than usual. Other parents report that thanks to smaller class sizes, their child's teacher was able to give them more individual attention and more 1:1 time.

Teachers of the Deaf

It is clear that Qualified Teachers of the Deaf and local authority specialist education services for deaf children have a key role to play in advising on reasonable adjustments and mitigating steps, providing advice on the individual needs of deaf children.

Where a Teacher of the Deaf would normally visit the school/college to provide support to the child and/or to teachers, 51% of parents reported that this was not currently happening.

Resource bases for deaf children

Where their child was in a resource base, 23% reported that their child was not receiving the same support in class or from the resource base as before. 16% were unsure.

Reasons for not receiving the same support included:

- Children not allowed to leave their year-group bubble to attend classes in the resource base
- Specialist staff no longer moving across classes to provide one-to-one support for children who need it
- Resource base closed or operating at reduced capacity
- Increased use of video lessons or audio recordings

In some cases, it was clear that support was not being provided in line with a child's Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Some parents reported that children were feeling more isolated from not being able to mix with their deaf peers in the resource base.

NDCS Parents Survey Questions:

If your child was in school or college during the last lockdown (that started in January), what impact has this has on your child's progress?

- Their progress was worse than usual – 27%
- Their progress was the same – 22% (86)
- Their progress was better than usual – 11% (44)

We asked parents to tell us why 'progress was better than usual':

- Smaller class sizes – 24
- More 1:1 support – 11
- Benefits of being in a 'bubble' with other deaf children from resource base – 1
- Benefits of school routine – 2

