

Post-Primary Support Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Room 602
43 Balloo Road
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

07 March 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

The proposed Education (NI) Order has been heralded as aiming to create an education system that will meet the needs of all children and young people.

In all the research and discussions leading up to this final draft, children with a disability have hardly figured at all and this is a real concern for the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS).

NDCS is the only UK charity solely dedicated to providing support, information and advice for deaf children and young people, their families and professionals working with them.

Over the past few years and particularly recently, we have seen the erosion of a system of support for deaf children – specialist units for deaf children being closed, and those children being given mainstream placements with very little specialist support or concern for their wider social needs in school.

As a minority group, our concern is that deaf children's needs will be overlooked, while these great changes to the whole system are being put in place. This must not happen.

NDCS believes that all deaf children (regardless of communication mode, type of aiding or implant) have a right to an education of the same standard as that offered to hearing children. NDCS supports the view that whilst deaf children are entitled to have their needs met in a mainstream school in their local community, for some deaf children full access to and involvement in the educational and social life of a school can be provided only in a specialist placement. In some instances, this

may be a specialist residential school for deaf children. NDCS supports the view therefore that Inclusion is a state, not a location, and that a continuum of provision is necessary in order to ensure effective inclusion for all deaf children in terms of achievement, full participation and 'quality of experience'.

For deaf children to experience successful inclusion, their educational placements (whether mainstream or special, maintained, non-maintained or independent) must be 'Deaf-Friendly' in accordance with NDCS published guidelines and recommended standards. Such a school will be one in which:

- ALL staff are deaf-aware and have received in-service training to raise awareness of the needs of deaf children and to provide appropriate communication skills
- The learning environment is acoustically favourable and all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that the environment does not hinder deaf children's learning and full participation in the activities of the school
- There is effective communication and age/ability-appropriate peer interaction between pupils, both educationally and socially (whether signed or spoken). Where deaf children's chosen communication mode is BSL, this should involve hearing children and teachers acquiring competence in signed communication
- Deaf children have equal and first-hand access to the taught and wider curriculum of the school
- Deaf children have true equity of access with hearing children to the extra-curricular life of the school. This may involve alterations to special transport arrangements in order for children to take part in after-school activity and evening events
- Deaf children's learning needs are properly supported by qualified and trained staff, with appropriate support from qualified Teachers of the Deaf and Communication or Special Support Assistants
- Policies and practice ensure that deaf children develop positive self-image and high self-esteem, supporting the achievement of their all-round potential
- Policies and practice ensure that deaf children can achieve their full academic potential and that their progress is regularly assessed and monitored
- There are opportunities for deaf and hearing children to mix together and establish true and equal friendships
- There are regular opportunities for deaf children to have contact with deaf adults and older deaf children as positive role models

We ask that all these guidelines and recommendations are taken into account **at the same time as** implementing any changes in the current system and structures.

Yours faithfully

Pauline Walker
Director NI