

NDCS Cymru response to Ministerial comments on *Close the Gap* Petition



Petition P-04-481, February 2017

NDCS Cymru is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Minister's response of 11.01.17 related to improving classroom acoustics and raising deaf awareness among teachers and pupils.

It is heartening that the Minister opened with a clear recognition of the need to ensure that appropriate interventions are in place for learners with hearing impairments, and closed with an invitation to NDCS Cymru to contribute to awareness raising materials – an invitation we willingly accept.

However, it's almost 4 years since we submitted our petition in May 2013, and the issues raised then are just as relevant today. So, for the 3,000 deaf children and young people in Wales we ask the Minister to do all in his power to *Close the Gap*.

Acoustics

NDCS Cymru is pleased to receive the Minister's assurance that acoustics requirements within the 21st Century Schools Programme will not be weakened. However, we understand that funding of this programme has been reduced with Local Authorities being encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding for new builds. Therefore, we call again for Welsh Government to demonstrate its commitment to good acoustics by strengthening the law so that all future schools, nursery and college buildings meet acoustic standards, regardless of how they are funded.

We would also like to repeat our offer to work with Welsh Government to raise awareness of measures to improve acoustics in existing buildings within the schools estate.

Deaf awareness

- We are very familiar with the Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme (ALN-TP) to which the Minister refers, and welcome many aspects. Nonetheless, serious concerns prevail regarding specific provision for deaf children and young people as will be detailed in our response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

We're encouraged that the Minister views Teachers of the Deaf as an important part of service provision, guidance and expertise and that work is underway to develop a national workforce planning system for these staff. However, as availability, recruitment and training are significant and current issues for specialist staff (ie Teachers of the Deaf, Communication Support Workers with appropriate BSL skills, and specialist Speech and Language Therapists), we suggest that work be undertaken not only with the WLGA but also with NHS providers to encompass wider specialist staff.

- As the Minister points out, one of the themes of the ALN-TP is that of workforce skills development at the three levels of core, advanced and specialist. Given that Teachers of the Deaf will fulfil the specialist element, NDCS Cymru seeks assurance that Initial Teacher Education and the ALNCo qualification will include training on deaf awareness and deaf-specific provision. As it stands, the Minister's reference to a more rigorous approach to the accreditation of Initial Teacher Education governed by the Education Workforce Council does nothing to convince us that deaf awareness will be covered within these training programmes.
- In addition, as a key feature of the ALN-TP is the 0-25 years focus, the early years and post-16 workforce will require the same attention to skills development and forward planning, not least in terms of deaf awareness. In turn, we seek confirmation that this will be incorporated.

In support of our stance, we refer to the former Children, Young People and Education Committee's comment in its pre-legislative scrutiny of the ALNET (Wales) Bill (10.12.15):

The Committee notes the extent to which you have linked changes to ALN with other changes within education, including Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) for the education workforce. It is essential that the new arrangements for ITT and CPD fully take account of

proposals for ALN and enable the education workforce to acquire and develop the skills required to deliver the new system effectively.

Conclusion

Once again, NDCS Cymru thanks the Petitions Committee for this opportunity and wishes to stress the importance it attaches to the issues raised here and in all previous correspondence. We would be happy to assist in further consideration of our petition – please contact campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk or call 02920 373474.