

P-04-481 Close the Gap for deaf pupils in Wales-
Correspondence from the Action on Hearing Loss Cymru to
Chair, 13.08.2013

Dear William,

Thank you for inviting Action on Hearing Loss Cymru to comment on NDCS Cymru's *Close the Gap* petition, which is being considered by the Petitions Committee.

It is clear that deaf children in Wales are facing barriers in education. Indeed, Welsh Government statistics reveal significant attainment gaps between deaf pupils and their peers at every Key Stage.

Action on Hearing Loss Cymru believes it is imperative that people who are deaf and hard of hearing are afforded equality of opportunity and that they are best placed to tell us about the issues that matter most to them. Since NDCS Cymru's petition has been created with the help of deaf children and young people, I am keen to offer my support.

The petition highlights the importance of ensuring that deaf pupils across Wales are able to access appropriate specialist support. I understand that the Ministerial response to this petition commits to including hearing impaired support within a wider workforce planning review, which is a great step forward. However, as commented by NDCS Cymru, I would also welcome assurances that action will be taken to address any identified gaps within the availability and skill set of specialist support staff for deaf pupils as a result of this exercise.

I would also endorse NDCS Cymru's calls for a wider national strategy to address the multitude of barriers that deaf children and young people face in education. In particular:

- Specific deaf awareness training is required for key education professionals, including teachers and SENCOs. The vast majority of deaf pupils in Wales attend mainstream schools and, without appropriate awareness, school staff cannot communicate effectively with deaf pupils.
- Taking action to improve deaf awareness among hearing pupils would also help to create an inclusive atmosphere in schools.
- Action on Hearing Loss Cymru has endorsed NDCS Cymru's *Sounds Good* campaign for good acoustics in school, college and nursery buildings. We support calls for stronger building regulations and improved awareness of how existing school buildings could improve their acoustic settings.
- Action on Hearing Loss Cymru would also welcome increased opportunities for families of deaf children, pupils and teachers to learn BSL.

- Action on Hearing Loss Cymru agrees with NDCS Cymru that Estyn has a role to play in ensuring the attainment gap is reduced for deaf pupils and would welcome further consideration of how Estyn inspections take account of support for deaf learners.
- The development of a clear provision pathway for deaf children and young people would help to ensure that deaf pupils are able to access the support they need.

I am also aware that NDCS Cymru's petition expresses concerns around the ongoing Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Review and changes to support for ALN students in a post-16 setting. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of ensuring that these reforms take account of the needs of learners who are deaf and hard of hearing.

I hope that this letter proves useful in your further discussions of the petition.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Williams
Director/Cyfarwyddwr
Action on Hearing Loss Cymru