

Parent Council for Deaf Education,

Block D
361-365 North Rocks Road
North Rocks NSW 2151

PO Box 4748
North Rocks NSW 2151

To: The Community Affairs Reference Council (community.affairs@aph.gov.au)

Parent Council for Deaf Education is the peak body for parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing in NSW. The role of the organisation is to support families with information, referral and advocacy services. With a membership of 150 families, PCDE is in regular contact with parents regarding the wellbeing and in particular the education of their children, who are deaf or hard of hearing.

We are providing two submissions to the hearing health inquiry. Both reflect concerns from our membership over their children's access to education, and both relate to adequacy of access to hearing services, including assessment and support services and hearing technologies.

- 1. Provision of qualified teachers and Interpreters for children using Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to access the school curriculum.**
- 2. Provision of resources and technology to bridge the access gap for children who are deaf or hard of hearing in the mainstream school system.**

1. Provision of qualified teachers and interpreters for children using Auslan to access the curriculum.

Currently in NSW, the staff fulfilling the role of teachers of the deaf for students who use Auslan to access the curriculum are not required by NSW Department of Education and Training to have any level of fluency in Auslan. Similarly, the role of interpreter in classrooms is fulfilled by teacher's aides (special) or learning support officers who do not have to be fluent in Auslan to be employed by Department of Education and Training to work with children who use Auslan to access the curriculum.

For those children who do access the curriculum in Auslan, there should be sufficient staff to make sure that all classes are interpreted or taught directly in Auslan.

Example: Mother of deaf signing student in primary school:

"One of the teachers has very poor limited sign skills and my daughter is so frustrated in class, because she looks around and know that the other (hearing) students are going ahead with their work and she isn't."

Recommendations:

- The adoption of a benchmark for fluency for staff employed to work with children who access the curriculum using Auslan, whether teacher aides, learning support officers, interpreters or teachers of the deaf. This benchmark should be NAATI Paraprofessional level accreditation or NABS/ASLIA Deaf Relay Interpreter Certification as a minimum.

- The recruitment (and, if not recruitment, the training) of teachers of the deaf who are fluent in Auslan and who have a detailed knowledge deaf culture and the Australian deaf community and who have the ability to work in a bi-lingual learning environment effectively. The minimum qualification indicating such skills is NAATI Paraprofessional Interpreter level or recognised Deaf Relay Interpreter training or certification.
- The employment of NAATI accredited interpreters to facilitate access to the curriculum in mainstream classes for students who use Auslan to access the curriculum.
- Just as we would not tolerate having a hearing child taught by a teacher who could not speak English, in the same way, we should not tolerate a deaf child who uses Auslan to access the curriculum being taught by a teacher who is not fluent in Auslan.

2. Provision of captions, soundfield systems and note-takers to bridge the access gap for children who are deaf or hard of hearing in the mainstream school system.

With limited choice of schooling options, 90% of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, are being educated in a mainstream classroom. These children are often the only ones in their class, year or often school, with a hearing loss. Their hearing loss is invisible in this learning environment and they are often shut out of access to the curriculum. Resources and technology are now available that would help to bridge this access gap.

There is an increasing trend towards curriculum support materials being delivered by electronic means in these classrooms.

Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing require access to that material via captions. Without access to captioned materials, they will be shut out of access to a significant part of their education, and also excluded from the social fabric of their classroom and school life.

Example - Mother of Year 9 student: *“My son is in Year 9 in a mainstream high school. He is the only hearing impaired child in the year. They were studying “Much Ado about Nothing” and were watching a movie performance of this play. The teacher did not have a captioned copy of the DVD and as a result my son got nothing out of these two hours. He just sat through it, getting pretty stressed that he could not participate in this activity. After school, we tried to find a captioned copy and went to 4 video shops, and did get one copy in the end. This did however cause great stress to my son, our family and so much time lost. This happens regularly too, this is not a one off. It should not be this hard for my child!”*

Soundfield technology should be standard equipment in all classrooms. This technology allows ALL students access to the teacher’s voice wherever they are in the classroom. These systems are cost effective and are of particular benefit to students with a hearing loss, since this technology does not single them out as being different, unlike an FM device, which many high school students are hesitant to wear.

High School students who are deaf or hard of hearing require support with note taking. This part of school life is very difficult for these children. Due to their hearing loss, their auditory memory is not able to capture the information and get it down on paper in the same way as hearing children. At the moment, these children rely on other students or asking the teacher to fill in the gaps and in a busy high school environment, this does not happen. These students are not getting full access to the curriculum. Notetakers would bridge this access gap

Recommendations:

- Australian Government looks at legislating to ensure that all media includes captions.
- Australian Government should legislate to ensure that all televisions have caption decoders
- Only captioned materials to be used in school curricula and as learning aids.
- Australian Government looks at soundfield technology to become standard equipment for all classrooms.
- Note-takers to be employed by schools to provide support to high school students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sincerely,

**Kate Kennedy
Coordinator, Information and Advocacy,
(On behalf of Parent Council for Deaf Education.)**

**Ph: 020 9871 3049
Mob: 0419 628 829**