



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity

CREID BRIEFING 27

The Education of Children and Young People with a Sensory Impairment in Scotland

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Introduction

This briefing reports the findings of research carried out by the Centre for Research in Inclusion Education and Diversity (CREID) and the Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC) on the number of children with hearing and visual impairment in Scotland, as well as the number and qualifications of the specialist teachers who support them. Questionnaires were sent to local authority heads of sensory support services and also to the head teachers of the two grant-aided special schools providing services for children with hearing and visual impairment. In addition to reporting on provision for children and young people with a sensory impairment and the teaching qualifications of staff, the research also included an analysis of Scottish Government statistics on the number of children and young people with hearing and visual impairments.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims of the research were to:

- establish the numbers of children and young people aged 0 to 18 with a sensory impairment currently attending publicly funded mainstream schools in Scotland or one of the grant-aided special schools for sensory impairment;
- investigate the qualifications and age range of specialist teachers; and, to consider the level of support and CPD opportunities for non-specialist teachers and support staff.

Main findings: surveys of local authorities and grant-aided school

Children and young people with a sensory impairment and their educational support

- Most children, over 70% with a visual impairment and 80% with a hearing impairment, were educated in mainstream schools. A larger proportion (16%) of children with a visual impairment attended special schools than children with a hearing impairment (10%). There was variation between local authorities in relation to the proportion of pupils who were recorded as requiring additional support, as well as in the proportion of pupils with a sensory impairment as a proportion of the total pupil population in a local authority.
- Around 250 preschool children with a hearing impairment and nearly 300 with a visual impairment were known to the local authorities as receiving additional support because of their sensory impairment.
- Nearly 40% of preschool children with a visual impairment also had a physical and cognitive impairment; the equivalent proportion of children with a hearing impairment in this category was 13%.
- Most authorities offered preschool children with a sensory impairment peripatetic service home visits and peripatetic service in mainstream nurseries. Some provided

peripatetic service in private nurseries and about half of authorities offered preschool children peripatetic service in family centres or provision outwith the LA.

- The most commonly used support plan for children with a sensory impairment who were below 3 were Family Support Plans, followed by IEPs. For 3 to 5 year olds the most commonly used plans were IEPs. Some authorities also used Family Support Plans for this age group and a small number of children had CSPs. A large number of preschool children with a sensory impairment had no support plans and there was variation between local authorities in the use of plans.
- Around half of the local authorities responding to the survey had made reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities to support children and young people with a sensory impairment. Collaborations with health professionals such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists were also common. The grant-aided school collaborated with local authorities and schools on an 'as needed' basis.
- Teachers of visual (VI) and hearing impairment (HI) collaborated as required to support children and young people with a dual sensory impairment, as the total number of pupils with a dual sensory impairment are very low.

Teachers working with children and young people with a sensory impairment

- Legislation is in place to ensure that teachers who work wholly or mainly with pupils with a sensory impairment have an appropriate qualification. This legislation requires specialist VI and HI teachers to have a qualification within 5 years of taking up their post. In the authorities surveyed there was a total of 88 specialist VI teachers and 133 specialist HI teachers. In several of the local authorities, a significant proportion of specialist VI and HI teachers were approaching retirement age. The grant-aided special school had 40 teachers and 55% of these were aged above 45.
- The survey data showed that 80% of teachers working with pupils with a hearing impairment and 60% of teachers of pupils with a visual impairment held appropriate qualifications. Most of the unqualified staff had been working in the local authority for less than five years; one third of the unqualified VI teachers and around half of the unqualified HI teachers were in training. In the grant-aided special school, 22 teachers were fully qualified and 7 were undertaking training. Nine of the unqualified teachers had been working at the school for less than 5 years and 5 had been there for more than 5 years.
- Most authorities felt that CPD for specialist teachers as well as mainstream teachers and support staff was adequate but for some distance and expense impacted on ability to undertake CPD.
- Around half of the local authorities employed an educational audiologist. Of those not employing an educational audiologist, all apart from two mentioned alternative ways of accessing an audiology service.
- Just over half of the local authorities employed a person to provide habilitation and independence training for children with a visual impairment; a further 8 said that they

had access to such training, albeit of varying quality, through other departments or by buying it in; four did not have access to such training. The grant-aided special school employed one full-time habilitation specialist, one assistant in training for the full qualification as well as one member of staff training to become a habilitation assistant. Experts expressed concern in relation to the understanding of habilitation and independence training by local authority staff and suggested that it may have been interpreted as mobility training. Such training does not prepare children and young people for independent living.

Challenges in supporting children and in ensuring adequate training for staff

- Challenges in supporting children and young people with a sensory impairment included geographical distance and cost of CPD, lack of qualified staff and age profile of specialist teachers in some authorities and communication with schools, parents and other professionals.
- Around half of authorities stated that there were no challenges in ensuring that teachers working wholly or mainly with children with a sensory impairment were qualified within 5 years of taking up post. However, the other authorities mentioned a range of challenges relating to funding, cover for staff when on training, distance to courses and, in some cases, an unwillingness of staff to commit to training.

Official statistics

Additional support needs

- There has been an increase in pupils recorded as having additional support needs (ASN) since 2004 whilst the overall total school population has decreased. The increase in the ASN population is largely due to changes in recording of ASN rather than any major changes in prevalence.

Pupils with a sensory impairment

- There has been an increase in the number of pupils with a visual or a hearing impairment but a slight decrease in the number with dual sensory impairment.
- There are more pupils with a visual impairment than with a hearing impairment.
- The majority of pupils with a sensory impairment are being educated in mainstream schools but there is a greater proportion of pupils with a visual impairment in special schools than pupils with a hearing impairment.

Socioeconomic status and ethnicity

- There is a weak association between social deprivation (as measured by SIMD 2009) and hearing impairment but less so for visual impairment. This contrasts with other categories of ASN, such as being identified as looked after, having a learning disability or social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, where the association between social deprivation and having this particular type of ASN is much stronger. There are limited statistics relating to ethnicity and sensory impairment. The small

number of pupils of ethnic minority groups with a sensory impairment makes comparison with a larger population problematic.

Achievement of pupils with a sensory impairment compared to those with no ASN and all ASN

- Unsurprisingly pupils with no ASN achieve better national qualifications than those with ASN. Pupils with a visual impairment are significantly more likely than those with a hearing impairment and some other categories of ASN to achieve no or low qualifications; however, around the same (low) proportion of pupils with a hearing or a visual impairment achieve Highers and Advanced Highers.

Background and Context

Legislation and policy

Legislation is in place to ensure support is provided to children with additional support needs, including those with a sensory impairment. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (the ASL Act) came into force in 2005. Duties were placed on local authorities to identify children's additional support needs and provide appropriate support, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of the additional provision. The Act set out rights for parents who, amongst other things, were empowered to request particular types of assessment. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 amended the 2004 Act. This legislation placed a duty on local authorities to assess disabled children aged 0 to 3 and provide them with additional support, if required, in agreement with their parents. Local authorities were also required to publish and make available information for parents and carers about additional support needs in their area and the rights of parents and carers. Finally, the legislation made provision for parents/carers of children with additional support needs to make placing requests to any local authority run school or independent special school in Scotland including schools outwith the local authority of residence.

Provision for children with visual and hearing impairments is also underpinned by wider policy developments. All children in Scotland are entitled to access the national curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, which is supported by the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) programme. This programme aims to improve the learning outcomes of all children, including children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The Education (Standards in Scotland's Schools etc.) Act 2000 includes a presumption of mainstreaming, so that pupils with additional support needs will be educated alongside their peers in their local community unless this is detrimental to the child's education, parents request a special school placement or mainstream placement would involve unreasonable public expenditure. In Scotland, as in the UK, around 1% of pupils are educated in special schools.

Children and young people with a visual impairment

The term visual impairment refers to a wide range of different eye conditions including those which cause a loss in visual acuity or clarity of vision and those that cause a loss in the field of vision or area that we can see. It does not include children whose visual

difficulties can be corrected by wearing glasses or contact lenses. In addition, and increasingly, it also includes children and young people with cortical or cerebral visual impairment (CVI). Visual problems for this group of pupils are related to the visual pathways and processing of information. Medical success has resulted in growing numbers of neurologically affected infants and children presenting with CVI. These children often have additional complex impairments.

Children and young people with a hearing impairment

Children with a hearing impairment can have a range of hearing loss from mild (difficulty hearing conversation in noisy environments) to profound (unable to hear a range of sounds, usually reliant on lipreading or sign language). Some children are born with hearing impairments sometimes due to prenatal or hereditary conditions, other children become deaf during childhood, for example, as a result of illnesses such as meningitis. Early diagnosis as a result of universal neonatal hearing screening has led to widespread early intervention and increased uptake of cochlear implants. This has had a generally positive impact on the lives of many hearing impaired children.

Children and young people with a dual sensory impairment (deafblind)

Deafblind children have a combination of visual and hearing impairments. These impairments can be of any type or degree. Most children who are deafblind have some useful vision and/or hearing and there are many different causes of deafblindness.

Teachers working wholly or mainly with pupils with a sensory impairment

The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (Scottish Statutory Instrument 2005/355) came into force in September 2005. These Regulations set out the requirements to be met by education authorities in employing teachers in the course of discharging their duty under section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended, and section 2(1) of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000. The Regulations state that where an education authority employs a teacher wholly or mainly to teach pupils who are hearing impaired, vision impaired or both hearing and vision impaired, then that teacher must possess an appropriate qualification to teach such pupils. The guidance in relation to this document does not define what this appropriate qualification should be but acknowledges that there is a range of pathways, for example, through completion of a postgraduate diploma, accredited prior learning and/or local authority-based competence training, or indeed other forms of training

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/164398/0044786.pdf>).

Methods

The research consisted of two surveys of Heads of Service one focusing on hearing impairment and one on visual impairment. In addition the headteachers of the two grant-aided schools for children with a sensory impairment were invited to complete a questionnaire. These data were supplemented by an analysis of official statistics gathered by the Scottish Government relating to ASN and sensory impairment. The purpose of the questionnaires was to ascertain the number of school age pupils and preschool children with visual and/or hearing impairment in each local authority, the qualifications of teachers working wholly or mainly with children with visual and hearing impairments, and the organisation of services. Data was gathered during the period November 2011 to January 2012. The response rate for both local authority questionnaires was over 80%. The questionnaire for the grant-aided school supporting children with a visual impairment was

returned in time for inclusion in the report. However, the questionnaire for the grant-aided school supporting children with a hearing impairment was not returned.

Key themes emerging from the research

Regional variation relating to provision and support for children and young people with a sensory impairment.

The local authority data from our survey and the official statistics indicated variation in a number of areas, including:

1. Number of pupils and preschool children identified with a sensory impairment and its proportion of the total pupil population.
2. The composition of the ASN population in a local authority.

The data show wide variation across the local authorities in relation to the proportion of pupils assessed and identified as having visual and hearing impairments. It is likely to be due to local variation in terms of the triggers for assessment and identification. It was suggested by a group of practitioners that one significant factor might be the resources available in the local authority to support these pupils. This would lead to those with a less severe sensory impairment potentially not being offered additional support. These differences were also reflected in the analysis of the official statistics in the proportion of pupils identified as having additional support needs as well as the composition of the ASN group.

These differences may be particularly problematic for children who move between local authorities as well as leading to inequities in provision across authorities. The legislation makes clear that children with additional support needs or disabilities should receive comparable services irrespective of geographical location.

It is not possible to explain these differences from the data gathered in this report. However, questions arise with regard to the management of support for children and young with additional support needs within an authority, particularly at a time when there are considerable budget constraints. The survey data suggest that authorities are balancing the needs of the overall ASN population with those of pupils with a sensory impairment and that this is leading to differences in the identification, assessment and recording of pupils with a sensory impairment. A high level of recording is not necessary a mark of high quality support (Lewis, et al, 2010). However, unless children's needs are properly assessed and recorded, they are unlikely to be met. Particularly when children are moving from one local authority to another, or between Scotland and another part of the UK, clear written records which can be easily accessed are essential, so that precious time is not wasted on re-assessment.

Preschool children with a sensory impairment

There is very limited data on preschool children with additional support needs and no data which show the number with a sensory impairment in the official statistics. There are some National Health statistics but these are patchy and unrepresentative. The survey data are not robust but provide a starting point for considering what further data should be gathered in order to help monitor the level and quality of support provided for these children.

The survey data identified different practices across local authorities in the use of plans for preschool children with a sensory impairment, which raises questions about what leads to these differences. It is possible that some local authorities have more robust planning and identification mechanisms than others. As mentioned above, these kinds of differences can be confusing for parents if they move between different authorities and can lead to post code lotteries in resource allocation.

One reason for variation, suggested by Heads of Service, was that interagency working and sharing of data between agencies, especially health and education, differ between authorities. Screening for a sensory impairment in preschool children is carried out by the health service and communication between health and education is not always effective. A further reason for variation between authorities may be that some local authorities only support children with particular levels of need, e.g. in relation to a hearing impairment, only those with a hearing aid.

Collaboration and inter/intra agency working

The surveys identified differences in the extent to which authorities collaborated with each other. In some authorities it involved shared services in mainstream schools. One authority catered for mainstream primary pupils and the other for mainstream secondary pupils. In another authority, one person had oversight of the provision in four authorities. It is not clear whether this collaboration leads to an enhanced service provision or whether it presents additional challenges in terms of managing support across a wider geographical area and in relation to communicating across geographically dispersed teams. It was pointed out at the Heads of Service meeting that several authorities had informal agreements with other authorities. However, formalising such agreements can lead to difficulties in relation to service level agreements, salary variance and variance in roles and responsibilities. However, collaboration can provide collegial support among specialist teachers, especially in authorities where the numbers of specialist teachers are low.

Qualifications of teachers and the renewal of the profession

Around 60% of specialist VI teachers and just over 80% of specialist HI teachers were fully qualified and a number of unqualified specialist teachers were currently in training. About half of local authority respondents believed that there were problems in recruiting appropriately qualified staff to work with children and young people with sensory impairments. The age profile of existing staff suggests that this problem might intensify over coming years. They also identified a number of challenges in this area. The main ones were funding, lack of time, commitment by staff, staff cover and distance from the provision. There were also concerns about the quality of some teacher training. It was noted that staff might be reluctant to gain an additional qualification in the field of sensory impairments because of limited promotion prospects in this field and no immediate financial gains (in contrast with the immediate salary increase associated with the Chartered Teacher qualification). The Donaldson review of teacher education recommended that there should be a development of CPD opportunities for mainstream and specialist teachers in particular areas, one of which was additional support needs.

Use of different types of school and teaching methods

It is evident that the vast majority of children with sensory impairments in Scotland are being educated in mainstream schools. Whilst the overall population of pupils with additional support needs and sensory impairment has increased, the special school

population has stayed constant. At the same time, there are variations in the amount of time spent in mainstream classes and the use of specialist staff. Furthermore, there are considerable variations in the type of special school provision which is available and the extent of expertise in different types of special settings. This variation, according to Heads of Service, is to some extent due to inherited provision and assets within a particular authority. Whilst the Heads of Service supported inclusion in mainstream provision, it was also pointed out that there is a need to monitor the social needs of pupils with a sensory impairment to ensure that inclusion does not lead to social isolation. It was also noted that the attitude of mainstream staff are of vital importance. The increase in pupils recorded as having additional support needs in the mainstream pupil population has implications for the support of mainstream teachers and support staff as well as the training, both initial and continuing professional development of these members of staff.

The survey data from the grant-aided special school for pupils with a visual impairment suggested that there was a reluctance on the part of local authorities to place pupils in special schools outwith their authority.

Changes in recording procedures in official statistics

There have been several changes in the way in which data have been gathered over time, making it virtually impossible to have a clear picture of changing practices in the identification of pupils with sensory impairments in Scotland. In addition, the variation noted between the authorities in the recording of pupils with additional support needs, including those with a sensory impairment suggests that there may be different interpretations about who should be included.

Monitoring of attainment

There is a very wide spread of attainment amongst children with sensory impairments and there is a need to monitor this over time and promote improvement.

Challenges in supporting children and young people with a sensory impairment

Survey respondents identified very similar challenges in supporting children and young people with a sensory impairment. These included: providing support across a wide geographical area, communication at all levels, lack of time for training and lack of qualified staff. The main challenge for the grant-aided school was getting pupils enrolled at the schools. Whilst supportive of inclusion in mainstream, the school felt it could offer specialist support which is not always available in mainstream schools. Local authority staff had developed a number of coping strategies to deal with the challenges. One strategy used to deal with geographical distance was to arrange caseloads according to location. In addition, efforts were being made to train mainstream staff to offer more effective support. Also mentioned were communication protocols to ensure that data could be shared with other professionals.

Suggestions for further research

1. Qualitative studies are needed to investigate the decision-making process in selected local authorities with regard to the assessment and identification of children with sensory impairments. The implications of different types of plans as passports to service delivery should be monitored. The types of support available in

different mainstream and special settings should be examined. In addition, there is a need to examine the level of support available in mainstream schools which all children are able to access, regardless of their type of educational plan.

2. Quantitative longitudinal studies, supplemented by qualitative data, should be used to explore the school experiences and outcomes of pupils with specific impairments and social characteristics in different geographical locations.
3. The qualifications of teachers of pupils with hearing and visual impairments should be monitored on an ongoing basis. In addition, the availability of different types of postgraduate qualifications, and teachers' experiences of various forms of provision, should be explored.
4. The impact on mainstream teachers of the inclusion of pupils with a range of additional support needs would also be a relevant area to investigate. This could include monitoring the impact on teachers of implementing a new curriculum whilst ensuring that this does not impact detrimentally on certain groups of children such as those with a sensory impairment within their classroom.
5. It would be useful to examine the role of publicly funded special schools in providing support for pupils with a sensory impairment as well as the characteristics of the staff within these schools. This would provide a broader overview of the overall local authority provision.

References

Lewis, J., Mooney, A., Brady, L-M, Gill, C., Henshall, A., Willmott, N., Owen, C., Evans, K. and Statham, J. (2010) *Special educational needs and disability: understanding local variation in prevalence, service provision and support*, London: DfCSF.

Further information

Further information about the project is available from Dr. Elisabet Weedon, CREID, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, elisabet.weedon@ed.ac.uk. All publications and information about this project are available at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/centres-groups/creid/projects/scottish-sensory-centre>

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