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### CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ARRIVAL OF A REFUGEE FAMILY WITH A CHILD WITH SENSORY IMPAIRMENT (DEAF, MULTI-SENSORY OR VISION IMPAIRMENT)

#### 1. Introduction

This guidance is written by the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) as a guide for those supporting families and children who may have arrived from another country with refugee status and are awaiting longer-term accommodation.

This briefing note was written by NatSIP partners working in Local Authorities and schools to highlight issues to take into account when considering the long-term housing and settlement needs of a deaf, multi-sensory or vision impaired child following their arrival in the UK.

This note is necessary because sensory impairment (SI) is a low-incidence disability and relatively few highly specialist placements can be found for children with SI in the UK.

Children and young people with sensory impairment are covered by the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) legislation (the Children and Families Act 2014, the Children Act 1989) and the Equality Act 2010 and it is expected that the normal policies from the legislation will be observed. Legislation across the UK may vary between England, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

#### 2. What does the term *sensory impairment* include?

##### 2.1 Deaf

The term *deaf* is an umbrella term to describe a child or young person with all levels of hearing loss. Other terms that may be used include: hearing-impaired (HI), hearing loss, and partial deafness, alongside others. In this guidance, we use the term *deaf* for all the above.

A deaf child or young person can have any level of hearing and may, or may not, wear hearing aids. They also may use spoken language, sign language or a combination of the two.

##### 2.2 Vision Impairment

The term *vision impairment* (VI) refers to a range of conditions, varying in severity and impact, which are not correctable with spectacles/glasses.

A child or young person with a vision impairment may be registered sight impaired, or severely sight impaired, but does not necessarily need to be registered. A vision impairment must be diagnosed by a recognised clinician, such as an orthoptist, ophthalmologist, paediatrician etc.

##### 2.3 Multi-Sensory Impairment

The term *multi-sensory impairment* (MSI) refers to a child or young person who may have a combination of visual and hearing difficulties. They are sometimes referred to as deafblind but may have some residual sight and or hearing. Many such children also have additional disabilities, and their complex sensory needs mean that it may be difficult to immediately ascertain their cognitive abilities.

### **3. Appropriate Professionals – the Local Authority’s Sensory Impairment Support Service**

It is extremely important that the local authority’s sensory impairment support service is involved as soon as a child or young person is suspected of, or identified as, having a sensory impairment.

Some children may not have paperwork or specialist equipment when they arrive. However, if a parent reports their child has a sensory impairment or loss, this should be taken seriously and should be sufficient for the child to be referred to the sensory impairment support service.

3.1 A **Qualified Teacher of the Deaf** (QToD) can support the child and family by ensuring audiology appointments are made and that hearing equipment is working well and is appropriate. The QToD can also support schools to meet the needs of such deaf children.

3.2 A **Qualified Teacher for Vision Impairment** (QTVI) can liaise with health services, support with appointments and ensure relevant information is relayed to the appropriate people in education or other settings.

The QTVI will provide advice and support schools to meet the needs of a child with a VI to access learning and the environment.

3.3 A **Qualified Teacher for Multi-Sensory Impairment** (QTMSI) will normally advise and support school staff, parents and carers in implementing interventions and in identifying next steps for the pupil and often works as the key professional across all sectors ensuring a holistic approach.

### **4. Considerations when selecting an appropriate school for the child**

There is a range of educational settings open to a child with a sensory impairment. It is important to consider the wide variety available. The various options include:

#### **4.1 Mainstream school**

A mainstream school is a setting with no specific, additional provision for a student with SI. A QToD, QTMSI or QTVI for the local authority will often visit a child and the school to ensure the school understands the needs of the child and can adapt to ensure access. The local authority’s Local Offer Document should provide the parent and social worker with an idea of how much support is given to students with SI in their region, as this varies according to the Local Authority.

#### **4.2 Specialist provision in a mainstream school**

These are less numerous than mainstream schools. A local authority may have one, two or even none. A specialist deaf, MSI or VI provision (sometimes called a Unit or Resource Base) will usually have at least one QToD, QTMSI or QTVI and other support staff who have specialist knowledge and skills to meet the needs of children with deafness, multi-sensory impairment or vision impairment. A child will still be involved within the mainstream school but may have accessible resources provided by specialists, additional support, or be taught for some lessons in the specialist provision.

#### **4.3 A special school for deaf, MSI or VI children**

These are the most specialist of educational settings. There are only a few such schools around the country. Some are for primary-aged pupils, some for secondary, and some for both.

4.3.1 A list of the schools for deaf children in England (Northern Ireland and Scotland) can be found at: <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/special-schools-deaf-children-uk/>

Each school for deaf children has its own policy on communication mode, including whether they use spoken language, sign language, or a combination of the two. It is important to understand which language the child was using prior to arriving in the UK and find out if a local deaf resource base or school for the deaf offers that same communication mode.

If a foreign language interpreter is used to communicate with the family it is helpful to have a deaf-aware interpreter, and to brief the interpreter thoroughly if they are not familiar with issues relating to deaf children.

4.3.2 A list of the VI schools in England can be found at:

<https://www.victaparents.org.uk/resources/education/vi-schools-colleges/>

Some children will need to use audio and tactile methods of learning, either exclusively, or to supplement the use of their residual vision. It is important that a child is assessed by a QTVI to determine their optimal learning media, and it is equally important that a setting is chosen that can deliver learning through that child's optimal learning media.

#### 4.4 Student and Parent Choice

It is also very important to consider the preference of the parents and child when considering school options. A child who was always taught in a special school for the deaf, MSI or VI learners in their home country may want to continue learning in a similar school.

If an appropriate school setting is not considered for a deaf child, there is the danger that a deaf child who communicates through sign language will become isolated and unable to communicate with their hearing peers. A child with VI may equally experience increased isolation and be unable to relate to their peers.

There is also the further difficulty in having a vulnerable and traumatised child with a sensory impairment attend a residential school many miles from their family, at a time when the family will feel safer together.

If a parent and child (or young person) are looking for a school for specialist provision, this and the above factors should be taken into account when considering long-term housing options.

After consultation with the family and SI professionals, permanent housing should ensure they have access to an educational setting which meets the child or young person's needs. This may be considered highly specialist provision and may be more readily available in some parts of the UK than in others.

#### 4.5 More information

**The National Deaf Children's Society** helpline (Tel: 0808 800 8880) is available to support families seeking advice and guidance on a range of topics relating to childhood deafness. Whilst the helpline cannot provide advice on housing or immigration, they can support families on topics such as education placements.

If English is not the first language of the family, the helpline can arrange to call back with an interpreter in the family's preferred language.

You may wish to signpost families to the helpline service via its website:

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/>

Professionals can also refer families to the helpline:

[www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/referral-form-for-professionals/](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/referral-form-for-professionals/)

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) has also produced a resource on supporting the achievement of deaf children who speak English as an additional language. This is predominantly aimed at Teachers of the Deaf but other professionals may find sections of this resource helpful.

See [www.ndcs.org.uk/eal](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/eal)

**RNIB Children and Young People and Education** team is available to offer advice and information on a range of educational areas linked to vision impairment. Whilst they cannot provide advice on immigration or housing, they can support families with regard to education provision.

<https://www.nib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-professionals/education-professionals>

The **British Red Cross** is the UK's largest provider of services for refugees, asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants and survivors of trafficking.

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees>

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