

1. ABOUT NATSIP

NatSIP, the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (<https://www.natsip.org.uk>) is a unique national partnership of professionals and the main voluntary and professional organisations working across the sensory impairment (SI) sector to improve outcomes for children and young people with SI and their families. SI includes learners with hearing impairment (HI) or deafness, multi-sensory impairment (MSI) and vision impairment (VI).

2. THE ISSUE FOR SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE SENSORY IMPAIRMENT SECTOR

Specialist services are under considerable funding pressure at a time when the numbers of learners with SI who require specialist support is growing. This has left gaps in provision and support to mainstream and specialist settings, and this in turn is in danger of provoking more referrals for EHC Plans if specialist support cannot be routinely available in schools and settings.

For example:

- Research found that just under two thirds (63%) of local authorities reported a decrease, or freeze, in full-time Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (QTVIs) affecting almost two thirds of children and young people accessing VI support. 39% of authorities have seen their budgets cut or frozen over the last year (2021-19,154 children and young people) (RNIB 2022).
- We have seen a decline of 13% in peripatetic teachers of the deaf since 2011, and decline of 29% of teachers of the deaf in resourced provision. Overall, we have lost almost 1 in 5 teachers of the deaf since 2011. Yet at the same time, the numbers of recorded deaf children and young people have risen from around 2,000 to around 3,000 per year group at key stage 2 since 2011. At key stage 1, the number of deaf children recorded per year group has risen from around 1,400 to 2,300 since 2011. These figures are also likely to be underestimates, as local authorities (LAs) record much higher figures than the school census. (CRIDE national survey, EPI Report).

There is no national strategy for ensuring access to specialist teaching and ancillary specialist support workers. Planning is left solely to LAs to work out demand, and is subject to funding pressures on the High Needs Budget (HNB). The HNB has already seen intense additional pressures due to the growth of EHCP provision.

A NatSIP report commissioned by the DfE in 2019 clearly demonstrated that there was a mismatch between the training resources available and those taken up by schools. This followed from the UCL report showing a gap in training and support for SI.¹

Schools cannot be relied on to commission additional specialist support for their SI pupils given the very low incidence nature of SI. Many multi-academy trusts (MATs) are opting to hire or promote support staff and assistant SENDCo staff without specialist training and qualifications to undertake the work of the specialist teacher with a mandatory QTSI qualification. There should be an obligation of any provision to be transparent in the revision of their service level agreements for provision of low incidence specialist services.

2. SEND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROPOSALS

2.1 National Qualifications

NatSIP welcomes the Government's commitment to the Mandatory Qualifications (MQs) for teachers of the deaf, vision impaired and multi-sensory impaired. We also welcome the commitment to establishing an apprenticeship route for these qualifications.

¹ See: <https://www.natsip.org.uk/doc-library-login/natsip-briefing-documents-and-papers/gapanalysis-the-availability-of-specialist-sensory-impairment-support-services-to-support-mainstream-teachers-and-ancillary-staff/1527-2019-03-gap-analysis-report-v4-natsip-0919>

However, the apprenticeship is not yet available and even when established, not all will be able to access this training route. The implementation plan states that

...the Department for Education are exploring further options to maximise take up of MQSIs with a view to improving the supply of teachers for children with sensory impairments.

Implementation Plan p63.

This is welcome. We urgently need to restore a bursaries programme to support applicants for the qualification who may not be eligible for the apprenticeship route.

2.2 What needs to happen to ensure specialist support is enhanced for SI?

2.2.1 We welcome the intention stated in the implementation plan:

...to take a joint approach to SEND workforce planning, informed by a stronger evidence base.

Implementation Plan p61

As part of this, a clear national SI workforce strategy is required, not just for specialist teachers but also the other specialist SI staff such as habilitation specialists, educational audiologists, intervenors and other specialist support staff. This should include succession plan for experienced staff who may be due or planning to retire.

2.2.2 As part of the newly proposed accountability framework and national standards in the implementation plan ensure that the specialist workforce is a focus:

a) The DfE has made clear that national standards need to ensure that the needs of children with SI are met: *“National Standards will cover the evidence-based approaches to identification and intervention for those with SEN Support and for those with EHCPs. For example, standards will set out how nurseries, schools and colleges must adapt the physical and sensory environment of the setting to enable children and young people with SEND to learn alongside their peers and the role of the local authority in supporting this.”*

LAs should be required to conduct a review of the specialist SEND SI workforce in the local partnership area to identify if and what steps need to be taken to ensure sufficient numbers of qualified SI professionals in coming years and to establish a programme to meet the CPD needs of the current workforce in the area to achieve this aim.

b) We support the idea flagged in the implementation plan of having a clear requirement to indicate what is ‘ordinarily available’ in schools. This should include a **specification of what specialist SI support can be accessed. The funding system should ensure that the funding is in place at schools, colleges and at LA level to deliver a complete offer for children and young people with SI.** Schools should also detail the budget expenditure for specialist support i.e., a requirement that the school can demonstrate how it uses, monitors and reviews the use of funding or resources allocated to it for the specialist resource provision to improve outcomes for deaf, VI or MSI children and young people.

c) We welcome the requirement for SEND and alternative provision partnerships to consult with all the key stakeholders. **SEND partnerships boards should include representation from the local specialist SI education service.**

d) We welcome the introduction of inclusion plans. **Local inclusion plans should specify what action will be taken to maintain or improve provision for SI children and that specialist services should be consulted on which specific data and standards should be included and monitored, as part of the inclusion plan.**

3. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on issues in this briefing please contact:

Lindsey Rousseau, Facilitator for NatSIP lindsey.rousseau@natsip.org.uk
Brian Lamb NatSIP Policy Advisor brian.lamb@natsip.org.uk

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