



Derby City Council

Children with Hearing Impairment returning to school

As children gradually return to school - *whatever that might look like* - there will be challenges for everyone, but for children and young people with Hearing Impairment (HI) this will be even more challenging. Every child and school environment is different, but it is important that staff are aware of the particular challenges HI children will face and the additional anxiety and fatigue these challenges may cause.

Challenges - Communication

The critical listening distance for an HI child using hearing aids (HAs) and cochlear implant processors (CIs) is **2m maximum** indoors in a quiet environment. Outdoors this distance is reduced; the child may hear voices but not understand what is said.

Social distancing requirements mean routines will change. HI children rely on routines to reduce their listening load. The combined effect of struggling to hear over distance and learning new routines will lead to fatigue above the norm.

HI children need to see, as well as hear to communicate well. Without clear access to speakers' faces they will miss vital information provided by facial expression and lip patterns.

HI children will be particularly disadvantaged in playground situations due to distancing and noise levels. An HI child will not hear a spoken warning outside unless the speaker is using the child's personal radio transmitter.

Challenges - Equipment and Maintenance

Some HI children will not have been wearing their HAs for some weeks and will need support to re-engage with their listening technologies. Many radio systems will have been at home during the school closure period. Some may be damaged and require attention. Passing a radio aid transmitter between users represents an infection risk.

Challenges - Learning and interactions

Children will not be close enough to adults or peers to gain a clear view of facial expressions, lip reading cues or visual support materials. Inadequate visual support creates anxiety in an HI child. HI children naturally move close to their friends and peers to communicate because this helps them hear and understand better.

Specialist Teaching and Psychology Service / People's Department
derby.gov.uk

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Strategies that may reduce the challenges

Transition back to school

Treat it like a starting school transition – give parents as much information as possible about what school will be like and ask them to talk it through with the child so they aren't expecting it to be the same as school usually is.

If possible, place the child with HI in their usual classroom and with at least one familiar adult.

Make sure adults are aware of the child's HI needs and ensure there is an adult in school who understands how to check the child's personal listening technology (HA and/or CI, radio system).

If possible, use a video / virtual tour shared live via video or recorded and shared with parents. Ideally this should be done by an adult who knows the child well and can talk about the new environment.

If the child has regular TA or CSW support, the TA could record a video / voice message for the child to listen to at home about the changes, particularly explaining that s/he will still be there to help but can't be as close.

Communication

Where possible, HI children should return to a familiar classroom as this will already have been assessed for sound quality and will also have many of the visual and practical materials used to support the child's learning.

HI children need quieter classrooms which are sited as far as possible from external noise sources (such as the hall, playground areas) and, where possible, rooms with a functioning soundfield system, carpeted areas and window blinds. Within the classroom, they should be seated as far as possible from internal sound sources.

Whenever possible HI children should be positioned at the front of lines and queues and an adult will need to use the child's personal radio system (if they have one) when giving instructions to the children in line.

Anticipated changes to routines need to be explained prior to, and again upon school return. A visual timetable could be introduced to support children's understanding of the changed routines, including new routines such as frequent handwashing times.

When unplanned changes occur, an adult will need to check the HI child has understood there is a change of plan, what that change is.

Position HI children in the first row of tables to one side where they have the best possible view of the adult and the board and can turn easily to look at their peers when they are speaking.

Ensure supervising adults in the playground use the HI child's radio aid and use an exaggerated wave to get children's attention.

Equipment and Maintenance

Equipment will need to be checked on return to school, daily after that and as needs arise. **Please follow the separate guidance provided to prevent infection risk.**

The radio transmitter should be used by adults only and not by peers. The transmitter and lanyard/belt clip should be wiped between users with 70% alcohol wipes.

Schools will need to provide 70% alcohol wipes and gloves or alcohol gel to prevent infection risk associated with equipment handling.

Contact the STePS Advisory Teacher for Hearing with any queries and send photos or make a video call for support with troubleshooting equipment faults.

Learning and Interactions

Use children's names when giving instructions or asking questions so the child knows when these are or aren't directed at them.

Name children before you take contributions or questions, and repeat peers' contributions which the HI child is unlikely to have heard properly

Record key information on the board in written, pictorial or diagrammatic form.

Repeat key learning points and instructions and check regularly that the HI child has understood.

If the child has a Communication Support Worker unable to attend due to their own health conditions, please contact your STePS Advisory Teacher for Hearing.

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