

Advice to local authority commissioners on meeting the needs of children and young people with **sensory impairments** in implementing SEND reform



Summary

This briefing is to help commissioners in local authorities discharge their responsibilities to children and young people with sensory impairments under Part 3 of the Children and the Families Act 2014 and the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

This short briefing:

- Summarises five key issues on which action may be required to ensure the needs of children with sensory impairments are met. Taking action on these issues will support you in improving outcomes whilst also making effective use of specialist staff and resources.
- Signposts to a number of key resources that may be helpful in considering the needs of children with sensory impairments.

We hope that this note will be helpful to Directors of Children's Services with specific responsibilities in commissioning for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Why specific action is needed

Children with sensory impairments are among the most vulnerable in society and specific action is needed to ensure that they benefit from the recent reforms to SEND legislation. Most will be eligible for entitlements under both SEN and Equality Act legislation.

Most teaching and learning occurs through listening and seeing. Having a vision and/or hearing impairment presents complex challenges to children and those supporting them – both parents and professionals. Specialist support is therefore required to ensure that they can access teaching and learning, both in formal education such as early years settings, schools, and colleges and in the home.

Most children and young people with sensory impairments are born to families with no prior experience of sensory impairments. Given the importance of families in early years learning and development of communication and language, families also need access to specialist support.

Sensory impairment is a low incidence need. This means mainstream education and health professionals can lack the knowledge and experience to meet these specialist needs. This can have implications for how services for children and young people are delivered and structured. For example, teachers and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO) are likely to be more reliant on specialist support for sensory impairments than for other types of higher incidence SEN, where they are more likely to have received training and gained experience of meeting children's needs.

Introduction

Over the past few years, Blind Children UK, the National Deaf Children's Society, RNIB and Sense have listened to the views and experiences of families of children with sensory impairments (SI), as well as the professionals that support them, about the SEND framework and the proposed changes. With the focus now moving to implementation, we have identified five key issues, set out in the following checklist, on which we believe action is needed in each local area to ensure that SEND reform is implemented successfully for children with SI.

Sensory impairment SEND reform checklist

- Is **data** on the needs of children and young people with SI, as well as their outcomes, collated, published and used to (i) commission services and (ii) benchmark performance with other services to inform improvement plans and the Local Offer?
- Has there been effective **consultation, involvement and participation** specifically with children and young people with SI, as well as their parents, in planning service development?
- Does the **Local Offer** reflect the specific needs of children and young people with SI and their families?

- ☑ On **assessments**, is there sufficient support from specialist teachers with a Mandatory Qualification in SI and specialist healthcare professionals to ensure:
 - early years providers, schools and colleges can meet their 'assess, plan, do and review' responsibilities set out in the SEND Code of Practice; and
 - EHC Plans are based on a rigorous assessment of education, health and care needs that fully take account of the implications of sensory impairment for teaching and learning and on the child's development?
- ☑ Have you considered the **regional commissioning** of services to ensure that the diverse needs of all children with SI can be met cost effectively?

Key issues and resources

The following sections outline why these five key issues are particularly important for children and young people with SI before outlining a number of supporting resources.



1) Data: Issues and implications

Section 22 of the Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to identify all children who have a disability, as well as those who may or may not have a SEN. Sections 3.27 to 3.30 of the SEND Code of Practice also emphasise the importance of reliable data-sets to inform Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and reviews of local SEN provision for the Local Offer. Specific emphasis is given to ensuring that registers of children with SI are kept accurate and up-to-date, as required under the Children Act 1989, as such low-incidence needs are particularly difficult to plan for from national data sets (see para 3.28 of the Code). Under the Deafblind Guidance, local authorities have a legal responsibility to identify deafblind children living locally.

In addition, government advice to local authorities and health partners (December 2013) suggests that consideration be given to the following questions:

- “What does my local area’s data tell me about outcomes for children and young people with SEN?”
- How will I know my local area is performing well to help children and young people with SEN achieve in education and employment (outcomes)?”

A lack of quality data on the number of children with SI, their needs and outcomes undermines effective commissioning of services. It also undermines the quality of Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Local Offers.

Key challenges include:

- Failure to collate information on children with SI in the disability register

- Data in the School Census is limited only to those who have been formally recorded as having a special educational need.

The absence of data also makes it harder to identify outcomes achieved by children with SI and so for local authorities to benchmark their performance against others.

Useful resources and references

On sensory impairment:

The National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) outcomes benchmarking project seeks to support services in reviewing the outcomes achieved by children with SI in their area including vision impairment specific independence outcomes:

www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/outcomesbenchmkg

On hearing impairment:

The Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) carries out an annual survey of education provision for deaf children:

www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE

On vision impairment:

UK Vision Strategy (2014) Eye health and sight loss; statistics and information for developing a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (Chapter 6): www.commissioningforeyecare.org.uk/

On multi-sensory impairment:

Sense carries out a biannual survey of local authorities to check identification rates of deafblind children: www.sense.org.uk/lasurvey

Research on the prevalence of deafblindness in the UK, with regional estimates of future rates: Robertson, J., and Emerson, E., Centre for Disability Research (2010) Estimating the Number of People with Co-occurring Vision and Hearing Impairments in the UK London: Sense: <http://www.sense.org.uk/content/regional-data-future-deafblind-population>

2) Consultation, involvement and participation in planning service development: Issues and implications

There is a strong emphasis on co-production in the SEND Code of Practice, not least in relation to the Local Offer (see Section 4.9).

As sensory impairment is a low incidence need, it is important to ensure that the views of children and young people with SI and their parents are not overshadowed by those with higher incidence needs. For example, because of the low incidence of SI, it is less likely that parents of children with a SI will be represented on the Parent Carer Forums than parents of children with higher incidence SEND.

The Government has emphasised that the views of children and young people should be sought separately from their parents. Children with SI also have specific access needs that will need to be considered for any consultation, involvement and participation with them – such as communication support, accessible materials, simplified information and so on.

Parents and carers may also need support to communicate their personal preferences. All materials should be made available in accessible formats.

Useful resources and references

On hearing impairment:

Children Hearing Services Working Groups (CHSWGs) already exist in many areas and often work effectively as a multi-disciplinary group of professionals with parent representation.

Local Deaf Children's Societies also exist across England, lead by local parents of deaf children: www.ndcs.org.uk/localgroups

NDCS has produced information on how to make resources accessible to deaf children and young people: http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/support_in_your_area/local_groups/running_a_local_group/supporting_deaf.html#contentblock3

On vision impairment:

Access through local authority VI services, local societies (www.visionary.org.uk/), Action for Blind People clubs and family events www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/our-services/ or Blind Children UK www.blindchildrenuk.org.uk.

On multi-sensory impairment:

Sense have produced comprehensive guides on communicating with deafblind people: www.sense.org.uk/content/communicating-deafblind-people

Sense resource for professionals: Meeting the needs of deafblind children in the new SEN system: <http://www.sense.org.uk/senchanges>

3) Local Offer : Issues and implications

Parents of children with SI can find it particularly hard to locate information about SI, given that it is a low incidence need requiring specialised support. It will therefore be vital for the Local Offer to be comprehensive in relation to support for children and young people with SI.

The Local Offer also provides an opportunity for local authorities to review local provision for children with SI, in order to meet the requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice so that provision can be more responsive to local needs and aspirations.

In particular, parents of children with SI have told us that it is helpful for them for information on deafness, vision impairment and multi-sensory impairment to be clearly separated out in the Local Offer.

The Code also requires the Local Offer to include information about national specialist provision outside of the area for low incidence needs (paragraph 4.4). This will be particularly valuable for parents of children with SI.

Useful resources and references

On sensory impairment:

NatSIP Local Offer advice:

www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/workstreams-and-groups/2-supporting-the-implementation-of-the-send-reforms/2b-local-offer

NatSIP quality improvement support pack:

www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/524-qilaunch

NatSIP Eligibility Criteria for Scoring Support Levels:
<http://nhdcs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/NatSIP-Eligibility-Criteria-Final-2013.pdf>

On hearing impairment:

NDCS Local Offer advice:
www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=8695

NDCS quality standards: specialist teaching and support services for deaf children and young people:
www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/our_resources/

On vision impairment:

RNIB maintaining quality provision webpages:
www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-professionals-education-professionals/maintaining-quality-provision

Developing a Local Offer for children and young people with vision impairment: RNIB advice to local authorities:
www.rnib.org.uk/SENDreforms

On multi-sensory impairment:

Quality standards in education support services for children and young people who are deafblind / multi-sensory-impaired:
www.sense.org.uk/publications/quality-standards-education-support-services-children-and-young-people-who-are

Information about the support available from Sense Children's Specialist Services:
www.sense.org.uk/content/childrens-specialist-services-core-offer-and-overview

4) Assessments: Issues and implications

The importance of high quality assessments to identify the needs of children with SEN, inform target settings, strategies and plans and review progress is emphasised throughout the SEND Code of Practice. Such assessments will inform the support provided to children under the age of 2 in the home, the graduated approach in early years settings, schools and colleges as well as helping to ensure Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans) are fit for purpose.

Section 9.49 of the Code states that, where a child has a sensory impairment, a qualified specialist teacher must be consulted when seeking advice and information for an assessment for an EHC plan. In addition, under the Deafblind Guidance, deafblind children are legally entitled to an assessment of their social care needs carried out by a suitably qualified professional. This should be built into the co-ordinated EHC plan assessment process.

A number of specialist assessments are available for use with children and young people with SI that take into account their specific needs, particularly in relation to communication, habilitation, language and literacy.

Useful resources and references

On sensory impairment:

NatSIP Better assessments, better plans, better outcomes: a multi-disciplinary framework for the assessment of children with sensory impairment:

www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/workstreams-and-groups/2-supporting-the-implementation-of-the-send-reforms/2a-ehc-plans

NatSIP model Education, Health and Care Plans for children with SI:
www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/workstreams-and-groups/2-supporting-the-implementation-of-the-send-reforms/2a-ehc-plans

On hearing impairment:

NDCS / NatSIP: Assessing and monitoring the progress of deaf children and young people:
www.ndcs.org.uk/assessments

BATOD: The role of the Teacher of the Deaf:
www.batod.org.uk/index.php?id=/resources/teaching/tod-role.htm

On vision impairment:

RNIB / VIEW position statement on the role of the qualified teacher of vision impairment:
www.viewweb.org.uk/

On multi-sensory impairment:

Sense research with specialist MSI professionals working in SEND pathfinder areas to explore how best to support deafblind children through the EHC plan process:
www.sense.org.uk/publications/supporting-deafblind-children-reformed-sen-system-experiences-sense-practitioners

Department of Health: Social care for deafblind children and adults (the deafblind guidance) (2009):
www.sense.org.uk/content/deafblind-guidance

Sense standards for professionals qualified to assess a deafblind person:
www.sense.org.uk/publications/suitably-qualified-assess-deafblind-person-england

5) Regional commissioning: Issues and implications

Section 3.68 of the SEND Code of Practice requires local authorities to consider strategic planning and commissioning of services for children with low-incidence needs across groups of local authorities or at a regional level.

As children with SI have specialist but diverse needs, it can be challenging for smaller local authorities to meet the wide range of needs that such children may have. Regional commissioning is therefore recommended for services for children with SI.

Local authorities who have already done so – such as in the Berkshire area – have reported an improvement in their ability to offer comprehensive support to children in a more cost effective way, making best use of specialist expertise across a wider area.

Useful resources and references

On sensory impairment:

Department for Education: Planning and developing special educational provision: a guide for local authorities and other proposers: www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=9247

NatSIP advice on joint commissioning:
www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/565-joint-comissioning-key-information-summary-leaflet

On vision impairment:

RNIB's evidence based review of children and young people includes a profile of the group, the policies that govern and impact upon their lives, and a commentary on what the evidence tells us: www.rnib.org.uk/knowledge-and-research-hub-research-reports/evidence-based-reviews

Working in partnership

Blind Children UK is a national charity that uses expertise and skills to deliver a range of services, break down barriers and raise standards to meet the needs of children and young people with vision impairment. For more information, visit www.blindchildrenuk.org/ or contact services@blindchildrenuk.org

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. There are over 45,000 deaf children across the UK. NDCS has a team of regional directors that works to influence and support local decision makers on the needs of deaf children, including sharing examples of best practice and on the issues highlighted in this note. For more information on our work, visit www.ndcs.org.uk/RDs or contact professionals@ndcs.org.uk.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is the leading charity offering information, support and advice to almost two million people with sight loss. For more information, visit www.rnib.org.uk or contact helpline@rnib.org.uk

Sense is a national charity that supports and campaigns for children and adults who are deafblind. Deafblindness/multi-sensory impairment (MSI) is a combination of both sight and hearing difficulties and is therefore a unique disability. There are an estimated 4,000 deafblind/MSI children in the UK. For more information, visit www.sense.org.uk or contact info@sense.org.uk

