

A Survey of

Provision for Pupils in Hearing Impaired Units

in Northern Ireland

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eti
The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 From May to October 2005, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) undertook a survey of the provision in units for pupils with hearing impairment in order to:
- evaluate the quality of teaching in the hearing-impaired (HI) units; and
 - identify how those responsible for the education of pupils with hearing impairment might best respond to current and emerging needs.
- 1.2 This report is based on the findings of ten inspection visits to primary and post-primary schools with HI units, across the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and on subsequent discussions with officers from the Sensory Support Services of the ELBs. Throughout the course of the survey, the inspectors held discussions with school principals, unit teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), classroom assistants, other teachers responsible for integrating pupils, and, where appropriate, with the pupils themselves. In addition, the inspectors observed a total of 56 lessons, examined samples of the pupils' work, and evaluated management and the teachers' planning. The schools provided a wide range of policy documents and materials specific to individual pupils, including statements of special educational needs.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In Northern Ireland, overall provision for deaf pupils and pupils with hearing impairment consists of discrete specialist provision in the Jordanstown Schools for pupils with hearing and visual impairments and further provision in the 12 special units attached to primary and post-primary schools which were the main focus of this survey. A small number of pupils attend Mary Hare Grammar School in England and St Mary's School for the Hearing Impaired Children, Cabra, in Dublin. In addition, pupils with hearing impairments may attend mainstream schools, with support from the peripatetic services for sensory impairment.



- 2.2 During the period of the survey, there were 766 pupils with hearing impairment and 145 deaf pupils in Northern Ireland (see Appendix 2). There were some 102 pupils educated in HI units attached to six primary and six post-primary schools; therefore, the pupils in HI units were a minority of the overall population of pupils with hearing impairment. The total staffing of these units consists of 18 full-time equivalent teachers. In the past ten years, eight HI units have closed; two of the remaining units have very small numbers. To date, there are no agreed criteria for admission to the units, across the ELBs, and there is no common agreed level of support for the pupils in units, nor indeed for the increasing numbers of pupils with hearing impairment in mainstream classes.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE HEARING IMPAIRED UNIT PROVISION

- 3.1 The survey findings indicate a number of key characteristics of effective provision which are specific to the HI unit context; these include:
- pupils with hearing impairment accessing learning alongside their hearing peers;
 - all staff (teaching and non-teaching), other professionals and parents/carers having access to regional specialist advice and support;
 - the HI unit and mainstream staff having access to joint training, to enable the sharing and development of skills;
 - agreed guidance on the best approaches to teaching and learning for hearing-impaired pupils;
 - the development of a systematic means of sharing expertise and disseminating current good practice; and
 - frequent high quality opportunities for teachers and assistants to develop their understanding of and ability to use information and communication technology (ICT) and HI technology.

4. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The survey findings, and subsequent discussions, highlight the need for:

- consideration to be given to the setting up of a Northern Ireland Centre for Hearing Impairment to support local development and to help secure consistency of provision and training in addressing HI needs;
- the establishment of a regional forum for unit, school and ELB personnel to discuss and consider their practices, to identify common indicators of best practice and to provide guidance for mainstream staff on effective integration arrangements;
- ongoing staff development and training opportunities for teachers and classroom assistants to meet the needs of a changing hearing impaired population and, in particular, to develop further their skills in the use of specialised technology;
- a comprehensive review of services for pupils with hearing impairment to promote equity in resourcing and provision for all pupils;
- the development of a common policy across all ELBs which identifies the arrangements for integration and for the sharing of knowledge and skills;
- training opportunities for mainstream staff to develop their teaching approaches to assist pupils with hearing impairment to work effectively alongside their peers in mainstream classes; and
- increased opportunities for HI unit staff to support mainstream teachers, given the increasing numbers of pupils with hearing impairment entering mainstream schools.

5. THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION

5.1 The HI units are caring and supportive environments which, in almost all instances, meet well the educational, personal and social needs of the individual pupils. A majority of the classrooms are bright and attractive;



displays are stimulating and are used well to support teaching. The positive ethos evident in the units is a key aspect of the overall good practice noted. The pupils respond well to the variety of methods used to increase their self-esteem, and to praise their efforts. The unit staff work effectively with parents and the wider community to support the pupils and there are many examples of good arrangements for communicating information about the pupils' welfare and progress.

- 5.2 The quality of teaching observed was always satisfactory, mostly good and, on occasions, excellent. The teachers know their pupils well and are skilled in providing for and supporting the pupils with hearing impairment. The planning is of good quality and reflects well the pupils' learning needs. Some good examples were observed of unit teachers using ICT, particularly multi-media digital materials, to develop language and aid communication; frequently, attractive digital photographs of recent trips and community activities are used well for these purposes. The effective use of ICT has considerable potential for supporting and enhancing the learning of pupils with hearing impairment. Training in ICT should be made available to all teachers of the hearing-impaired, so that they can utilise it more extensively to support the pupils' access to the full curriculum. Overall, the pupils in the units make satisfactory progress in literacy, numeracy, and in other aspects of the curriculum.
- 5.3 In a majority of schools, the management arrangements ensure regular and supportive communication between the senior management and the unit staff. Policies vary from detailed and comprehensive information, guiding all aspects of the provision for pupils with hearing impairment, to general guidance which gives limited direction to planning, recording and reporting progress. In a majority of schools, the teacher of the pupils with hearing impairment, facilitated by senior management, provides training or information sessions for staff, focusing on the pupils' Education Plans (EPs) and their individual pastoral and other special needs.
- 5.4 In a majority of schools, the Principals take a keen interest in the work of the units, visit them on a regular basis and are aware of the main issues affecting the quality of the pupils' experiences. Priority is given to providing opportunities for the pupils with hearing impairment to work alongside their peers in the mainstream classes. This good quality inclusive practice allows a pupil with hearing impairment to work

alongside his/her peers and to engage effectively with a range of curriculum areas.

- 5.5 A majority of the pupils in the HI units experience additional special needs beyond the significant speech and language development difficulties, commonly associated with pupils with hearing impairment. As more pupils with hearing impairment enter the mainstream classes with additional learning difficulties, both unit and mainstream teachers will require additional joint staff development and training.
- 5.6 The teachers reported that they felt they would benefit from opportunities to meet as a group to share experiences and to develop common approaches to teaching and learning. Such meetings should also provide opportunities for the sharing of expertise and for good practice to be disseminated across schools and units. Currently, this is done during meetings of The British Association of the Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) which provides a forum for teachers to meet and discuss their professional work in the teachers' own time, in the evenings or at weekends.
- 5.7 Planning in the special units is, in the majority of cases, guided by a strong commitment to integrate pupils into the mainstream and to provide opportunities for them to work alongside their peers for varying periods. There is evidence of successful integration in most schools. Overall, however, there is no commonly agreed guidance regarding the integration of pupils with hearing impairment into mainstream classes across the ELBs. There is also undue variation in the amount of time that pupils are integrated and in the range of subjects, in which they are able to participate, as members of an integrated teaching group.
- 5.8 There is significant variation in the pupil-teacher ratios across the units. The pupil-teacher ratios ranged from 1:4 to 1:10, with average numbers at approximately 1:6. The increasing complexity of the needs of pupils with hearing impairment would indicate that equity, in terms of resourcing across the ELBs, is essential to help ensure that all pupils gain maximum benefit from attending units and from the opportunities to work alongside their peers in mainstream classes.
- 5.9 A majority of the mainstream teachers interviewed during the survey indicated their appreciation of the help received from their colleagues in the units, in relation to understanding the needs of pupils with hearing



impairment. A majority of the teachers interviewed were very aware of the range of expertise that their colleagues brought to the work and valued their advice on issues such as the technical support for pupils, the organisation of the classroom to best advantage, and the most appropriate manner of communicating with, and including, pupils with hearing impairment in lessons. In contrast, a minority of teachers failed to make good use of the knowledge and skills of the unit teachers.

- 5.10 The classroom assistants play a crucial role in ensuring that information and advice, regarding individual pupils and their learning needs, are mediated to mainstream teaching staff; there is ample evidence that their role is crucial to the successful integration of pupils. Of particular note is their role in supporting pupils' communication needs, through in-class support and encouragement, and their help with interpreting and relaying information. A majority of classroom assistants are skilled in the use of audiology equipment and provide useful help with note-taking and organising equipment. The specialist training, which this group gained, enhanced their capacity to support both pupils and teachers. This level of training is essential for all classroom assistants working with pupils with hearing impairment.
- 5.11 In one ELB, an audiologist visits schools to ensure that the hearing status of the pupils is quickly assessed and that steps are taken to provide and maintain appropriate amplification equipment. In this ELB, the teachers are content that each pupil's hearing equipment is maintained to a good standard and that repairs are carried out without undue delay; this service should be made available across Northern Ireland.
- 5.12 The age profile of the unit teachers indicates that, in the next five to ten years, a significant number of highly trained and experienced teachers will leave the profession. There is a likelihood that recruitment and retention of staff may be a major issue, unless a costed and planned programme to replace expertise is developed as a matter of urgency. This is more likely to be effective in the context of an integrated service for all pupils with hearing impairment, whether in units or within mainstream.
- 5.13 The survey also identifies a trend towards more mainstreaming of pupils. Over the past five years, the number of pupils with hearing impairment

and deaf pupils has remained constant, but the trend toward mainstream, rather than unit placement, is continuous. In recent years, some ELBs have already begun to reallocate resources away from individual schools, as units close, and to place teachers under the management of the Sensory Impaired Service. A number of unit teachers have joined the ELB services for the sensory impaired; where this has happened, valuable expertise has been retained in the service. The evidence from inspection visits indicates the need for a review in the level of resources, and in the management of support for the overall HI population, to take account of the trends in pupil placement and to respond more flexibly to changing circumstances.

- 5.14 The decline in the number of pupils with hearing impairment in units, reflects a growing trend to enrol pupils with hearing impairment in mainstream classes with support. It is evident, from discussion with ELB officers, that this trend will continue and this raises issues for the future of HI unit provision. In this regard, it will be essential to ensure that the skills and knowledge of the staff of HI units are not lost, but that they are facilitated in providing ongoing support to mainstream teachers, to help them develop their skills in working with pupils with hearing impairment. In addition, the role of the Jordanstown Schools and the ELB services for the sensory impaired will need to be clarified, as numbers of pupils with hearing impairment entering mainstream schools rises. In this way, a more integrated service could be developed which should be able to respond flexibly to support pupils in areas of need. In any new structures, it will be important to ensure that the increasing inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in mainstream classes is supported by the same level of advice, support and expertise that is currently available to the unit provision.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 There is clear evidence that a majority of HI units provide good quality education for their pupils. The strengths of these units lie in the sound management, the good quality of the teaching, the effective planning for the pupils' learning, the generally effective integration arrangements, and the sound progress the pupils make in their learning. The knowledge and skills of the unit staff are also significant components of the good



practice observed. The HI units are an important part of the continuum of provision for pupils with hearing impairments; they provide appropriate support to enable pupils with hearing impairment to learn, make progress and integrate with their peers. This report identifies characteristics of effective HI unit provision, as well as making specific recommendations on how the arrangements might serve pupils with hearing impairment more consistently with high quality provision.



Appendix 1

SCHOOLS VISITED

Ballymoney High School

Cregagh Primary School, Belfast

Holy Trinity Primary School, Belfast

Limavady High School

Lismore Comprehensive School, Craigavon

Orangefield High School, Belfast

St Anne's Primary School, Londonderry

St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar

St Conor's Primary School, Omagh

The Holy Family Primary School, Teconnaught



Appendix 2

HEARING-IMPAIRED PUPILS

ELB area	2003/04	2004/05
Belfast	153	181
Western	171	157
North-Eastern	114	111
South-Eastern	144	155
Southern	150	162
NI total	732	766

DEAF PUPILS

ELB area	2003/04	2004/05
Belfast	14	24
Western	15	22
North-Eastern	56	59
South-Eastern	19	25
Southern	19	15
NI total	123	145

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