

Advice for schools to support access to online learning for hearing impaired students

This advice aims to support schools in ensuring that pupils with a hearing impairment are not at a disadvantage when online teaching is taking place.

- Accessing auditory information is challenging for all hearing impaired children and young people and it is not possible to predict the challenges individuals will face based on their levels of hearing loss alone.
- Online sessions that cannot be successfully accessed can leave students feeling more isolated and frustrated because they are not able to fully engage with the sessions.
- Please seek advice from the Sensory Service on differentiation of home learning materials. Ensure close liaison with families, as appropriate, so that they are able to support their child's learning as much as possible.

Challenges for hearing impaired students

- Children and young people with a hearing impairment will use facial patterns, lip patterns and gestures to support their listening, even in good listening conditions. If they do not have clear access to this to support their listening, they are more likely to find it difficult to follow the session.
- The audio quality of online sessions cannot be guaranteed.
- Although many of the online platforms have caption capability the accuracy of these can vary tremendously and may not keep up with the speaker. This can be very confusing if what is being heard does not match what they are reading. Hearing impaired students may not be aware they are mishearing information.
- Text Overload - hearing impaired students need additional processing time compared to their hearing peers. Listening, following captions, looking at presentations and processing all the information places increased demands on the students who may find the pace of lessons more challenging in a virtual situation compared to a live classroom.

For further advice please contact the Sensory Service via phone: 028 25 661 258 or email: sensoryservice@eani.org.uk

- As in a normal classroom situation, students with a hearing impairment are not able to take notes whilst listening to a person speaking. This is even more challenging with online learning when they may need to be listening and reading the captions. They cannot then also write notes.

Recommendations

- Ensure that children can take equipment home to use to access any remote learning opportunities.
- Where signposting to online learning resources or using school-produced videos, check that these are accessible to students with hearing impairment e.g. subtitles.
- Live video delivered with teachers using a headset is preferable so that audio quality is of the highest possible standard. Speak clearly and at a steady pace to give captioning technology the best chance of keeping up. The use of a headset also helps to reduce the level of background noise for those listening.
- The speaker's face should be visible. Have light on your face rather than behind your head and speak at a steady pace, taking pauses between important points.
- Ensure there is no unnecessary noise in the background as children with hearing impairment are less able than adults to filter out background noise. They need good acoustic conditions.
- Make sure that the room where you are filming /recording has good acoustics in order to cut down on reverberation. Avoid rooms with lots of hard surfaces such as a kitchen. A smallish room with soft furnishings/ curtains or blinds is best.
- Plan time in sessions for students to listen, read, watch and process the information.
- Where applicable and depending on the software you are using:
 - Use emoticons (eg smiley face) to check the pace and content with the pupil.
 - Use the chat function to engage in another form as well as audio.
 - Make use of the polling function and agree for regular check-in with to check both hearing content and understanding.
- Send any PowerPoints/new vocabulary to the student in advance so they are able to review this before the lesson. This helps to overcome the slower processing that a student with hearing impairment may experience.
- Keep slides as simple as possible, do not crowd with text and use good accessibility practices. You can use the built-in Accessibility Checker in Microsoft Office 365 when creating presentations and documents or refer to [Good Accessibility Practice](#) .

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- Provide opportunities to work with the student / family to ensure that access to the auditory components is the best it can be by running test sessions to check out the technology. This can be particularly important for students using radio aids to help improve access.
- Provide glossaries for new vocabulary to support the development of language. Hearing impaired students do not develop new vocabulary through incidental encounters in the same way as children and young people with normal hearing.
- Make time to check in with students regularly to ensure they have understood new learning. Do not assume understanding. Students may not realise that they have missed new vocabulary or key points.
- The use of online applications that can record editable meeting notes (e.g. web captioner, otter.ai) can be used to record the sessions as notes. These notes can then be edited as necessary and sent to students.

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