

Future staffing arrangements to support hearing and impaired pupils

Purpose of the Report

This report seeks to:

1. Alert Schools Forum to anticipated capacity issues that will be experienced by the Sensory Team within Schools and Families Specialist Services over the next 3 academic years from 2018 -19 to 2020 - 21, as a consequence of predicted staff retirements during this period.
2. Outline the options available to Schools Forum to address the staffing shortfall in the context of a forecast of continued pressures on the High Needs Block budget.

Background

3. The Sensory Team provides a service for children and young people aged 0 -19, who are deaf or hearing impaired (HI); blind or visually impaired (VI); or have multi-sensory impairments e.g. deaf-blind. It is anticipated that there will be 6.9 vacancies by the end of 2020-2021. This would leave 3.3 FTE Teachers of the Deaf (ToD) and 3.3 FTE Teachers of the Visually Impaired (ToVI) to cover the whole county compared with a staffing baseline of 12.7 FTE teachers (7.7 x HI, 5 x VI) and 1 FTE Senior Practitioner who oversees the work of the team.
4. The reasons for the difference in the numbers of ToD and ToVI are historic. In pre-cochlear implant days it was felt that there was an argument for a higher number of TOD posts. When the Ewing School for the Deaf closed in 1995, a number of staff joined the peripatetic team. In 2013 5/7ths of Nottinghamshire districts were supporting more HI pupils than VI, however by January 2018 this shifted to only 2/7ths. There would seem less of an argument for maintaining this disparity going forward.
5. A temporary recruitment freeze was placed on vacant posts at the Extraordinary Schools Forum meeting on the 10th January 2018. The Sensory Team are carrying existing vacancies of 2.4 FTE, this comprises of 0.6 FTE ToVI and 1.8 ToD. In addition there are 2 teacher posts which will become vacant at the end of this academic year. However, this number could potentially rise to 4.5 FTE if other colleagues decide to finish in September 2018. Due to on-going issues with recruiting qualified teachers with mandatory sensory qualifications, an inability to appoint staff to replace colleagues retiring in the next 3 years, will have longer term implications.

Information and Advice

6. There are significant difficulties countrywide in recruiting to these specialist teacher posts. Neighbouring authorities in the East Midlands have had to undertake repeated recruitment exercises in order to try and fill posts and some still have vacancies, despite this.
7. In Nottinghamshire over the last 3 years it was necessary to appoint two unqualified staff and pay for them to complete the mandatory qualification with Birmingham University, in order to fill vacancies with the Sensory Team. It takes 2 years to complete the HI and VI qualifications and during this time the individual isn't legally allowed to carry a full caseload. Whilst the caseload can incrementally increase as their training progresses and their experience develops, this does mean that such appointments have an impact on the capacity of the Sensory Team. It would be advisable to anticipate the capacity issues in 2020-21 by recruiting and training staff from 2018-19.

Statutory Basis for the Work of the Sensory Team

8. The key pieces of primary legislation are the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Equalities Act 2010. They provide the overarching legal framework, with the more explicit detail being set out in the mandatory SEND Code of Practice (January 2015).
9. Section 19 (a) of the Children and Families Act states that the local authority needs to support the child and his/her parents, or the young person, in order to facilitate the development of the child/young person to help him/her to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.
10. Section 24 of the Children and Families Act states that local authorities are responsible for all children who have a disability (as well as a SEN). Section 27 of the Act requires local authorities to keep provision for disabled children under review to make sure it's sufficient to meet their education, training and social care needs, and that there are no gaps in provision. Disabled children and their parents must be consulted as part of any such review.
11. Section 20 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires local authorities to ensure that children and young people with a disability aren't placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled. This includes through the provision of auxiliary aids and is an anticipatory duty.
12. The relevant sections from the SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) are as follows:

Paragraph 9.49 – “In seeking advice and information, the Local Authority should consider with professionals what advice they can contribute to ensure that the assessment covers all the relevant education, health and care needs of the child and young person. Advice and information must be sought as follows:

- If the child or young person is either vision or hearing impaired, or both, the educational advice and information must be given after consultation with a person who is qualified to teach pupils or students with these impairments”.

Paragraph 6.34 – “Many children and young people with vision impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or a multi-sensory impairment (MSI) will require specialist support and/or equipment to access their learning, or habilitation support”.

Paragraph 6.61 – “Schools should work closely with the local authority and other providers to agree the range of services and clear arrangements for making appropriate requests. This might include schools commissioning specialist services directly. Such specialist services include, but are not limited to:

- specialist teachers or support services, including specialist teachers with a mandatory qualification for children with hearing and vision impairment, including multi-sensory impairment, and for those with a physical disability. (Those teaching classes of children with sensory impairment must hold an appropriate qualification approved by the Secretary of State. Teachers working in an advisory role to support such pupils should also hold the appropriate qualification)”.

13. The Sensory Team has an important role in supporting the local authority to meet its anticipatory duty under the Equality Act, by facilitating transitions into nursery and PVI settings, as well as schools. Staff within the team support the statutory assessment process by providing qualified professional advice about the needs of children and young people, their sensory impairment and the provision required to meet those needs. The Team are commissioned by mainstream schools, primarily through the Springboard process, to provide them with the specialist advice from qualified professionals, where they are required to seek it. This includes issuing, monitoring and maintaining specialist equipment issued to pupils. The Team maintain strategic links with health and produce guidance and training for schools based on research and developments in practice.

Caseload Over Time, Distribution and Profile of Need

14. Analysis of the Sensory Team caseload over a 55 month period between May 2013 and January 2018 indicates an incremental rise of approximately 35% in the total number of children and young people being supported by the team:

- In 2013 a total of 450 children/young people were on case load (182 – VI and 268 – HI)
- In 2016 a total of 587 children/young people were on case load (306 – VI and 281 – HI)
- In 2018 a total of 606 children/young people were on case load (278 – VI and 328 – HI)

15. Table 1a) at **Appendix 1** shows the distribution of children and young people with either VI or HI needs by district, between May 2013 and January 2018. It is evident that all the districts have VI and HI pupils for whom they will be making provision. Whilst there has been some fluctuation in the distribution of VI and HI pupils across districts between 2013 and 2018, all of the districts have seen an increase in the number of children and young people with a sensory impairment that they are supporting.

16. The majority of pupils with either a visual or hearing impairment are being educated in mainstream settings – 252 pupils in mainstream primary schools and 155 in mainstream secondary schools¹. At January 2018 only 10% of VI pupils were being educated in special provision (either a Nottinghamshire special school or an Independent/Non-Maintained School) and 11% of HI pupils. There are no specialist schools for the deaf or visually impaired in Nottinghamshire, so independent/non-maintained provision involves educating the children and young people away from their home communities. These placements are by definition more expensive than mainstream schools or maintained/academy special schools.

¹ 131 children are in pre-school; 16 children are primary age in special school and 1 is in an out of county primary; 32 young people are secondary age in special school and 13 are in secondary INM placements.

17. Table 1b) on **Appendix 1** indicates the severity of hearing impaired need across the 7 districts in Nottinghamshire. There is again some uniformity in the way that this need is distributed across the county. Whilst Table 1c) details the types of visual impairment and some of the interventions required to support those needs.

18. There has been a steady increase in the numbers of pupils requiring support from the Sensory Team over the last 4 ½ years. **Appendix 2** Table 2a) indicates that for most children and young people these needs will have been present from birth and will be lifelong. Only a small number of pupils will acquire a visual or hearing impairment as a result of an illness or injury. The Sensory Team provides support to young children prior to their admission to school, in homes and in nurseries. This is an important part of the early intervention strategy advocated in “Every Child Matters” and thereafter.

19. The complexity and severity of a pupil’s sensory impairment is used to determine the frequency with which the Sensory Team visit the setting. Please see **Appendix 2** Table 2b). Pupils in receipt of FM radio aids provided by the Sensory Team are routinely visited on a half termly basis to monitor and assess the pupil’s hearing and ensure that the equipment is working optimally. This has to be carried out by somebody suitably qualified to undertake those assessments.

Staffing comparison with other statistical/geographical neighbours

20. It has been difficult to get information from other local authorities on the size of their Sensory Teams in order to benchmark Nottinghamshire’s team. Information was provided by three local authorities and their comparative information is detailed below:

	NoR (Jan 17)	HI Caseload	No of ToD (FTE)	VI Caseload	No of ToVI (FTE)
Nottinghamshire	120,724	329	7.7 (1.8 vacant)	278	5 (0.6 vacant)
Derbyshire	111,812	Not provided	7.7	Not provided	6.5
Staffordshire	125,586	727	12	397	9 (1 Manager post is vacant)
Lancashire	179,099	Not provided	13.7 (incl 3.2 traded service)	Not provided	8.5 (incl 4.6 traded service)

In the case of Staffordshire, it is worth noting that in addition to their specialist teachers, they also employ 30 Communication Support Workers (CSWs) for HI, who support individual signing pupils in schools; and 25 (CSWs) for VI, who support individual tactile learners in school. They have two mobility officers and three peripatetic CSWs who support in Early Years, homes and with touch-typing. Shared staff across both the VI and HI teams include a technician and three intervenors. The intervenors work with children with Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI) and deaf or VI children with complex needs.

21. In Nottinghamshire there are 2.6 Teaching Assistants who work across VI and HI. Nottinghamshire County Council also employs a Sensory Technician and an Habilitation Officer; one of the ToD is also a trained Audiologist. Two of the VI teachers are undertaking the mandatory qualification (one is nearing completion, the other is just starting), which means that they are unable to carry a full caseload at this time.

Options

i) Implement the phased recruitment and training of teachers without the mandatory sensory qualifications

22. This would help address the issue of trying to recruit qualified staff, which is a national issue. The difference in pay between an unqualified member of staff and a qualified member of staff can be used to help offset the cost of the training. It takes 2 years for a teacher to achieve the mandatory qualification from the start of the course and during that time they aren't legally permitted to carry a full caseload. Starting a phased recruitment and training programme now will help address further capacity issues that are predicted over the next 3 years.
23. Not recruiting may have a limited impact at this stage. It will probably be possible to meet statutory requirements in the short term, but this would require a reduction in caseload. This would mean asking clinics not to send through referrals for children with mild/moderate/unilateral hearing loss or refractive errors and visual acuities below 6/16. It would also mean reconsidering how the service monitors FM systems in school, with a view to reducing our monitoring role. Currently the Sensory Team aim to see children and young people with moderate/severe hearing loss every half term, but this could be reduced to termly.
24. This might address the situation in the short term, but there will be further staff reductions going forward which will exacerbate rather than ameliorate the capacity issue. Limiting clinic referrals runs counter to the principle of early intervention. These children and young people may become known to the Sensory Team later on as a result of issues arising from unmet earlier needs. Having invested in specialist equipment it makes practical sense to ensure that these are monitored and working correctly. When they cease to work a replacement has to be found or repaired quickly otherwise a child/young person is left with reduced capacity to access the curriculum in contravention of the primary legislation and the statutory Code of Practice, detailed earlier.
25. The indications are that Sensory Team vacancies will increasingly be filled by teachers who do not hold the mandatory VI, HI or MSI qualifications at the time of appointment. Given the 2 year timescale for achieving these mandatory qualifications, it would be sensible to begin a phased programme for recruiting and training these staff at the earliest opportunity.
26. It would be preferable to be able to recruit to these posts from a wider pool than Schools and Families Specialist Services. Limiting recruitment to within Schools and Families Specialist Services would alleviate capacity issues in the Sensory Team by creating ones for other teams, such as the Cognition and Learning Team and the Communication and Interaction Team. These are still subject to a recruitment freeze and would therefore be unable to backfill.

ii) Commission services externally to fill gaps

27. There is no one to externally commission from. There aren't any private or charitable organisations offering this service and there are limited numbers of suitably qualified Teachers of the Deaf and Teachers of the Visually Impaired in the system, hence the current recruitment issues. The Sensory Team has been encouraging special school heads to consider training one of their staff in one of the three mandatory qualifications. It

will again take 2 years for the staff to become qualified. The choice of qualification will be driven by the need of the special school. Whilst this approach may help address the demands placed on the Sensory Team by special schools, there will still be an issue around capacity to support mainstream inclusion, which is the primary purpose of the team.

28. A centrally managed team is able to keep an overview of needs and issues across the county and to explore county-wide solutions. It is able to maintain crucial links with health professionals and third sector partners, which inform training, guidance and strategy.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Schools Forum:

- Notes the content of this report.
- Approves option 1, in order to address the staffing capacity issues within the Sensory Team. This will allow the Sensory Team to recruit and train up to 4 teachers to attain the mandatory sensory qualifications over the next 2 academic years (2 x Teachers of the Deaf and 2 x Teachers of the Visually Impaired), using the funding already available in the Schools and Families Specialist Services budget.

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Simon Ray

Acting Team Manager – Schools & Families Specialist Services

T: 0115 804 0823

E: simon.ray@nottscc.gov.uk