

# British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit for Practitioners

## Executive Summary



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EducationScot



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**For Scotland's Learners with  
Scotland's educators**



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## Background

This British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit is the first of its kind in Scotland. Our objective was to consider the available evidence on BSL through research, case studies and from consultation with parents, practitioners and partners. The Toolkit is necessary to support practitioners in early learning and childcare settings and schools who work with all Deaf children, young people and their families, parents and carers who use British Sign Language and Tactile BSL, or who may consider using it, in education.

## Approach to the task

Development of the toolkit was led by Education Scotland in partnership with Deaf and hearing parents, carers, Teachers of deaf children, Headteachers of Deaf schools/units, Deaf teachers, BSL Teachers and an online survey with parents who use British Sign Language. Consultation on the Toolkit has also been undertaken with Deaf professionals, Education professionals, Scottish Government, The University of Edinburgh and the British Deaf Association Scotland.

## The Toolkit

Toolkit takes account of the available research in British Sign Language. It identifies examples of good practice from Scotland, the UK and internationally. This BSL Toolkit should be used alongside the [‘Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners’](#).

## Conclusions

There are a number of key messages and areas of good practice which have emerged from the development of this Toolkit. Potential actions for practitioners and stakeholders to consider include:

### Strategic and operational

- Gathering more evidence through a range of methods including research, inspection findings and feedback from children, young people, families, practitioners and national partner organisations.
- Using the evidence to help inform future policy developments and drivers for change.
- Publishing case study examples to support practitioners who are working with families.
- Ensure the workforce is developed and equipped to work with BSL users.
- Consider having a qualified and registered BSL/English interpreter to support and communicate with BSL families in settings and schools.
- Consider having free opportunities for families to learn BSL.
- As a starting point, consider having a regular toddlers group to provide opportunities for parents to meet and socialize. Ensuring that there is at least one fluent Deaf BSL user and a BSL/English interpreter available at the group is important. Consideration should be given to potential transport issues that might arise for parents.
- Raise awareness of this Toolkit.

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### Operational

#### *Supporting Deaf children and young people*

There is a need to provide:

- Deaf role models, Deaf clubs, centres, youth clubs
- peer support and activities for Deaf children and young people
- meet regularly with other fluent signing children and staff
- early access to enough, and good quality BSL used between adults and peers to allow BSL acquisition
- opportunities for all children to attend BSL interpreted events

#### *Supporting practitioners*

There is a need to:

- provide BSL Awareness training for practitioners, contact information for Deaf organisations
- ensure a [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) (GIRFEC) approach when working with all children and families.
- ensure practitioners know how to access and book BSL/English interpreters and translators, and access support for children, young people and families
- support practitioners to have a greater understanding of the barriers that Deaf parents encounter when trying to support their learning of their Deaf and/or hearing child(ren)
- support practitioners to understand Deaf culture and identity
- allow time and space to understand the individual needs of families
- ensure families feel valued, included, understood and listened to
- recognise the need for specific intervention(s) to help staff support deaf children and overcome any barriers
- have access to suitable resources e.g. story books, signed videos
- clear communication channels with allocated Teacher(s) of deaf children

#### *Supporting parents*

There is a need to:

- have a parental support group for networking and exchanging information
- ensure Deaf parents have access to information about their rights, entitlements, options and available support
- facilitate exposure to sign language in the home environment
- provide information for Deaf parents via an interpreter/translator or in Easyread format
- ask BSL families about their specific communication needs and preferences
- support parents to become involved in the wider life and work of settings and schools
- involve parents in any transitions process

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### Research

Further research is required on:

- ways of facilitating early access for deaf children to BSL as a complete language;
- how to provide access to parents of ongoing BSL in the home to build confidence in the language;
- how to work with related professionals (Teachers of deaf children, Health Visitors) to demonstrate ways of encouraging bilingualism in deaf children, as we currently do in Scotland in relation to Gaelic.

### Moving forward

Improving outcomes for children, young people and families continues to be a key focus for all. Education Scotland, Scottish Government, local authorities, third sector organisations, practitioners, further and higher education establishments, researchers and others involved in working with deaf children and BSL families will continue to work together in partnership in taking forward actions to achieve this.

We trust that you will find this British Sign Language Toolkit valuable and look forward to working with you to deliver positive outcomes for children, young people and families both now and for the future generations to come.

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