

# British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit for Practitioners



This Toolkit is for all practitioners who work with:

- Deaf children, young people and their families
- Parents and carers who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Tactile BSL in education

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# 1. Scotland's vision for British Sign Language

*'We recognise the need to develop a clear pathway for deaf and deafblind children that helps promote the use of British Sign Language (BSL) at each stage in their education journey helping to maximise their potential at school, ensuring they have the right support to engage with BSL. Parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education'.*

([British Sign Language National Plan, 2023-29](#), p15)

Scotland has much to be proud of in terms of its [journey](#), transformational change and continuous commitment to British Sign Language. Moray House at the University of Edinburgh was one of three institutions in the United Kingdom who confirmed British Sign Language (BSL) is a language. The name 'British Sign Language' was first published from Moray House back in 1975. This has been an important cornerstone which has contributed to the journey of BSL in Scotland today.

The [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act](#) came into force in 2015. BSL is a recognised language within the 2015 Act. Following on from the introduction of the Act, Scotland's first National Plan for 2017-2023 was published in October 2017. The second [BSL National Plan](#) for the period 2023-29 was subsequently published in November 2023.

Scottish Government aims to make Scotland the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) users to live, learn, work and visit. Across Scotland there already exists a clear commitment to early intervention and prevention.

*'That commitment is best realised through proper, holistic support for families....The underlying universal support system must support all families and identify those who need more support'.*

([The Promise, 2021](#), p46)

Providing opportunities, supporting and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on the learning experiences of all children and young people is key to raising attainment.

**Parents have an [important role to play](#) in supporting their child's learning and development at home as well as in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, schools and the wider community.**

Research evidence shows that when 'parents, carers and other family members are effectively involved in their children's education, the outcome for their children is better' (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act [Guidance](#), 2006, pi).



## 1.2 The need for a British Sign Language Toolkit

In the first British Sign Language National Plan (2017-2023), ten long-term goals were outlined for BSL in Scotland. Additionally, the plan described 70 actions which Scottish Ministers would progress in order to achieve these long-term goals. In respect to parents and families, these actions included:

- Working with partners to determine the best way of enabling families and carers to learn British Sign Language so that they can communicate effectively with their Deaf or Deafblind child in the crucial early years (0-8) (**Action 13**).

- Working with Education Scotland to share advice and examples of good practice for education professionals and support staff about how to engage effectively with parents who use British Sign Language (**Action 20**).
- Working with British Sign Language users to develop information and advice about how parents who use BSL can get further involved in their child's learning (**Action 21**).

The need for a British Sign Language Toolkit was recognised while working with children, parents and practitioners on **Actions 20 and 21** mentioned above. This Toolkit is therefore aimed at practitioners within early learning and childcare settings and schools who support all deaf children, young people and their families, parents and carers who use BSL and Tactile BSL, or who may consider using it, in education. It has been shaped by feedback from focus groups and interviews with Deaf and hearing parents, carers, Teachers of Deaf children and young people, Headteachers of Deaf schools/units, Deaf teachers, BSL Teachers and an online survey with parents who use BSL. Consultation on the Toolkit has also been undertaken with Deaf professionals, a number of Education professionals, Scottish Government, The University of Edinburgh and the British Deaf Association (BDA) Scotland.

Following the publication of the second BSL National Plan, this Toolkit has subsequently been updated to align with the priorities for the years 2023-29.

The BSL National Plan (2023-29) has a refined focus on actions to address the systemic issues which have been identified as key barriers to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, learn and visit. Ten priority areas have been identified, with 45 actions aimed at further embedding BSL within wider government policy and thinking. Further information on the second national plan can be found in Section 5.4 of this Toolkit.

Within this Toolkit, where reference is made to '**BSL users**', this means **Deaf and/or Deafblind people** (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) **whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language**. It should be noted that throughout this document the use of small 'd' refers to deaf children that have not yet acquired British Sign Language. The use of a capital 'D' specifically refers to Deaf or Deafblind people who use British Sign Language.

## 2. Background

*'We need Scottish education to deliver both **excellence** in terms of ensuring children and young people acquire a broad range of skills and capacities at the highest levels, whilst also delivering **equity** so that every child and young person should thrive and have the best opportunity to succeed, regardless of their social circumstances or additional needs'.*

[\(National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan, 2022, p8\)](#)

Research by the University College London shows that around 1 in 600 Deaf babies are born in the United Kingdom every year. [96% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, the vast majority of whom do not have British Sign Language \(BSL\) skills.](#)

Where there is a lack of communication, this can lead to frustrations between settings, schools, families and at home. [Deaf children are 60%](#) more likely to experience [mental health problems](#) compared to other children. See Sections 7.1 and 8 below for further information.

In 2018/19, an [Annual Survey](#) undertaken by the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE), looked at the education provision for deaf children in Scotland.

Responses to this survey were received from 30 services covering 32 local authorities.

The findings of the survey showed that there were, at that time, around 3,647 Deaf children in Scotland. This figure highlighted an increase of 8% as compared to the previous academic year.

Figures obtained from the [2019/20 Annual Survey](#) and the [2020/21 Annual Survey](#) would suggest that these numbers reduced to 2,898 and 2,841 respectively. However, given the lower response rate (27 services in 2019/20 and 25 services in 2020/21), it was not possible to determine if there had indeed been a change overall in comparison with previous years.

Figures obtained from the 2022/23 Annual Survey were collated from 29 services who responded to the question. Based on those responses, the adjusted number of deaf children in Scotland was 3,418. This suggests a 3% increase from the 2022 figures when 30 services responded.

Annual surveys undertaken by CRIDE show the following key findings for school-aged deaf children in Scotland over the last 5 years.



It should be noted that CRIDE alternates from year to year between a full survey and a short survey, with the short survey including a mix of core and thematic questions. As can be seen from the table below, the 2020 survey was a short survey which means that some of the more detailed data available in other reports is not available in this report\*.

**Table 1: Numbers of deaf children in Scotland**

Numbers of deaf children	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of school-aged deaf children in Scotland	3,647	2,898	2,841	3,313	3,418
Number of services who responded	30	27	25	30	29
Attending a mainstream school	86%		81%	84%	83%
Attended a mainstream school with resource provisions	5%		5%	6%	9%
Attended a special school for deaf children (See Appendix 1)	1%		2%	2%	1%
Home educated	-		6%	<5	<5
Attended a special school which was not specifically for deaf children	6%		6%	9%	7%
Deaf children recorded as having an additional support need	22%		20%	-	28%
Deaf children using an additional spoken language other than English	7		8	-	8

One conclusion which could be drawn from these figures is that **Deaf children are much more likely to use British Sign Language if they are attending a Deaf school or resource base school. This is where a community of Deaf BSL users meet and learn together.**

Being deaf should, however, not be considered as a learning disability.

Deaf BSL children and young people would be more likely to access Deaf BSL role models who would support them to develop a strong sense of BSL, Deaf Culture and Identity in Deaf schools and resource base schools. There are fourteen local authorities in Scotland which have such a provision. These are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Number of local authorities with Deaf schools and resource base schools**

- Aberdeen
- Angus
- Dundee
- East Ayrshire
- Falkirk
- Fife
- Glasgow
- Highland
- Inverclyde
- Midlothian
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- South Ayrshire
- South Lanarkshire

**Local authorities who do not already have a Deaf school or resource base may wish to consider having something similar** when planning for **Actions 19 and 28** in the [British Sign Language National Plan](#) (2023-29).

Practitioners should be aware of the distinct groups which are:

- Deaf children/young people with Deaf parents;
- Hearing children with Deaf parents; and
- Deaf children with hearing parents.

While many of these groups will have some overlapping needs, practitioners need to know about how Teachers of Deaf children and young people can support with literacy development. This can be due to these distinct groups of children mentioned above, having very different experiences of access to BSL. **Action 16** in the BSL National Plan (2023-29) calls for early years staff to learn BSL up to Level 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This will promote the acquisition of BSL in more children at an earlier age.

This Toolkit sets out the key national legislation and [General Teaching Council for Scotland](#) (GTC Scotland) standards which practitioners should be aware of when working with deaf children and

their families. Information to help understand BSL and Deaf Culture is provided throughout the Toolkit alongside some of the key definitions and terms used when working with parents and families.

The Toolkit goes on to consider some of the barriers that BSL users may encounter when trying to engage with education and it provides suggested ideas and reflective questions for consideration on what might help address and overcome these. One such barrier may be that while Deaf parents may sign fluently, hearing parents have less opportunities to learn and develop these skills.



Ensuring that staff in settings, schools, public services, further/higher education and businesses are trained and able to work with BSL users is also discussed.

Lastly, there are a number of national organisations across Scotland which work with policymakers, practitioners, settings, schools and communities on engaging with parents and families. A list of some of these key national organisations is provided in Appendix 2 of this Toolkit for ease of reference.

## 2.1 Defining Deaf parents

Deaf parents are British Sign Language users who have Deaf and/or hearing children. The BSL National Plan (2023-29) focuses on this group of parents because of the wide consultation which took place with the Deaf Community leading up to the BSL (Scotland) Bill and onwards into the National Advisory Group (a short-term working group which included a Deaf parent).

Children can be deaf for many reasons but statistics shows that [genetics](#) is considered to be the most common. [Statistics](#) also show that approximately 90% of Deaf children are from hearing parents and 5-10% are from Deaf parents.

**Deaf parents may not have access to information about the Education system because practitioners do not sign BSL or do not know how to sign fluently in BSL, so they cannot communicate easily with Deaf parents, and often do not interact with Deaf parents.**

Deaf parents struggle to access information in the planning process for their child due to a lack of literacy and/or access to this in a BSL format. Additionally, practitioners often have to deal with cases without having an appropriate understanding of BSL, Deaf Culture, Identity and on how best to meet needs.

Knowledge about literacy may be much less because Deaf parents themselves were not taught in BSL when they were at school. Indeed, many Deaf parents experienced a long period without language in their own early childhood. The lack of language development (in any language) impacted their ability to learn reading and writing in English. Deaf parents themselves may not be aware how important it is to teach their own children (both deaf and hearing) to be fluent in BSL as early as possible. Additionally, Deaf parents may not know the details of how to help their own child(ren) learn how to read and write. **Reaching parents who find themselves in this situation is therefore a key priority.** It is also important that practitioners know how to support Deaf parents in an equally supportive way as they would with hearing parents.



**Statistics show that there is a much larger group of hearing parents of a Deaf child (96%) who do not know British Sign Language but many of whom want to learn.**

**Actions 16 and 17** in the BSL [National Plan](#) (2023-29) addresses their needs to learn BSL in the early years. One possible structure to support this would be to have an approach whereby hearing parents learn BSL when their Deaf child is young and/or alongside them. Classes then continue in the home, via online groups and in early learning and childcare settings with fluent BSL signers.

There are good examples of this in countries like the [Netherlands](#), [Ireland](#) and in some USA states such as [Colorado](#), and in Victoria in [Australia](#). In these countries and states, parents do not have to choose a path such as speech or sign. They can use both if they are allowed the opportunities. It is a challenge for hearing parents to find a BSL teacher and accessible classes to learn BSL, but it is possible if this is a policy priority. The outcome of this approach is children and parents who can communicate fluently with each other.

## 2.2 Key findings from focus groups and interviews

Data from the focus groups, interviews and the online survey suggest that there may be differences in the priorities and perspectives of Deaf parents and practitioners in respect to their children's learning. Reasons for these differences could be due to a lack of understanding of the needs and culture of Deaf children and families.

**Practitioners who may not have previously worked with BSL signing families may not be aware of how to access and book BSL/English interpreters, nor where to access support for them. Additionally, Deaf parents may have less access to information and therefore less understanding about their rights, entitlements, options, and what support is available to them.**

This can result in Deaf parents possibly feeling estranged from decision-making processes regarding their children's learning. Further information on how to work effectively with a BSL/English interpreter is available [here](#).

What is clear from the findings is a willingness from practitioners and parents to work together in partnership to support children's learning and improve outcomes.

Deaf parents who have both a hearing child and a Deaf child, expressed concerns over the variations in how their children's learning was progressing. For some Deaf parents, the progress of their Deaf child's learning was significantly behind that of their hearing child.

Findings from focus groups, interviews and the online survey also highlighted a need for practitioners to have a greater understanding of the barriers that Deaf parents encounter when trying to support the learning of their Deaf and/or hearing child(ren).

Suggestions to address some of these findings, were to:

- develop a British Sign Language Toolkit for:
  - practitioners who work with deaf children, young people and their families
  - parents and carers who use British Sign Language and Tactile BSL in education
  - family members and friends of deaf children and young people who do not currently use BSL but want to learn
- provide BSL Awareness training
- provide contact information for Deaf organisations to access further information
- provide Deaf role models
- provide Deaf clubs, centres and youth clubs

- have activities for Deaf young people
- provide peer and mentoring support
- provide a parental support group for networking and exchanging information
- ensure a [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) approach when working with all children and families

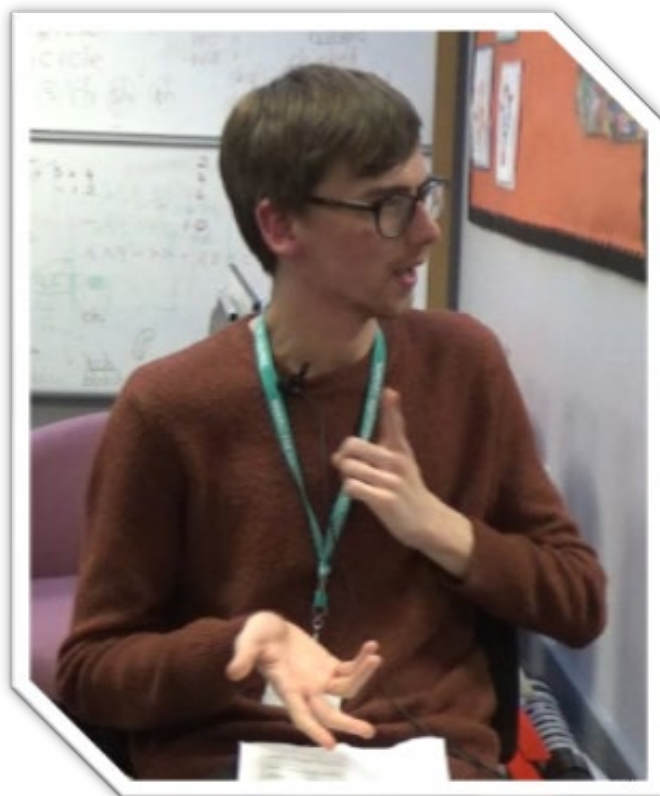
## 2.3 Local authority plans

Public bodies in Scotland are required under the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015), to publish their local British Sign Language plans every six years, showing how they will promote and support British Sign Language. It is good practice for these to be published in BSL and English at the same time. School services for Deaf children should also contribute to these plans and review targets which affect them.

Further information on local authority BSL Plans can be found on [Parentzone Scotland](#) and the Scottish Government BSL [website](#).

## 2.4 Overview of British Sign Language in Scotland

Appendix 3 provides a pictorial overview of British Sign Language in Scotland.



## 3. Terms and definitions

The following terms and definitions have been taken from the [Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners](#), [Deaf Research Report](#), and 'Understanding Deaf Culture: In search of Deafhood' (Ladd, 2003). This Toolkit was developed to provide practitioners with a practical resource to help support partnerships with parents and families in all aspects of their child's and their own learning. The various sections in the Toolkit can be used in all educational settings by early learning and childcare practitioners, teachers, parental involvement officers, family learning practitioners, community learning and development teams, family support and home-school link workers, third sector and national organisations who work with BSL families. The 'Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners' should be used alongside this Toolkit for practitioners working with British Sign Language users.

### 3.1 Terms

**'British Sign Language'** (BSL) - is the preferred language of over 87,000<sup>1</sup> Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language. Sign languages are fully functional and expressive languages; at the same time, they differ profoundly from spoken languages. BSL is a visual-gestural language with a distinctive grammar using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to convey meaning (Definition taken from the [British Deaf Association](#) website).

**'British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015'** – Act requiring public bodies to set out how they will promote the use of British Sign Language.

**'BSL Awareness'** – is a programme of awareness which focuses on the language of BSL, Culture, Identity and Deaf Community.

**'Child'** - For the purposes of support for children and families, 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years. 'Family', in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living (Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1995).

**'Corporate parenting'** is defined in the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2014) as 'the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers'. Throughout the Toolkit the term 'care experienced' will be used to denote looked after children and young people and care leavers to ensure a more inclusive definition.

**'Deaf'** - a cultural and visual way of being. It relates to being a visually oriented person and user of a signed language such as BSL.

The lowercase **'deaf'** refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audio-logical experience. It is also used to describe those who lost some or all of their hearing in early or later life, but whose first or preferred language is English.

Whereas the uppercase **'Deaf'** refers to those whose first or preferred language is BSL and who see themselves as enriched by a shared knowledge of language, culture and involvement with the Deaf community.

**'Deafblind'** - Deafblindness is the loss of sight and hearing to the point where communication, mobility and ability to access information are impacted. It affects everyone differently ([Deafblind UK | Supporting Deafblindness in the UK](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> The latest figures from [Scotland's Census](#) (2022) were not available at the time of printing. However, the Census now includes questions on British Sign Language.

**'Deaf Culture'** – The term 'Deaf culture' was developed in the 1970s to give utterance to the belief that Deaf communities contained their own ways of life mediated through their sign languages (Ladd, 2003). Deaf culture has in fact a history which expands over hundreds of years.

**'Deaf Community'** – The community of visually oriented Deaf people sharing a common sign language like BSL, common cultural references, and deaf space where they share the same experiences such as school sports, Deaf clubs and social gatherings. Further information about Deaf community can be found [here](#).

**'Deaf organisation'** – A loose term that can refer to an organisation or charity such as the British Deaf Association (Scotland) which is led by Deaf BSL signers.

**'Parents'** - refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of section 1(3) of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. Individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute to a child's learning at home.

**'Interpreter'**

- **'BSL/English Interpreter'** – an interpreter of BSL into English and vice-versa
- **'Tactile BSL Interpreter'** – an interpreter for Deafblind BSL users

**'Tactile BSL'** – is a method of communicating using touch that is used by some children who are deaf and blind. The Deafblind child places their hands over those of the signer to follow what is being communicated through touch and movement. This is sometimes called 'hand-over-hand', 'hands-on signing' or 'tracking'. The signs are based on British Sign Language (BSL), and it includes the Deafblind manual alphabet, which is based on the BSL fingerspelling alphabet.

**This method is particularly used by Deaf children and young people who used BSL as their first language before losing their vision.**



## 3.2 Definitions

### 3.2.1 Parental involvement

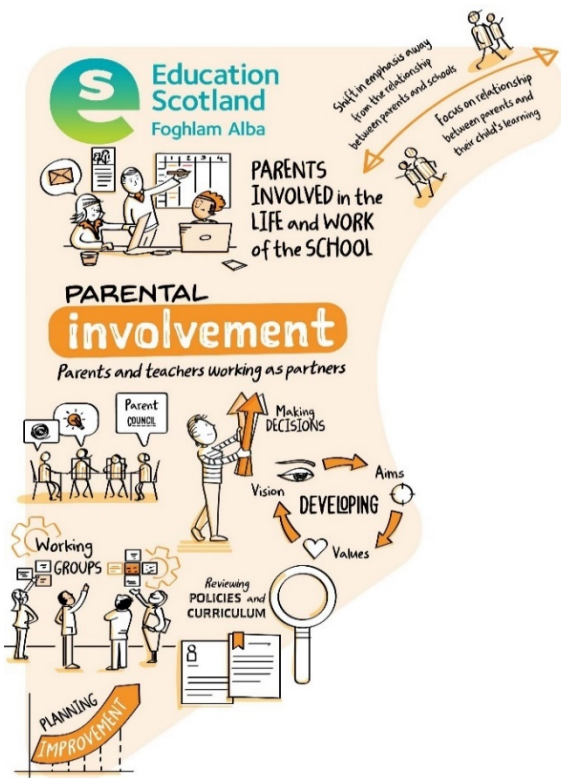
*'Parental involvement is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners'.*

**(Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006)**

'Parental involvement' is not a clearly or consistently defined term in literature. It has been described as:

- representing many different parental behaviours;
- parenting practices such as parental aspirations for their child's academic achievement;
- parental communication with their children about school;
- parental participation in school activities;
- parental communications with teachers about their child; and
- parental rules at home which are considered to be education-related.

**(Harris and Goodall, 2007)**



The range of definitions implies that parental involvement is multifaceted in nature because it subsumes a wide variety of parental behavioural patterns and parenting practices.

While there are no universally recognised definitions of 'parental involvement' in Scottish education, the term most often focuses on parents getting involved in the life and work of the establishment.

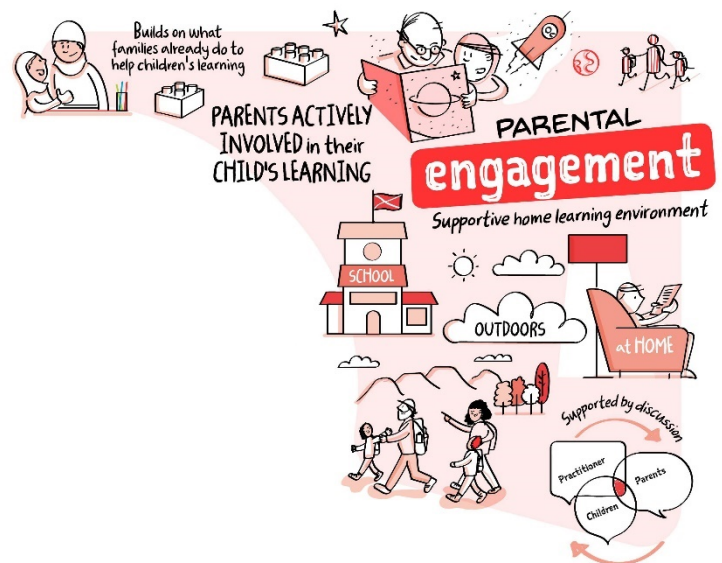
Early learning and childcare settings and schools involve parents by encouraging on-going, two-way communication between home and the establishment. They make sure parents views are represented and they have opportunities to contribute to improvement and decisions that affect the establishment as well as using the skills of parents to enrich the curriculum.

### 3.2.2 Parental engagement

Parental engagement can be considered as active involvement in learning. Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including:

- early learning and childcare settings (ELC);
- schools;
- the community;
- through family learning; and
- at home.

(Goodall and Montgomery, 2014)



'Parental engagement' most often refers to parents actively and meaningfully engaging in their children's learning (Harris and Goodall, 2007; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including early learning and childcare, schools, the community, through family learning and learning at home. Parental engagement is supported by discussion between parents and practitioners. It focuses on how families can build upon what they already do to support their children's learning and provide a supportive home learning environment. Parental engagement represents a greater 'commitment, ownership of action' than parental involvement within educational settings such as early learning and childcare and schools.

It is recognised, however, that there is a continuum between parental involvement and parental engagement. The movement between the two represents a 'shift in emphasis, away from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Defining what is parental involvement and what is parental engagement is not always easy. Regardless of whether parents are involved with the wider life of the school or engaged in their children's learning, they can make a positive difference.

### 3.2.3 Family learning

Family Learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning.

'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage'.

(Family Learning Network, 2016)



Family learning is an approach to engaging families in learning outcomes that have an impact on the whole family. In order to support a consistent understanding of family learning, Education Scotland has published a number of documents, reports and case studies and resources such as 'I am a Scientist', 'I am a Mathematician', 'I am an Engineer' on [Parentzone Scotland](#). The Scottish Sensory Centre has published the [British Sign Language Glossary of Curriculum Terms](#). A copy of the postcard with the current definition of family learning in Scotland can be downloaded on Education Scotland's [website](#).

The definition of family learning in Scotland was developed after a series of consultation events throughout Scotland. Those involved in the process worked across sectors and were employed in a variety of positions. After an extensive process it was ratified by the National Family Learning

Network of Practitioners in Scotland. Further information is available in the [Review of Family Learning](#) (2016) and [Family Learning Framework](#) (2018).

A family learning approach gives parents, families, and children the tools from which they can continue to learn at home together.

Where practitioners are considering using a Family Learning approach, they should ensure that Deaf BSL users are able to access these programmes.

### 3.2.4 Learning at home

'Learning at home is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It can take place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities'.

(Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018)





Learning at home can happen through a range of events including:

- play;
- leisure activities;
- fun events;
- sports;
- trips;
- cultural or volunteering experiences; and
- everyday family life.

It can also happen through curriculum related activities, homework, reading, sharing books and [BSL videos](#). Activities for learning at home can be specifically designed to enable parents to engage in their child's learning and build upon the learning from the early learning and childcare setting or school. It can also provide intergenerational learning opportunities for the child, family, extended family, and the community. Some families can be supported with learning at home through a family learning approach (see Section 3.2.3). Families can also be supported with learning BSL at home for example through a visiting BSL tutor.

The definition of learning at home was produced as a result of a range of consultation events with practitioners from across Scotland and in partnership with the Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network (SPION). Further information can be found in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018).

Learning at home can present its own unique challenges for Deaf parents and British Sign Language users if for example information is not in an accessible format, for example, BSL videos.

### 3.3 Home learning environment

*'A growing body of research suggests that good parenting skills and a supportive home learning environment are positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing'.*

**(Economic and Social Research Council, 2012)**

The home learning environment is the combination of everything within the home and the time that a child spends out and about, that affects their development and learning. These include the availability of:

- toys and books;
- outings; and
- having space and time to learn.

**Most importantly though, are the people who provide the love, security, encouragement, conversation and positive Deaf role models to their child to encourage and support them to thrive.**

A good home learning environment encourages children and young people to have positive attitudes to learning, to be curious and to have confidence in themselves.

Research shows that the home learning environment has a strong impact on attainment and wellbeing. Furthermore, the influence of the home learning environment is 'over and above that of standard measures of family socio-demographic factors such as parental education, socio-economic status and income' (Melhuish, 2010, p3).

Providing a 'supportive home learning environment is also positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing' (ESRC, 2012, p1; Kluczniok et al, 2013; Clarke and Younas, 2017). Parental support of 'learning within the home environment.....makes the maximum difference to achievement' and raising attainment more than parents supporting school activities (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

Further information can be found in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018) and on [Parentzone Scotland](#).

**Deaf children need to have early access to language and information as opposed to only seeking a ‘medical solution’.**

This is particularly important given that the reading age of most Deaf adults at age 17 is between age 8 and 9 (Qi and Mitchell, 2012, p6; O’Neill, Arendt and Marschark, 2014).

Exposure to sign language in the home environment can positively influence children not just to become bilingual but more importantly, to support the development of the brain and cognitive function (Rowley et al, 2019).



In addition to this, acquiring a fluent language in the home environment will contribute to and support children’s learning.

Findings from the Conrad report which was published in 1979 showed that large numbers of Deaf young people left school with poor reading skills and struggled to cope with basic reading in everyday life ([British Association of Teachers of the Deaf](#)).

A more recent American study by Qi and Mitchell (2012) showed that the ‘achievement gap between deaf and their hearing peers remains large. It may well be that lack of opportunity to learn, which itself may have its roots in language acquisition delays or the reported deficiency of curriculum and instruction in at least some programmes serving deaf students’. It should be noted, however, that ‘exposure to sign language at an early age is different for children of Deaf parents as compared to the children of hearing parents. Those born to Deaf parents are more likely to have had early exposure to a fluent model of adult BSL’ (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 2019, p23-24).

### 3.4 Community learning and development

*‘Community learning and development (CLD) is a field of professional practice that enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to engage in learning and take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities. It uses a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities’.*

**([Standards Council Scotland](#), 2018)**

Community learning and development (CLD) covers a broad range of practice including youth work, community-based adult learning, family learning and community development. It empowers people of all ages to work individually or collectively to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning, personal development and active citizenship.

Programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. Working in these ways enables community learning and development to extend the reach of democracy and widen its scope. Further information can be found on the [Standards Council](#) and [Education Scotland](#) websites. Local authorities may have provision such as British Sign Language classes which are held in the evening and are available to support parents of Deaf children and/or Deaf BSL parents.



### 3.5 Third sector organisations

*'The third sector, which includes charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups, delivers essential services, helps to improve people's wellbeing and contributes to economic growth. It plays a vital role in supporting communities at a local level'.*

([Scottish Government](#))

In 2011, the [Christie commission on the future delivery of public services](#) made several recommendations regarding the reform of Scotland's public services, including the third sector. The Scottish Government's response, [Renewing Scotland's Public Services: priorities for reform in response to the Christie Commission](#), recognised the role of the third sector, particularly in regard to partnership working, collaborative spend in localities and preventative spend.

The third sector workforce offers specialist expertise, an ability to engage with families in a meaningful way, including vulnerable groups and a flexible and innovative approach. When working in partnership, these skills support families to achieve their goals as well as accessing community venues such as church and community halls suitable for deaf children, young people and parents. For some families these venues are less intimidating and allow easier access to provision at a reduced cost. **Examples of partnership working could include mentoring, transitions, using Deaf role models, peer support.**

Third sector organisations such as the British Deaf Association Scotland, [Solar Bear](#), National Deaf Children's Society Scotland and Deaf Action have a range of activities to support parents.

Further information and contact details are contained in Appendix 2.



## 4. Understanding British Sign Language, Deaf Culture and Deaf Identity

For a variety of reasons, **many practitioners may not understand or have an awareness of British Sign Language, Deaf Culture or Deaf Identity.**

Sign Language is a visual language which uses space, facial expression and hand shapes quite differently from spoken languages.

It is used mainly by people who are Deaf. Within the UK, the most common form of Sign Language is called British Sign Language (BSL). BSL is the preferred language of Deaf people and it is used for many functions including learning. It has 'its own grammatical structure and syntax. As a language, BSL is not dependant nor is it strongly related to spoken English' (<https://www.british-sign.co.uk/what-is-british-sign-language/>).

British Sign Language is an entirely separate language that is grammatically different to English (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999). Sign language can also be different in social groups with a Deaf Community and there are regional dialects in BSL in the same way as there are in English.

As with all living languages, BSL has altered to reflect changing society. 'BSL sign order is different from English word order, but it still has its own rules of sign order' (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999, p10). Users of BSL comprise a cultural-linguistic community with its own cultural norms, traditions, ways of being, preferences and histories (Ladd, 2003).

British Sign Language does not directly translate into a visual representation of the English language. 'There are some BSL signs for which there is no easy translation into English'.

Likewise, 'it sometimes happens that there is not a single BSL sign to express something for which English uses a single word or phrase' (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999, p10).

Deaf people share a unique culture and way of life which has been passed down from generation to generation. 'Deaf Culture' centres on the shared experiences and histories as well as the central role that sign language has within the Deaf Community. This key characteristic is what differentiates 'Deaf' from 'hearing' people. Within the Deaf Community, there are two separate cultures, the 'hearing world' and the 'Deaf Community' although most Deaf people inhabit both worlds. The BDA Scotland supports the development of Deaf identities through the [Deaf Roots & Pride Transitions Project](#).

The medical approach to 'deafness' is not used within the Deaf cultural model as terms such as hearing loss or hearing impairment are seen as negative. This compares to the social model of disability and disabled people's rejection of the medical model. In particular, it is the term 'impairment' that the Deaf community sometimes departs from the social model because for the majority of culturally Deaf people, there has not been a loss of hearing neither is there an impairment.



Deaf Culture encompasses a common language, history, heritage and shared values. The Deaf Community is international and despite the variation in national sign languages there are some commonalities which connect all Deaf people. These include their shared visual communication, histories, cultural activities and their requirement for a Deaf space or opportunity to get together. Further information about Deaf culture can be found on the [British Deaf Association](#) and the [National Deaf Children Society's](#) websites.



Deaf children need to meet other fluent signing children and staff in order to develop their self-expression and confidence in the language. This is why deaf schools and resource base schools are so important for Deaf children's sense of identity as confident communicators. Deaf children can learn from each other in these environments and watch adults signing to each other, thus expanding their knowledge base.

Deaf children need the right environment in order to thrive. British Sign Language is one way which can shape the way deaf children develop. It can also support them to develop a strong and fluent language. Exposure to language, particularly a first language, begins in the home environment and continues in settings, schools and in the community. Having access to British Sign Language and learning English allows a Deaf child to become bi-lingual. Teachers of Deaf children (TOD) who are Deaf themselves can be a great role model, as can teachers who have high quality BSL skills and fluency.

One way to achieve this would be to have a systematic and continuing way for parents of Deaf children to learn BSL in the home alongside their child. BSL teachers could teach parents (at home or in another venue) or provide a model of BSL in the home. Children aged 0-5 would ideally need around 10-15 hours per week to become bi-lingual ([The Input Matters: Assessing Cumulative Language Access in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals and Populations](#)). This would be complemented by a sign bi-lingual environment at school with teachers who are qualified to SCQF 6 or above in BSL.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 promotes that information and services will be accessible to BSL users across the Scottish public sector. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD) recognises and promotes the use of sign language to allow persons to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice' (Article 21). Further information is available in Article 24.

Deafblindness is the combined loss of both vision and hearing. For some people this may be a complete sensory loss, whilst for others, there may be some residual sight or hearing that can be used. Deafblindness is a uniquely disabling condition. When an individual experiences a single sensory loss or are Deaf from birth, they often cope by making the best use of their other senses. However, with a dual sensory loss, this coping strategy becomes less effective.

Deafblindness affects each person differently. Currently there is no consensus on a definition of deafblindness in Scotland. A commonly adopted, helpful definition is that deafblindness is 'the loss of functioning in one sense that cannot be compensated for with the other sense, resulting in a distinct disability' (Taken from [Deafblind Scotland](#) video).

Further information on the history of British Sign Language in Scotland is available on the Scottish Government's [website](#).

## 5. Key national legislation and standards

This section provides an overview of the key national legislation and documents relating to the involvement, engagement and communication of all parents, families and communities. These provide the overarching framework within which local authorities, early learning and childcare settings, schools and practitioners should work.

**Practitioners should be aware that British Sign Language users may not have access to the following national legislation and standards.** Reasons for this could be because:

- BSL was not consistently used at school when Deaf parents attended themselves.
- Up until 2005, Deaf children were usually diagnosed from 18 months to 3 years ([Hearing tests for newborns](#)). This means that most Deaf adults today did not have any support for early language development.
- **Any literacy barriers are therefore not to do with being Deaf, they are to do with the way that society supports Deaf children (or not) in the early years.**

Providing a copy of documents in [Easy Read](#) or BSL translation would help empower Deaf parents to know their rights and responsibilities. It should be noted that providing an Easy Read version of a document would not be considered as making it accessible for BSL users. Providing a BSL translation would meet that criteria. Further information on newborn screening can be found [here](#).

### 5.1 Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006)

In 2006, the [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act](#) came into force. Within the Act, Scottish Ministers and local authorities have a duty to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in their child's Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting (e.g. nursery, playgroup or childminder) or school and their learning. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) recognises the benefits of involving parents in the wider life of the ELC setting or school and the vital role they play in supporting their children's learning. Providing and strengthening the framework to support parental involvement and engagement is therefore a key focus of the Act. Parents are encouraged to express their views and have these taken into account not just on matters affecting the education of their children but also the school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and engagement, as well as other matters or issues of interest or concern to parents.

Enabling parents who use BSL to have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education is also a goal within the first BSL [National Plan](#) (2017-23) (School Education goals 16-24, p12).

BSL users can access signed video content on how to engage in education on the [Parentzone Scotland](#) website.

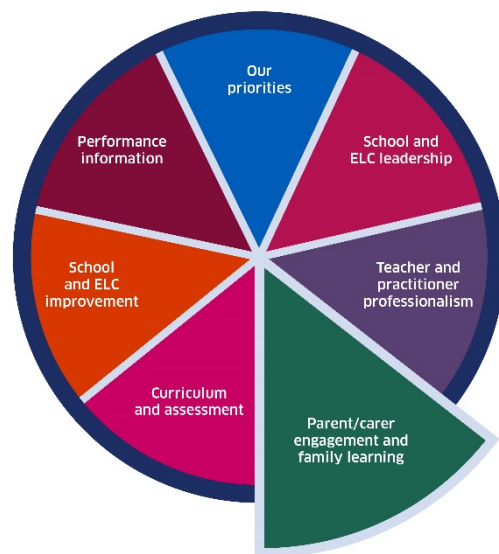
### 5.2 National Improvement Framework

The [National Improvement Framework](#) was established in 2015 and it sets out a clear vision for Scottish education based on delivering excellence and equity. It has the following five priorities:

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- **Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy**

To deliver this improvement, six 'drivers' were identified. These are:

- School and ELC leadership
- **Teacher and practitioner professionalism**
- **Parent/carer engagement and family learning**
- Curriculum and assessment
- School and ELC improvement
- Performance information.



### 5.3 National Improvement Framework Parent Communication Plan (2016)

The Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework [Parent Communication Plan](#) (2016) sets out six principles that should underpin all communication with Deaf and hearing parents, carers and families. Being conscious of the different needs and preferences of Deaf and hearing parents and asking them how and when they would like to communicate is key to building trusting relationships.

The principles were developed in partnership with national parenting organisations, and they capture examples of good practice in communicating with Deaf and hearing parents. Although this is a national communication plan, the principles are relevant at a local authority and school level.

The principles are:

- simplicity and clarity
- transparency
- relevance
- partnership
- flexibility and adaptation
- timeliness

The National Improvement Framework Parent Communication Plan (2016) focuses on the following three key priorities:

**Priority 1** Explaining what the National Improvement Framework is, why it has been developed and where it is relevant to parents.

**Priority 2** Answering the questions that are most important to parents and families

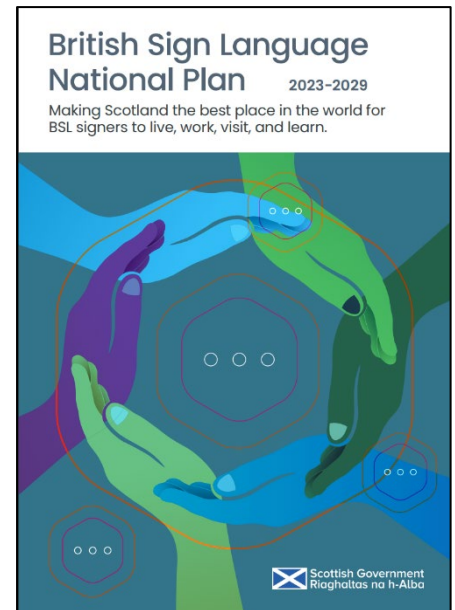
**Priority 3** Supporting good quality dialogue between parents, teachers and headteachers.

## 5.4 British Sign Language National Plan (2023-29)

The [British Sign Language National Plan](#) (2023-29) sets out ten priority areas for Scotland. These are:

1. Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023-29
2. BSL Accessibility
3. **Children, Young People and their Families**
4. Access to Employment
5. Health and Wellbeing
6. Celebrating BSL Culture
7. BSL Data
8. Transport
9. Access to Justice
10. Democratic Participation

Summaries of progress on BSL plans for public bodies in Scotland are available [here](#). Additionally, an independent report on 'The impact of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 on Deaf education' is available [here](#). This report aimed to contribute to the [review](#) of the first national BSL National Plan (2017-2023). It acts as a discussion point for parents, teachers, organisations and Deaf young people themselves about what changes the Act has so far made in relation to their education.



## 5.5 General Teaching Council for Scotland – Professional Standards

The General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTC Scotland) has developed [professional standards](#) that are required of all registered teachers. Within these standards, professional values are included. These values include a professional commitment to social justice, trust and respect and a commitment to taking the individual need of the child or young person into account (see below).

- Committing to social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive, and sustainable policies and practices in relation to protected characteristics, (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation) and intersectionality.
- Demonstrating a commitment to motivating, and including all learners, understanding the influence of gender, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds on experiences of learning, taking account of specific learning needs and seeking to reduce barriers to learning.

In fulfilment of **Action 18** of the first national BSL Plan, GTC Scotland produced a professional guide for teachers on 'Teaching and Supporting'. This resource is available on their [website](#).

**Action 18** of the second national plan will encourage more Deaf BSL users to qualify as school teachers.

## 5.6 Equality and Equity

'Equality is defined in [legislation](#) and is designed to make sure every person has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents (see accompanying [guidance](#)). Equity is a policy concept and approach that aims to focus on treating people fairly and provide additional or different support where required. Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances are not obstacles to achievement and that all children and young people are well supported and have the same opportunities to succeed' ([Connect](#), 2021, p4).

Overcoming barriers and building the capacity of BSL families may require a move away from more traditional methods. The early engagement process with BSL families and techniques used are crucial in

developing relationships and trust which is a motivating factor in families who ordinarily may not be engaged. Practitioners should also ensure that they take a sensitive approach to working with families and ensure that this is a genuinely collaborative and user-led process. Working in collaboration with parents, families and partners is essential to ensure that this improves outcomes for children, reduces inequity and closes the attainment gap. Other factors which can impact on families can include:

- Protected characteristics\*
- Literacy barriers
- English speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- Caring responsibilities
- Service families
- Absent or displaced parents
- Parental confidence

\*Protected characteristics are the nine groups protected under the Equality Act 2010. They are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.



## 5.7 Education (Additional Support Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004)

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) provides the legal framework for the provision of additional support for learning. The legislation was amended by the [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act \(2009\)](#).

The Act is structured around the concept of support being needed for any reason, and for short or long-term periods determined by the individual learning needs of the child or young person. The key duties of the education authorities are to identify, make provision for, and review provision for the additional support needs of children and young people for whose education they are responsible.

Further information is available on [Education Scotland's](#) website and [Enquire's](#) website (Scotland's advice service for additional support for learning).

## 5.8 Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)

'[Getting it right for every child](#)' (GIRFEC) is the Scottish Government's approach to providing all children and young people, together with their families, with the right support at the right time, so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.

'Getting it right for every child' provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language which puts rights and wellbeing at the heart of policies and services across all public and third-sector organisations providing support to children and their families. This is supported by using the [GIRFEC National Practice Model](#) which sets out an approach to the identification, assessment and analysis of a child or young person's wellbeing needs. It brings together the [My World Triangle](#), Resilience Matrix, eight wellbeing indicators and the four contexts for learning within [Curriculum for Excellence](#) to support education practitioners and their partners in health, social care and related services consider ways in which they can help improve wellbeing for a child or young person, including through support for families.

The National Practice Model encourages practitioners to explore the trusted and supportive relationships within a child or young person's life. It allows practitioners; together with children, young people and

families, to structure and analyse information in a consistent way, holistically take account of a child or young person's needs, identify their strengths and any challenges they face and consider the most appropriate offer of timely support.

The effective implementation of 'Getting it right for every child' means we can meet the needs of all children and young people, including those with additional support needs, by promoting inclusive practice throughout the learning journey and across educational settings.

## 5.9 United Nations Convention

### 5.9.1 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

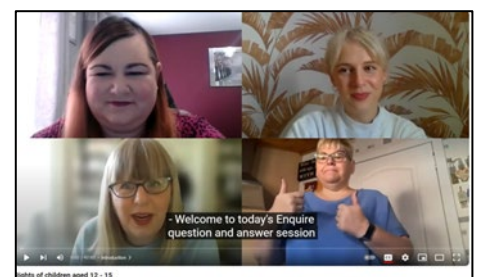
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly recognises the central role played by parents, carers, and families in ensuring that children grow up healthy, happy and safe. It recognises that families need protection and assistance to support the rights and wellbeing of children.

Rights within the UNCRC require governments to recognise parental responsibilities and provide resources and support to help them fulfil their responsibilities, including assisting parents and carers to ensure children are provided with an adequate standard of living.

Parental responsibilities are directly referenced in **Articles 5, 18 and 27** of the UNCRC and references to parenting and the role of families are made throughout a large proportion of the articles.

Further information on the UNCRC can be found [here](#).

Information on the rights of children aged 12-15 is available in this [BSL signed video](#).





## 5.9.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD) recognises and promotes the use of sign language to allow persons to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice' (Article 21).

The right to education applies to all children. [Article 24](#) describes what is needed to ensure that children with disabilities are able to realise this right. Further information is available at the [World Federation of the Deaf](#) and the [United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Persons \(UNDRIP\)](#).

## 5.10 Empowerment



The Empowering Parents and Carers Guidance considers the contribution of parents and carers in an empowered system.

Empowering parents means improving and strengthening the ways in which education staff engage with parents and families; and, ensuring they are at the centre of decision-making processes about their children's learning.

Further information can be found on Education Scotland's [website](#) and in the National Parent Forum of Scotland's [nutshell guide](#) to Scotland's Empowered System.

## 5.11 Health and Wellbeing

Ensuring good health and wellbeing, including mental health amongst children, young people and their families has consistently been a key priority for Scottish Ministers.

'Along with literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing is one of the three core areas that are the responsibility of all staff in the school. All adults who work in Scotland's schools have a responsibility to support and develop the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of pupils, as part of what is referred to as 'Responsibility of All'.

([Mental Health Strategy, 2017-27, p13](#))

Deaf CAMHS services exist in York, England but not currently in Scotland. Referrals can be made but there may be long waiting lists (See Section 8).

## 6. Workforce development

Staff in settings and schools can go through long periods of time where there is stability **but also significant times of fluctuation and turnover.**

It is more common for people to change careers, occupational fields or jobs more regularly throughout their lifetime than in previous years. This can result in some staff being registered with a variety of professional bodies such as the [General Teaching Council of Scotland](#) (GTCS), [Scottish Social Services Council](#) (SSSC) or the [CLD Standards Council Scotland](#). Staff can also have a wide range of valuable background and life experience which can contribute towards engaging and working effectively with all parents and families.

**Ensuring that the workforce is developed and equipped to work with British Sign Language users is an ongoing challenge.**

This is especially the case given that family circumstances along with methods of communication can change rapidly through social and economic influences and constantly emerging technology. Having a Teacher of Deaf children and young people can help overcome these challenges. Additionally, all deaf pupils should have access to Deaf role models to support them to develop a strong sense of identity and pride in who they are. Education settings and schools could consider approaches whereby Deaf BSL users can work with Deaf pupils in a Deaf role model capacity.

Given that British Sign Language is a language, it should not be assumed that practitioners and 'specialists' feel confident in using it when working with Deaf children and families who have Deaf BSL signing parents.

**Additionally, it should be noted that each Deaf child will require a tailored approach to meeting their needs.**

Developing the workforce through appropriate qualifications and continuous professional development will continue to have positive outcomes for all children, parents, families and communities. As a setting or school, it is important to discuss which staff need to have fluency in BSL in order to work effectively with Deaf children. These could include:

- Teachers of Deaf children who can sign fluently, including Deaf BSL users.
- Early learning and childcare staff working in resource-based schools and/or Deaf schools who can sign fluently.
- Qualified and registered BSL/English Interpreters who have experience working with Deaf children and young people in mainstream settings and schools.
- British Sign Language teachers for Deaf children.



BSL SCQF 6 (or BSL Level 3) is a minimum qualification level for staff working with deaf children. Local authorities should ensure that staff are trained on an ongoing basis and aim for SCQF 10.

This online [resource](#) will help teachers to reflect on their current BSL level and set out ways of working to improve their BSL levels and/or other language skills.

Having multilingual professionals in Deaf education is important and so the online resource above also looks at other community languages as well.

There are a range of networks that practitioners can access to gain specialist advice. Some of these include the Scottish Sensory Centre, the University of Edinburgh's programme for Teachers of Deaf children and through the British Deaf Association Scotland.

Advanced BSL courses are available online throughout the UK. Practitioners should also consider attending a local Deaf centre(s) to learn local variants. While it should be noted that Education Scotland cannot endorse any particular course(s) run by private companies, it may be useful for practitioners to know that these do exist and that there is a cost attached.

Practitioners who choose to access any course should ensure that there is certification issued by the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) or [Signature](#)\* at the end of the course. Information about local Deaf clubs/centres can be accessed by contacting the British Deaf Association Scotland. \*NB Education Scotland cannot endorse either of these courses which may incur a cost.

Practitioners who are learning BSL and who wish to practise their signing in an authentic immersive Deaf cultural space should approach this sensitively. For example, in exchange for intermediate BSL conversation practice, a practitioner could offer advice to a Deaf parent about how to work on a Maths project at home with their hearing child.

In every early learning and childcare setting and school, having at least one member of staff who has a minimum of Level 1 BSL and BSL awareness will be welcoming for British Sign Language users. It will enable them to have brief basic conversations with Deaf parents. More importantly, it would be good practice to have one setting or school within each local authority which has a BSL immersion environment with staff who are highly fluent in BSL.

Further information on a survey undertaken in 2016 to explore the current levels of British Sign Language held by Teachers of Deaf children is available [here](#).

### **Reflective Questions:**

- Do practitioners undertake appropriate professional learning to be able to communicate with BSL users in your setting or school?
- Are practitioners confident in communicating and working with BSL users in your setting or school?
- Is there an opportunity to have a full-time one-year paid secondment for an Early Years Officer or Teacher of Deaf children to work with signing Deaf children? This would allow an existing qualified teacher to improve their BSL levels significantly and return to their existing establishment after the secondment.
- Do practitioners have knowledge of information and resources about the Deaf Community which is based locally?
- Do practitioners feel confident to support parents to signpost to appropriate Deaf centres, clubs, Deaf organisations or gatherings so that parents can engage and understand more about Deaf Culture?
- Do practitioners feel confident in ensuring that support would be tailored to match the individual needs of Deaf and Deafblind BSL children and parents?

## 7. Engaging with education, settings and schools

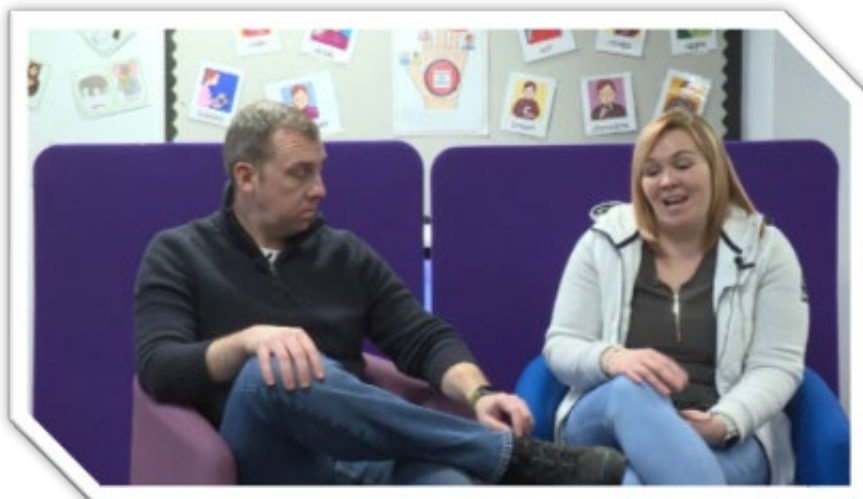
As mentioned previously, around 96% of Deaf children are born to hearing families and approximately 83% attend a mainstream school ([Mitchell and Karchmer, 2004, Annual surveys of Deaf children – CRIDE UK-wide surveys](#)). Developing positive relationships and involving all parents in their children's learning and the wider life of the school is central to raising attainment.

### Partners

There are a range of practitioners and partners who will be able to work in partnership with settings and schools to support British Sign Language users and carers. These include:

- British Sign Language users from Deaf Community and professionals
- Deaf teachers
- Deaf role models e.g. Deaf professionals, actors, comedians, scientists, designers, hairstylists
- British Sign Language teachers
- Parents and families who use and/or have knowledge of British Sign Language
- Teachers of Deaf children and young people
- Settings, schools and units with Deaf pupils
- Local authority staff
- Local colleges and universities
- Community resources e.g. Scottish Sensory Centre
- National Deaf organisations

Additionally, there are a range of national organisations provided at the back of this Toolkit who can help support practitioners working with British Sign Language users in their setting or school (See Appendix 2).



### Parents and families

**Communication is a key element to ensure effective engagement with British Sign Language users.**

Practitioners working with BSL families should consider whether they are:

- A Deaf/Deafblind parent of Deaf/Deafblind children
- A Deaf/Deafblind parent of hearing children
- A hearing parent of Deaf/Deafblind children

The ability of Deaf BSL users to understand the English language will vary and be dependent on the individual. For some BSL users, English is their second language. Learning to read and/or write in any language can be complex. Many Deaf parents may lack confidence with English for a number of reasons. As mentioned in Section 4, these include:

- not receiving early support when they themselves were in the 0-5 age group
- their parents (if Deaf) not having communication with Teachers of Deaf children
- teaching methods in settings and schools may not have used BSL
- Teachers of Deaf children and young people may previously only have had minimal BSL skills.

A lack of or limited literacy skills amongst many Deaf parents means that they have much less access to information about how systems like Education work. Information is not passed on, for example at the school gate which can often be a common source of intelligence for hearing parents. Schools need to be aware of this so that they can pass on important information which other parents are likely to find out through conversations.

Additionally, some BSL users who do read and write English, may have partners at home who do not. Information sent home should therefore be in an easy to understand and accessible format whilst avoiding the use of jargon. Furthermore, as already mentioned in Section 4, it should be remembered that not all words translate from English to BSL and vice-versa. Individuals all have their own preferred method(s) of receiving information and this will be dependent on their needs and circumstances.

**It is crucial that BSL families are explicitly asked about what their specific communication needs and preferences are.** For instance:

- While some Deaf parents are highly literate, others will prefer plain English email communications.
- Some may like to have ways of getting letters home translated (as already happens with other community languages), through the setting or school's existing communication methods and channels, with parents who speak other languages at home. For example, a letter being sent home could be translated and the QR code link to the translation could be included in the letter.
- Some Deaf parents may prefer to communicate via a BSL interpreter either in person or online. Local authorities may have access to their own interpreting service. In addition, some local authorities may already use or have access to an app which they use to inform parents in BSL on video format about their child's progress and activities being undertaken in the setting or school.

Communication options could include:

- British Sign Language – in person (BSL/English interpreter) or online via [Contact Scotland BSL](#). It should be noted that Contact Scotland do not provide a service whereby written communications from settings or schools are translated or interpreted for BSL users.
- Written English or other language
- Spoken English or other language
- Both written and signed language

Further information can be found on the British Deaf Association Northern Ireland's [website](#).

As with many families across Scotland, parents may, for a variety of reasons, have children who attend different schools in the same authority or indeed local authorities out with their catchment area. Engaging with families may therefore present more challenges. Allowing time and space to understand the individual needs of families is a key starting point from which to build relationships and create a foundation upon which the home-school partnership can grow (Hunt et al, 2011). Care should be taken in the early days of building relationships to ensure that assumptions about parents and families are not made without firstly obtaining a holistic overview of their individual circumstances, challenges and/or barriers.

**Ensuring families feel valued, included, understood and listened to is a vital component to developing and maintaining effective and meaningful relationships.**

Families with deaf children may engage with their child's learning at home through various methods. These can include:

- mainstream and deaf social media platforms;
- deaf TV programmes for educational purposes
- sharing images or photos from the class teacher about their learning;
- having a conversation with their child(ren);
- going through the school newsletter(s) with their child;
- reading diary notes (home diary) or subtitled video from the class teacher about what their child has been learning, or via online communications. There is a range of video relay agencies available.

## Ideas to consider:

- Would it be possible to partner with a setting or school, BSL teacher, local college, national Deaf organisation(s) or community partner(s) to provide parents and families in the school community the opportunity to learn British Sign Language together as a family and support the development of a shared language?
- Can staff undertake professional learning to help them work effectively with families who use British Sign Language?
- Can staff and families explore different a social media app(s) to enhance access to communication and information?
- How can your setting or school support families who adopt and/or foster Deaf children?

## Children

All children and young people may face barriers to their learning for a variety of different reasons. Deaf children who use BSL could encounter similar barriers but at the same time also experience completely different and/or additional barriers to their learning. Deaf children face barriers to learning because their communication needs are often not being met effectively. One main barrier that deaf children face is because they do not have language in the earliest years.

Many Deaf children from signing families need a BSL environment and access to staff who can use the language fluently.



Recognising the need for a specific intervention(s) to enable staff to support deaf children and overcome any barriers is important to ensure they can achieve and attain throughout their learning journey.

British Sign Language can be used effectively to support children and ensure they understand the purpose of their learning but also to engage effectively with their peers. Further information is available [here](#).

Children who are deaf can develop their knowledge and understanding through a range of approaches. This can include learning more about Deaf Culture and Identity. Additionally, staff, former pupils, Teachers of Deaf children and young people, visitors, Deaf role models and Deaf organisations can all support children to learn about Deaf Culture and Identity. This will in turn reduce feelings of isolation, build their confidence and overcome any barriers to learning which they may encounter.

## Deaf children in the care system

'Deaf children involved with child welfare systems are often overlooked both in terms of tracking and service delivery. These systems frequently do not offer accessible and equitable services to deaf children'.

(Bowman, 2018, p348)

Deaf children in the care system may not have fluent BSL in the children's home, setting or in the family where they are placed. They may have trauma from their earliest life experiences.

When working with Deaf children in the care system, it is particularly important for settings and schools to:

- be aware of ways to provide and/or enhance the BSL skills of caregivers;
- signpost to BSL learning services;
- recognise the need for skilled bi-lingual Deaf mental health practitioners and care workers;
- provide mentoring and transitions support;
- provide deaf children with Deaf role models so that they can develop confidence in their Deaf Identity.

Planning meetings for Deaf children in the care system should use a GIRFEC approach and have **consistent representation** from all agencies so that the parents and caregivers can build trust over time. The families and the setting or school will need support before meetings are held. This could include a worker from a third sector organisation. As a Deaf child progresses into the upper stages of primary school, they will also need support to represent themselves at planning meetings. Education is often the agency providing consistent support and it can encourage other bodies to do the same. This is also true for Deaf children from other families who need additional support. For example, families with refugee parents, families who are hearing but do not use English at home, families who are Gypsy Travellers, or who have a parent in prison, children who are caregivers for others, children who have suffered serious injury or abuse.

Multi agency work with Deaf children needs to consider BSL services throughout a child's learning journey.

### Ideas to consider:

- In what ways can you support Deaf children in the care system who attend your setting or school?
- Teaching an introduction to BSL to children and staff across the setting or school, particularly where there are Deaf BSL pupils. Where possible, this should be undertaken by a qualified BSL teacher. This will help to reduce social isolation and loneliness.
- BSL could be included as part of the policy or [1+2 approach](#) to language learning as an L3 (second additional language).
- Deaf children are encouraged to organise and lead school clubs e.g. lunch time club for other pupils (hearing and/or deaf). This would support Deaf children to engage and communicate with their peers.
- Inviting Deaf parents and/or fluent British Sign Language users to relate conversations and stories to all pupils using BSL. However, it may be necessary to pay for a BSL/English interpreter.
- Raising awareness of and promoting BSL as a valued language across the whole school community on an ongoing basis throughout the year including from outside education e.g. BDA's [Deaf Roots & Pride Transitions Project](#). Case study examples include [Moorfoot Primary School](#) and [St Rochs Secondary School](#).
- Providing opportunities for all pupils to develop their confidence and skills in BSL in mainstream classes. The [BSL Glossaries of Curriculum Terms](#) can be used in mainstream science classes to teach children scientific concepts which they can learn and remember kinesthetically with BSL.
- Providing other opportunities for children to showcase their skills in the setting or school e.g. class activities, assemblies, concerts. Consideration could also be given to attending Deaf theatres, drama groups or the BDA's online [Glasgow City Heritage Trail](#). Settings or schools could consider using BSL storytelling or jokes.

- Provide opportunities for all hearing children to gain accreditation at Levels 1-6 in BSL. Further information about SCQF 3-6 units is available on the Scottish Qualification Authority's [website](#).
- Provide opportunities for Deaf children to achieve up to and including SCQF 7 BSL accreditation.
- Ensuring there is a strong approach to inclusion in ways which are relevant for children to learn about equality and diversity. For example, including:
  - Deaf history when studying history;
  - Deaf role models when looking at leadership in assemblies;
  - Poetry and storytelling by Deaf authors;
  - Deaf senior citizens at events with Deaf children who can interact with them and enable them to understand more about Deaf Culture and Identity.
- Introducing Deaf Studies into the curriculum rationale.
- Ensuring whole school events have a qualified BSL/English interpreter. Consideration should be given about where the BSL/English interpreter should be positioned. Further information on working with an interpreter can be found [here](#).

## 7.1 Information for staff in settings and schools

British Sign Language users identified the following as being important for staff in settings and schools to help support them and their Deaf child:

### General

- Quality liaison must take place with the allocated Teacher of Deaf children and young people and parents to know and understand the needs and culture of deaf children before they start an early learning and childcare setting or school. It is also important to know the needs of the family and any relevant background circumstances.
- Taking a [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) approach is necessary to ensure the holistic needs of the child and their family are met. Individualised Education Programme (IEPs) and a Child's Plan are often structured using [SHANARRI indicators](#).
- Not all Deaf people use BSL, neither are they proficient in it.
- Families from other countries use a different sign language to BSL and may/may not understand English. It may be an idea to explore with parents and families which signed, written or spoken language(s) are used at home.
- BSL families need to be aware of their rights and have the full range of information. Ensuring that national policies, strategies and frameworks are available in [Easy Read](#) or BSL translation is important to ensure parents and families are aware of their rights. For additional support needs, parents and families could be signposted to [Enquire](#) (Scotland's advice service for additional support for learning) which has some information available in BSL. See below for further information\*.
- **Repeating/explaining information to practitioners is a tiring process. This is exacerbated at times because the child's ability (particularly younger children) to communicate with staff in BSL is limited.** In addition to this, there can be a high turnover of staff in settings and schools. This can intensify the barriers for Deaf BSL users who regularly have to return to the beginning to help practitioners build their understanding of the situation. Ideally, it would be good to have a Deaf Teacher of Deaf children and young people. However, in





the interim, local authorities may wish to consider having a qualified and registered BSL/English interpreter who can support and communicate with BSL families in settings and schools.

- Practitioners should be aware of hearing fatigue which is an additional burden for deaf children in schools.
- There are costs for families to learn BSL so that they can communicate with their Deaf child.
- The Scottish Qualification Authority offer [qualifications](#) in BSL for pupils to learn the language.
- Deaf BSL users in Scotland can use BSL for [exams](#).

\*Further information:

- [Planning your child's support: working together with the school](#)
- [Understanding school placements and making a placing request](#)
- [Extra support in exams](#)
- [Rights of children aged 12-15](#)

British Sign Language users who are looking for advice from Enquire can submit a [webform](#) or [email](#) with their request. A date/time will then be arranged to contact them, and a BSL/English interpreter will be provided.

## Children's learning

- **Involving a Deaf child(ren) in British Sign Language from the start is critical.**
- Tactile BSL for Deafblind child(ren) and young people.
- Close liaison with the allocated Teacher of Deaf children and young people to inform all learning and teaching.
- Local authorities should consider providing free opportunities for families to learn BSL.
- Informing parents in advance and on a regular ongoing basis what topic their child is learning so that they can support this at home.
- Appropriate communication support in and beyond the classroom should be provided for all signing Deaf children. BSL users struggle to ask for support in class if they are not confident, are unable to communicate with the teacher, or if support has not been provided in class.
- Liaising with established Deaf schools across the UK who can provide curriculum support and advise on suitable resources. Schools in Scotland include: [Windsor Park School and Sensory Centre](#), [Aberdeen School for the Deaf](#) and [Hamilton School for the Deaf](#), [St Rochs Primary School](#), [St Rochs Secondary School](#), [Moorfoot Primary School](#), [Nursery Class and Garvel Deaf Centre](#). See Appendix 1 for further information.
- Settings and schools should ensure there is an emphasis on hands-on practical activities as well as progression which involves complex discussions on curriculum areas.

## Extra-curricular activities

- Communication support and better signposting to available groups/venues needs to be in place to allow Deaf children who use BSL and Deafblind children who use Tactile BSL to take part in extra-curricular activities such as sports, Deaf clubs, Deaf Youth Clubs and have access to Deaf role models outside of the setting or school. Further information can be found [here](#).
- **Providing opportunities for all children to attend BSL interpreted events.** For example, if you have a signing Deaf child in the setting or school and are planning to attend a pantomime each year, consider asking the company if performances are already, or can be provided in BSL.
- It is easy to assume that children do not need interpreters in activities and sports such as football and ice-skating. Providing interpreters will enable children and young people to be included in the activity or sport itself as well as in the social aspect.

## Friendships

- British Sign Language users generally have more friends in lower stages of primary but fewer in the upper stages and in secondary. Children, both Deaf and hearing, need support to develop relationships with their peers.
- **Provide opportunities for Deaf children to meet other Deaf children at a local and national level informally and at organised events e.g. British Deaf Association Scotland and National Deaf Children Society Scotland events.**
- As a starting point, consider having a regular toddler's group to provide opportunities for parents to meet and socialise. It is important to ensure that there is at least one fluent Deaf BSL user and a BSL/English interpreter available at the group. Consideration should be given to potential transport issues that might arise for parents.

## Mental health and wellbeing

- British Sign Language users can be motivated and inspired when hearing people are able to communicate with them in BSL.
- Having access to Deaf teachers and Deaf role models throughout their education learning journey is really important for children who use BSL. **The benefits of this approach are that children grow up recognising the skills of Deaf adults and the wider Deaf community. Deaf children will also be able to have conversations with adults who are very fluent in BSL.** This approach will support Deaf children's quality of life and sense of wellbeing. Many Deaf children often feel that they are the only person who is Deaf. Providing the opportunity for them to see and meet other Deaf people opens up their world. It is important that parents, teachers and peers are aware of the impact of such opportunities.

## Resources

- Having suitable story book [resources](#), plain English information books and text books for children and young people are necessary.
- [Videos](#) signed using BSL to support learning and understanding.
- Access to resources and understanding of the issues outlined in this Toolkit will support schools to understand the needs of Deaf families.
- There is a need for STEM [language](#) (Science, technology, engineering, mathematics to be translated into BSL. The [British Sign Language Glossaries of Curriculum Terms](#) is a deaf-led project which creates new technical terminology for STEM subjects to support deaf education in the UK ([Cameron, 2020](#)).

## Staff

- Staff should be aware of British Sign Language, Deaf Culture and Deaf Identity - see Section 4.
- Clear communication channels with allocated Teacher(s) of Deaf children and young people. This will enable better planning for language support.
- **Having staff who can communicate effectively is essential to support BSL families.**
- Need for staff to be trained to SCQF 6 or above in BSL. Many young BSL users become more fluent earlier than the adults who support them. Where that is the case, children often need to adapt their language so that staff can understand what is being said. This is not a good situation for learning and the progress of learners will be limited by the lack of expertise in BSL.
- There is a need for staff teaching BSL to be native users of the language or to be at a minimum of SCQF Level 9. It is recommended that other staff working in schools with groups of Deaf BSL signing children be able to sign at SCQF Level 6 and above where there are BSL users in the school community. Teachers of Deaf children and young people require to be fluent in BSL. Further information is available [here](#).
- **Raising awareness of this Toolkit with staff and signposting them to online and local BSL courses would help them to better support BSL families.**

- It is important that staff know where to access information, help and support for BSL families. For example, the British Deaf Association Scotland, Deaf Action or a social worker with Deaf people.
- Staff should support and encourage parents to learn BSL to an equal level or better than their Deaf child. This will be an ongoing process from the day of birth or identification onwards.

## 7.2 Involving British Sign Language users in the wider life and work of the setting or school

Over the years, parents have identified many barriers and factors that restrict their ability to be more involved and engaged in the life of the setting or school and in their child(ren)'s learning. These fluctuate from external barriers out with a parents' control, to individual obstacles specific to personal life circumstances (Scottish Executive, 2005). External barriers restricting parents from supporting their children's learning can be multifaceted.

Individual barriers can result from a parent's socio-economic circumstances such as poverty, working patterns, or social exclusion and/or their own learning needs. Some parents also have personal assumptions about what their level of involvement or engagement in their child's learning should be (Scottish Executive, 2005).

Scottish Government, in close partnership with Education Scotland, national organisations, partners and stakeholder groups, work collaboratively to provide educators and practitioners with the tools to address barriers and engage all families. It is important for Deaf children and parents to have access to BSL at an early stage. Obtaining advice and tips from Deaf BSL users via Deaf teachers, Deaf parents, Deaf BSL organisations, Deaf role models can be helpful and informative.



Many British Sign Language users would like to be involved in the wider life and work of the setting or school, such as:

- Parent Council
- Improvement Planning
- School events
- Fundraising
- Extra-curricular activities with child/family
- Out of school clubs
- Breakfast clubs
- Family learning
- Classroom helpers
- Open days
- Volunteering e.g. school trips, sharing skill, expertise
- Parents evenings
- Deaf peers, Deaf mentoring support

However, there are a number of challenges which prevents them from doing so. These include:

- Lack of availability of BSL/English interpreters.
- No access to Deaf peers or mentors.
- Not feeling confident or able to volunteer and support the setting or school.
- Being unable to engage/communicate with other parents and vice-versa.
- Sign language used in settings or schools not always following British Sign Language.
- Not knowing where/how to fit in, lack of BSL access, attitudes towards BSL.
- Lack of understanding and/or reluctance to ask questions.
- Appointments being cancelled at the last minute due to unavailability of BSL/English interpreters, note takers, or lack of communication.
- Meetings with multiple teachers who may/may not be familiar with accommodating BSL users.
- Requirement to travel distances to access clubs, activities, Deaf role models.

Settings and schools could consider supporting British Sign Language users by:

- Employing a Deaf signing teacher and embracing BSL as a whole school culture.
- Access to BSL/English interpreter(s) and booking these well in advance.
- Liaising effectively with a Teacher of Deaf children and young people who is fluent in BSL and has the necessary skills to support the child or young person.
- Engaging with more Deaf parents.
- Having a support network e.g. provided by the setting or school, online, with other BSL parents, national networks.
- Facilitating online meetings with BSL/English interpreters where appropriate and access to digital devices and internet access permits. This may require training and support initially.
- Providing an email address and/or a mobile number for parents to contact the school regarding any issues.
- Creating a list of local Deaf role models and Deaf led organisations to work with them. This would enable Deaf children and young people to have regular exposure to BSL and Deaf culture and support them to develop their confidence in embracing their Deaf identity.

### **Reflective Questions:**

- What is working well within your setting or school to support BSL users?
- Are there opportunities in your local authority, setting, school or local community for children and parents to learn BSL together as a family?
- Are BSL users in your setting or school able to access information and support in the format most suitable for them? Do they have access to Deaf clubs, Deaf role models, Deaf organisations?
- Do practitioners in your setting or school know how to book and employ BSL/English interpreters?
- Are parents able to access a list of Deaf schools if they request it?
- Is there a pool of BSL/English interpreters that can be accessed when needed?

## 8. Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are important at all times of our lives. Children thrive in situations where they feel safe, secure and respected. Practitioners, family, and friends have a strong influence on health and wellbeing and help shape habits and behaviours which can last a lifetime.

**The mental health of children who use British Sign Language to communicate, can be affected particularly if they are the only Deaf pupils in the setting or school and are unable to communicate with practitioners and/or form friendships with their peers.**

Not having access to Deaf role models or being exposed to Deaf Culture from an early age can affect the mental health and confidence of Deaf BSL users. Parents and families will undoubtedly be concerned that their child will feel alone and isolated if they are unable to fully participate in routine school and playground communications and activities. Providing BSL learning for hearing pupils will help to reduce incidents of bullying, improve social inclusion, provide better education opportunities and participation for Deaf BSL users.

The purpose of health and wellbeing strategies, programmes, involving Deaf professionals and role models is to help every child feel cared for and valued as an individual. Learning about health and wellbeing will help BSL users to cope with uncertainties in life, have confidence to try new and different things and make the most of opportunities that come along. It will also teach BSL users about:

- mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing;
- planning for choices and changes;
- physical education, activity and sport;
- food and health;
- substance misuse and relationships;
- social isolation and loneliness;
- bullying and harassment;
- sexual health and relationships.



### 8.1 Supporting Deaf children and young people

Mental health, also known as mental wellbeing, is about how we think, feel and behave. This can range from feeling happy and optimistic to feeling very low and unable to escape negative ways of thinking. If a child appears anxious it is important not to assume you know why. It is important for practitioners e.g. Teachers of Deaf children and young people, the Pastoral/Guidance Teacher to check in with children to see if they are able to or want to share what they are worried about.

Opening up conversations with a child can be a useful place to start. For example, by asking 'How are you feeling at the moment?' or 'It's been a tough time lately. How are you getting on?' Children may prefer to express feelings through a game format, for example the [Balloon game](#).

Younger Deaf children are able to show their emotions but may not be able to identify them. You can help by offering them a possible name for how they are feeling, for example: 'I'm wondering if you are feeling a bit sad just now' or 'are you angry because you can't go on the swings at the moment?'. You can also comment on characters in stories and wonder about what they might be feeling. Having access to Deaf counsellors and/or Arts Therapy should be considered where appropriate. The NHS in Scotland does not currently have a Deaf CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) service but there are qualified Deaf BSL counsellors who do a lot of work with Deaf children and young people.

NHS Lothian provides specialist support for Deaf people with mental health problems. This is available to deaf people across Scotland. Further information is available [here](#). Deaf Action provides BSL Health and Wellbeing Support including deaf counselling services. This is available to all adult BSL users living in Scotland. Further information is available on their [website](#). The British Deaf Association (Scotland) offer Deaf Roots and Pride Transitions and mentoring support for wellbeing on their [website](#).

Practitioners can support Deaf children by helping them find positive ways to express strong feelings. Some children might express their feelings through imaginative play, others might draw, journal, kick a ball against a wall or go for a run. You can also help them to think about what helps them feel better when they are down or upset.

Finding ways for children to stay connected to their friends can help build up and maintain friendships with their peers. These may differ depending on each child and/or family circumstances. BSL videos, programmes, ideas for staying connected, and information about Deaf Culture and Identity is available on BDA Scotland's Deaf Roots and Pride [website](#).

The wellbeing of children can further be improved by finding small ways to help others. Perhaps they can help a sibling or a peer with their reading, or do an act of kindness for the community, for example send drawings to a local care home as part of an intergenerational project.

If parents are concerned about their child's mental health, they should contact their child's GP. [Parentline](#) can also support with general parenting advice either through their website or their free telephone number – 08000 28 22 33. This helpline can be accessed through [Contact Scotland BSL](#).

Contact Scotland BSL aim to provide a quality, effective and seamless platform in interacting with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users who use and access all business services. They offer a free video relay service for all. Calls can be made to any service provider – public, voluntary or the private sector. Contact Scotland BSL also have online videos which settings or schools may find useful.

Childline support children and young people up to age 19. There is lots of advice and support for children and young people on the [Deaf Zone](#) section of their website.

### Reflective questions:

- How do you support the health and wellbeing of Deaf BSL families in your setting, school and at home?
- Do Deaf children have access to a Deaf counsellor or Deaf volunteer if required?



## 9. Supporting transitions

Transitions are a normal part of everyone's life. While many children look forward to moving on through stages such as: from home to an early learning and childcare setting, from an early learning and childcare setting to primary, from primary to secondary, between schools and from secondary to further education, employment and beyond, others may be quite anxious. Transitions at any stage can be challenging but support from practitioners and parents can help ensure they go more smoothly.

The success of a transition can often be dependent on a range of factors including the availability and accessibility of British Sign Language support throughout the transition period. This is key to helping both parents and children feel supported throughout the transition process.

It should be noted that while information is provided on transitions, this does not actually mean that any or all of those choices will be available in all settings. For parents with Deaf children in the 0-5 age group, BSL is not available consistently in order to acquire the language. For parents of school aged children, BSL is currently only available in a resource base or Deaf school in thirteen local authorities (See Appendix 1 for a list of all resource bases and schools).

### Ideas for transitions:

- Parents and children must be involved in any transition process. Deaf BSL parents will require particular support when their child is making a transition, but they do not usually need a Teacher of Deaf children and young people to help. If the child is Deaf, then a Teacher of Deaf children and young people will be involved. Hearing parents of Deaf children will need support at transition too and the Teacher of Deaf children and young people will be involved.
- Ensuring parents are provided with information to allow them to make informed choices regarding education provision.
- Providing information for parents (who need it) in a format that suits them e.g. BSL/English Interpreter, BSL videos, [Easy Read](#).
- Arrange a visit(s) to the new setting or school.
- Accessing advice and/or support from agencies such as the British Deaf Association Scotland's [Deaf Roots & Pride Transitions Project](#) and the [National Deaf Children's Society Scotland](#).
- Having a consistent Communications Support Worker (with BSL SCQF 8 qualification) / Teacher of Deaf children and young people / Support for Learning Assistant / BSL/English Interpreter or ensuring a smooth handover to the new worker.
- Where appropriate, enhanced transitions could include more visits, appropriate communication access and trialing new forms of support.
- Ensuring a child(ren) have an identified friendship group in the new setting or school. Teaching BSL to the peer group of a Deaf child is important to allow a few children to become fluent. This fluency in BSL needs to be nurtured to support transitions and peer learning.
- Clear communication links and exchange of relevant information between the existing and the new setting or school.
- Ensuring appropriate staff is in place in the new setting or school that is qualified and able to communicate with the pupil fluently in BSL. Reference should be made to the local authority BSL Plan.
- Ensuring children and parents have early access to and discussions about careers advice and information to prepare them for the world of work or further/higher education.
- Using the services and mentoring support of the [Deaf Roots & Pride Transitions Project](#).

## Reflective Questions:

- How accessible is the transitions information for parents and children who use British Sign Language?
- Are there additional supports you could put into place for children during transition periods? For example, Deaf role models for transitions (careers).
- Many signing deaf young people transition from school to college. Only a disproportionate number transition to university. Thinking about your expectations for signing deaf young people, what can you do to help prepare signing deaf pupils transition to positive destinations to help further their career?

## Further information

Further information for practitioners on transitions is available in the links below:

Click on the links below to access [Deaf Roots and Pride](#) videos with young people on their educational journey and experience:

- Interview with [Jia](#)
- Interview with [Erin](#)
- Interview with [Kisters](#)
- Information on transitions in BSL video format is available for parents on [Parentzone Scotland](#).
- Scottish Early Childhood and Families Transitions [Statement](#).





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- Scottish Government (2023), '*British Sign Language National Plan 2023-29*'. Edinburgh.  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/documents/>
- Scottish Government - Health and wellbeing in schools -  
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/wellbeing-in-schools/>
- Scottish Government, '*Achieving Excellence and Equity. National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan*'.  
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/national-improvement-framework/>
- Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006).  
[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/pdfs/asp\\_20060008\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/pdfs/asp_20060008_en.pdf)
- Sutton-Spence, R. and Woll, B. (2019), '*The Linguistics of British Sign Language*'. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilks, R. and O'Neill, R. (2022), '*Deaf Education in Scotland and Wales: Attitudes to British Sign Language in deaf education compared to Gaelic and Welsh*'.  
<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/deafeducation/publications/>

# Appendix 1

## Case studies

Engaging parents in language learning – Moorfoot Primary School and Garvel Deaf Centre - <https://education.gov.scot/resources/engaging-parents-in-language-learning-moorfoot-primary-school-and-garvel-deaf-centre-inverclyde-council/>

Good practice in working with deaf learners, their parents and families – British Sign Language Plan - <https://education.gov.scot/resources/good-practice-in-working-with-deaf-learners-their-parents-and-families-bsl-plan/>

## Padlets

Family Learning and the Outdoors - <https://padlet.com/susandoherty/cnlp1mq77zi4rlz6>

Family Learning Numeracy and Maths Padlet - <https://padlet.com/susandoherty/5266189ms955lv6c>

## Professional Learning

Parents and Families Theme page - <https://education.gov.scot/resource-themes/parents-and-families/>  
Strategic Framework for Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home - <https://education.gov.scot/resources/strategic-framework-for-parental-involvement/>  
Professional Learning Guide – Involving and engaging parents and families - <https://education.gov.scot/resources/professional-learning-guide-involving-and-engaging-parents-and-families/>

## Professional Learning Activities

Family Learning Professional Learning Activities  
Learning at Home Professional Learning Activities  
<https://education.gov.scot/professional-learning/>

## Schools and Resource bases in Scotland

### Schools for deaf children

- Aberdeen School for the Deaf - <https://sites.google.com/ab-ed.org/asfd>
- Hamilton School for the Deaf - <https://www.hamiltonschooldeaf.s-lanark.sch.uk/>
- Windsor Park School and Sensory Service Falkirk - <https://windsorpark.falkirk.sch.uk/index.html>

### Primary Schools with resource bases for deaf children

- Claypotts Castle Primary School - <https://www.dundee.gov.uk/education/claypottscastle>
- Elderbank Primary and Early Years – <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/na/elderbankprimaryandearlyyears/>
- Glencairn Primary School - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/nl/glencairnprimaryschoolmotherwell/>
- Moorfoot Primary School, Nursery Class and Garvel Deaf Centre - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/in/moorfootps/>
- St Roch's Primary and Deaf School - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/gc/saintrochsprimary/>

## Secondary Schools with resource bases for deaf young people

- Calderside Academy - <https://www.calderside.s-lanark.sch.uk/>
- Clydeview Academy - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/in/cydeviewacademyinverclyde/>
- Craigie School - <http://craigiehighschool.ea.dundee.city.sch.uk>
- Dalziel High School - <https://www.dalzielhigh.org.uk/>
- Dingwall Academy - <http://www.dingwallacademy.com/>
- Grange Academy - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/ea/eastayrshiregrangeacademymain2017/>
- Greenwood Academy - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/na/greenwoodac/>
- Mearns Castle High School - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/MearnsCastle/>
- St Roch's Secondary School - <http://www.st-rochs-sec.glasgow.sch.uk/>

## Local authorities with resource bases in Scotland

- Aberdeen
- Angus
- Dundee
- East Ayrshire
- Falkirk
- Fife
- Glasgow
- Highland
- Inverclyde
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- South Ayrshire
- South Lanarkshire
- Midlothian

## Wakelets

The following resources will be useful for practitioners but do not have particular information about working with Deaf BSL users, parents, hearing parents of deaf children, or Deaf BSL users in settings and schools.

Family Learning - <https://wakelet.com/wake/PcjAgKBR7R19qQ-Crt8Oo>

Learning at home - <https://wakelet.com/wake/514ed540-1501-4d90-be87-65ad192721ab>

Mental Health and Wellbeing – <https://wakelet.com/wake/z4xxOsUqBlSdgpa8DStJB>

## Websites

British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) - <https://www.batod.org.uk/>

British Deaf Association Scotland:

- Deaf Roots & Pride Transitions Project - <https://bda.org.uk/?s=DRP+Transitions>
- Equality and Human Rights Fund - <https://bda.org.uk/ehrf/>
- Helpline - <https://bda.org.uk/bda-scotland-launches-bsl-helpline/>

British Sign Language Blethers – Fostering and Adoptions - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l\\_dm5SknrM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l_dm5SknrM)

Cameron, A. (2020), British Sign Language Glossaries of Curriculum Terms. <http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/BSL/>

Contact Scotland BSL - <https://contactscotland-bsl.org/>

Deaf Education Resources from Scottish Sensory Centre - <http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/deaf/defed.html>

Deaf Studies, Research and the Education of Deaf Pupils – reflections - <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/deaf-studies-research-education-deaf-pupils-reflections/#accordion-1>

National Deaf Children’s Society - <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/>

National Deaf Children’s Society Healthy Minds - <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/healthyminds>

Parentzone Scotland – a website created for parents (including British Sign Language users) to support their children’s learning - <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/bsl/>

Scottish Government - [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)

Scottish Qualifications Authority Special Arrangements - <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/36298.html>

Scottish Sensory Centre - Glossary of Terms - <https://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/BSL/>

The History of British Sign Language in Scotland - <https://bda.org.uk/help-resources/>

Young Minds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

## Appendix 2 - National Organisations



**Aim:** to represent and support the development of the ethnic minority voluntary sector across Scotland.

**Offer:** empowering communities, working towards an inclusive society by establishing structures which recognise diversity and empowers ethnic minorities.

<https://bemis.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to represent Deaf people who use British Sign Language in the UK.

**Offer:** directly supports BSL communities across Scotland to engage with delivery of the BSL National Plan; Advocacy Service, early intervention and mentoring support for children and families, awareness raising campaigns for legal protection of British Sign Language, capacity building and policy work.

<https://bda.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to give all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish.

**Offer:** support and empower children and young people, families and the workforce across Scotland through policy and participation projects, research and a profession learning programme.

<https://childreninscotland.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to promote and support the establishment and maintenance of education through the medium of Gaelic.

**Offer:** information on Gaelic medium education, advice leaflets and reports, news on activities of Comann nam Parant groups.

<https://www.parant.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to make parental engagement in education and learning as good as it can be.

**Offer:** provide resources, advice and evidence-based learning opportunities for school communities, parents and professionals. Engage with and share parental perspectives across the system and with policymakers.

<https://connect.scot/>



**Aim:** quality, effective and seamless platform in interacting with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users who use and access all business services.

**Offer:** a free video relay service for all. Calls can be made to any service provider - public, voluntary or private sector. Funded by Scottish Government.

<https://contactscotland-bsl.org/>



**Aim:** to support the diversity of deaf people, including deaf users of British Sign Language and those who are deafened, deafblind or hard of hearing.

**Offer:** to empower deaf people to achieve their potential and participate in society, with equality of rights, access and opportunity.

<https://www.deafaction.org/>



**Aim:** to provide the very best start in life for every child in Scotland.

**Offer:** delivery of: services working with children and families together; services for providers of early learning and childcare; high quality relevant professional learning services for the workforce; advocacy and advisory services relating to legislation, policy and practice.

<https://earlyyearsscotland.org/>



Advice and information about additional support for learning



voicing the needs of families affected by imprisonment

**Aim:** to raise awareness of children's rights to extra support in school; help families and schools work together; provide advice to children and young people.

**Offer:** provide easy to understand advice and information; help families find local education and support services; share practical tips to help families.

<https://enquire.org.uk/>

<https://reach.scot/>

**Aim:** to support families of people affected by imprisonment.  
**Offer:** helpline; direct support to children and families across Scotland; training and awareness raising; develop policy and practice.

<https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to work with a wide range of organisations to help them support dads.

**Offer:** a range of services including training, consultancy, events, research and media work.

<https://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to provide clear and accurate information for educators and armed forces parents.

**Offer:** introduction to the Scottish education system; understanding of the geography and education resources available.

<http://www.forceschildrenseducation.scot/>



**Aim:** To work together to overcome the social and educational barriers that hold deaf children back.

**Offer:** provide expert support on childhood deafness for parents and professionals, raise awareness and lead campaigns for deaf children's rights.

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to work in partnership with national and local government, other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing issues, parent forums and parent councils.

**Offer:** provide parental perspective at local and national level; work in partnership with education authorities, national government.

<https://www.npfs.org.uk/>



Parent Network Scotland

**Aim:** to support parents to develop skills and have more fulfilling relationships with their children.  
**Offer:** a range of evidence-based/accredited parenting programmes and training opportunities to parents across Scotland.

<https://www.parentnetworkscotland.com/>



**Aim:** to offer support to children and families in Scotland.  
**Offer:** provide information service to parents and carers including information about organisations that have helplines for parents; share research, policy and good practice with practitioners who work with families.

<https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/>



**Aim:** to provide training for practitioners to support parents, carers and children to learn together; to improve the home learning environment and build positive attachment relationships.

**Offer:** training in evidence-based early intervention programmes that supports positive outcomes for parents, carers and children.

<https://www.peeple.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to build the capacity and competence of adults to effect change by challenge bullying behaviour involving children and young people.

**Offer:** provide adults with the practical skills and confidence to respond to children who are bullied and those who bully others.

<https://respectme.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to give children the chance to thrive and reach their full potential.

**Offer:** to work with families, nurseries, schools and government to tackle the poverty related early learning gap.

<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>



**Aim:** to change lives through reading and writing.

**Offer:** share benefits of reading, singing and playing; gift books; work with teachers to inspire children to develop a love of reading; work with adults with low literacy.

<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/>



**Aim:** to promote and support Catholic education in Scotland.

**Offer:** to work with parents and families, partner associations, individuals and church agencies to promote and support Catholic education, seek and represent the views of the Catholic community on issues of national significance.

<http://sces.org.uk/>



Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Club  
Promoting Cultural Diversity In Scotland

**Aim:** to provide a variety of services for Deaf community.

**Offer:** support community through groups, bespoke advocacy, advice, signposting and information in accessible sign languages.

<https://semdc.org.uk/>

Formerly known as Glasgow Asian Deaf Club  
Registered SDO Charity No: SC04714





**Aim:** to help parents, children, families affected by divorce or separation.

**Offer:** provide advice, assistance and other support, helping build relationships between separated parents and schools in support of children's learning.

<https://www.sharedparenting.scot/>



**Aim:** the national skills agency, supporting people and businesses in Scotland with careers advice and guidance, apprenticeships and skills planning.

**Offer:** to deliver services for individuals and employers that help them achieve their ambitions. Skills Development Scotland delivers Scotland's careers service through every state secondary school, its network of centres throughout Scotland and its helpline.

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

<https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>

<https://www.apprenticeships.scot/>

<https://www.digitalworld.net/>



Scottish Parental Involvement  
Officers Network

**Aim:** to provide a network of support for practitioners across Scotland who are working on parental involvement and engagement.

**Offer:** to meet formally as a network 3 times per year to share good practice and communicate informally by email.

Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network.



**Aim:** to provide career-long professional learning opportunities to teachers and professionals; engage in research into the issues that affect children with sensory impairments.

**Offer:** an information service comprising a postal lending library, information searches and online resources.

<http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/>



**Aim:** to provide advice and support to enable organisations meet a range of educational, development and regulatory requirements.

**Offer:** to provide products and services in skills, training and education which positively impact on individuals, organisations and society.

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa>



**Aim:** to help children and families from travelling communities to access relevant and flexible learning opportunities throughout their lives.

**Offer:** a professional support network, community development programmes, training, information and resources.

<http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/>

# Appendix 3 – Overview of British Sign Language in Scotland

1 in 600 Deaf babies born in the UK every year

96% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents - vast majority do not have BSL skills

3,647  
30 services responded across 32 LAs  
2018/19

2,898  
27 services responded across 32 LAs  
2019/20

2,841  
25 services responded across 32 LAs  
2020/21

3,313  
30 services responded across 32 LAs  
2021/22

3418  
29 services responded across 32 LAs  
2022/23

## Deaf children in Scotland



## Overview of BSL in Scotland



## Schools and Resource Bases



3 Schools for the Deaf

4 primary schools with Deaf units

9 secondary schools with Deaf Units

13 resource bases

## Audiences



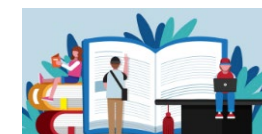
Deaf C&YP with Deaf parents

Hearing C&YP with Deaf parents

Deaf children with hearing parents

Understanding BSL, Deaf culture and Deaf identity

## Complexities



Workforce development

Access to Deaf role models

Mental health and wellbeing

Extra-curricular activities

Friendships

Accessing information in BSL format, resources

Large group of hearing parents of a Deaf child who want to learn BSL

## Examples of Stakeholders



BSL Users - Deaf and/or Deafblind pupils



Parents, foster carers, corporate parents, adoptive parents, refugees, gypsy travellers

Headteachers, Depute HTs, Principal Teachers



Teacher(s) of Deaf



Community

BSL/English interpreters

## **Education Scotland**

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EH54 6GA

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E [enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot)

<https://education.gov.scot/>

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