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Deaf children missing out on classroom support, study suggests

Children with only mild hearing losses are being overlooked in schools, resulting in academic achievement no better than that of profoundly deaf children, research suggests.

Researchers say that because slightly deaf children have better speech skills than profoundly deaf pupils, serious learning issues can be overlooked.

These include smaller vocabularies and difficulties in acquiring information by listening to lessons in class.

As a result, resources are mainly targeted at children with more severe hearing loss, researchers found.

Students with mild and moderate deafness received only 1.6 and 2.6 hours of support each week respectively, compared with 17.2 hours for profoundly deaf students.

The research, led by the University of Edinburgh and funded by the Nuffield Foundation, looked at the educational achievement scores of 540 pupils in Scotland aged 16, using a score which covered all the exams taken. The difference in scores between pupils aged 16 with mild deafness (144) and profound deafness (128) was minimal, researchers found.

Pupils with any degree of deafness were below the average academic score for the general population (173), particularly in examinations for English.

The report recommends more support hours for children with mild hearing loss as well as improved acoustics in classrooms to better enable them to hear lessons.

Researchers also looked at how well schools prepared deaf and hard of hearing pupils for adult life and assessed parents' views of their children's education.

The majority of 16-28 year-olds preferred to use English speech to communicate (75 per cent), while only 15 per cent preferred to communicate with British Sign Language and nine per cent with English based signing.

This was potentially due to the lack of availability of sign language in mainstream schools, where the majority (85 per cent) of deaf pupils are educated, according to the report.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The investigators found that schools struggled to communicate with parents of children with hearing loss.

Teachers did not always inform parents about their child's poor literacy skills and neither did they always have high expectations for deaf pupils, researchers found. Schools were also unsure when engaging with parents from poorer backgrounds, the study concluded.

Dr Rowena Arshad, head of the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education, said: "If we are serious about inclusion and getting it right for every child, the principle has to be about needs and not numbers.

"A good place to start would be to identify ways we can increase communication and cooperation between parents, teachers, education authorities and researchers to arrest these disparities."

The report was carried out by researchers from Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology. It was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

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Notes

The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org