

What ensures effective support for children with hearing impairment in the Early Years?

Alison Holmans discusses how clarity regarding support, set out in early years protocols, sets the standard and leads to actively engaged families and children

Teachers of the Deaf working in the Early Years have generally been well prepared for the implementation of the SEND reforms having benefited from working within the family centred ethos of Early Support from the implementation of the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme onwards. The familiarity of Family Plans, put together by families with the support of the professionals supporting them, working towards shared multi-agency goals, has made the transition to Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) a familiar process for families and the professionals supporting them. Similarly, parents of children with hearing impairment have been involved in developing provision for many years through representation on interagency groups and in Oxfordshire through involvement in a number of pilot projects including the NDCS Informed Choice project and participation in working groups for the development of Early Support materials such as the Monitoring Protocol for Deaf Babies and Children. In Oxfordshire parents have also been very involved in implementation of the SEND reforms, participating in the on-going development of the Local Offer. Most recently parents have co-produced a set of principles for the provision of Early Years Groups for children with a wide range of SEN and disability.

It is within this new framework that we, together with families, continue to develop what they feel ensures effective support for them and their babies and young children with hearing impairment in 2015:

The Early Years Teacher of the Deaf needs an understanding of the needs and diversity of families to:

- empower families to make informed decisions
- work in partnership
- clarify roles and responsibilities
- support the family's natural skills, expectations and aspirations
- encourage the family to enjoy their child and family time together.

Implicit in this is a belief in and adherence to the Early Support Principles that place the family and child at the centre and facilitate informed choice.

- These principles underpin our support in Oxfordshire and are integral to the SEND reforms.

Families value an active Pre-School Family Support Group where information is shared and where there is a programme put together by families that is practical, supportive and inclusive.

- We run a fortnightly session with a dedicated programme of focused topics that families have jointly decided upon. This is led by one of the Early Years Teachers of the Deaf.
- A crèche runs simultaneously for toddlers so that parents, grandparents and friends can have time to discuss and share information. Babies settle in with their parents.

Families using sign language with their child value the opportunity to develop signing skills if they don't already have these.

- Teachers of the Deaf working with families using sign language to support communication are fluent signers with a minimum of BSL 2.
- Families are offered sign language tuition in their home or a local setting with wider family members and carers involved at a time of day that is convenient to the family through the Oxfordshire 'Sign Up' programme funded through a carers' grant. A range of sign communication choices is available.

Protocols, co-produced with parents, are in place and set out the links and ways of working with other agencies.

- Hearing Support Service Early Years Protocol:
  - Principles & values upon which the service delivery is based
  - Aims
  - How these aims are put into practice in Oxfordshire.
- Active use and revisiting of the MAPIT (Multi-Agency Planning and Improvement Tool) with the Interagency NHSP working group.
- Multi-agency Protocol – (Audiology; S< Social & Health Care; NHSP) describing roles and responsibilities and how we work together to support the child and family's needs.
- A clinic advice booklet for parents developed by parents of children with hearing impairment. This followed a discussion at the Family Support Group about what the various audiology clinics were for, who was who and tips on what to bring and how to keep your child amused during appointments. This is now routinely handed out to families.
- Teachers of the Deaf working in the Early Years follow clear guidelines regarding first visits, successive visits and report writing, funding sources and implications.

The Early Years Teachers of the Deaf meet three times a year for training to reflect on procedures and to support each other. There are also on-going links with the Family Support Group sessions and joint visits with each other to schools and homes to share expertise. Reports are all seen by the Area Team Manager, discussed with individual staff members and moderated centrally. We are in close contact with each other to provide support and guidance. Each family is different and requires a bespoke package of support. We are continuously learning new skills.

Support and management of hearing loss and audiological equipment

- In Oxfordshire there are five Early Years Teachers of the Deaf who are all trained and qualified to take earmould impressions routinely in the home, within agreed guidelines and procedures following a protocol developed with Paediatric Audiology who Quality Assure the process.
- All Teachers of the Deaf liaise closely with Audiology to ensure a good knowledge and understanding of prescribed hearing aids, cochlear implants and/or bone conducting hearing implants. Links with the Early Years Countywide Lead are maintained to ensure close monitoring of equipment and its management as well as to continue verification outside the clinic. The team recognises that the Early Years is often when you see changes in a hearing loss if it is a progressive condition, not forgetting the susceptibility of pre-school children to a conductive overlay. Recognition of the need to be proactive in managing changes in hearing loss in the Early Years is understood and appointments for hearing aid review can be arranged quickly.
- The FM Protocol and its use in the Early Years are understood and equipment is loaned as necessary with the Teacher of the Deaf setting it up, balancing and monitoring its use. All Early Years practitioners have the ability to balance FM with Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants.

Teachers of the Deaf working in the Early Years have specialist skills and knowledge as well as flexibility with regard to the support offered.

- Teachers of the Deaf have skills, experience and training (e.g. Early Years modules/PG diploma/Masters) in working within the Early Years both in the home and in educational settings.
- They are confident in having a secure knowledge of early language development and communication.
- They have the skills to monitor, support and track development and progress in partnership with families
  - actively using the family held Monitoring Protocol, facilitating the confidence of families to use the materials and enjoy their child's development
  - encouraging parents to use their natural skills in routine interaction and play
  - encouraging the use of the Stage 2 materials to support the development of language, communication, grammar, pragmatics and phonology
  - using additional assessments that are also part of the toolkit for Early Years
  - having familiarity with the Foundation Curriculum and the tracking of progress against the performance indicators used by settings. Data is collated and benchmarked as part of the NatSIP data collection. This is then used formatively over time with other data to drive service improvements.
- They guide families in the use of the Family Plan/EHCPs encouraging the family to use their natural abilities, offering additional strategies, identifying roles and responsibilities and celebrating successful outcomes.
- They have the skills to support and assess settings, to access additional funding and early placement as required.
- They work flexibly in the evening to support extended family members.
- They work flexibly during holiday periods to provide cover.
- They maintain video records of development and sharing with families. With the new 'Early Years App' video can be sent directly to Family files (held by families) and permissions for its use can be requested from families.

Some of the challenges:

- Supporting families to understand the implications of their child's hearing loss and empowering them with the skills to support communication development. Helping the family to understand the range of hearing loss and the need for access across the speech spectrum if the baby is to access and acquire speech and language. The challenge is when the baby has a profound loss and gains little from the hearing aid. We recognise the value of maximising any available residual hearing. The baby brain is pre-programmed to access any residual hearing no matter how small. The key is the interactive caregiver who places value and meaning on the baby's responses. In clearly contingent situations (whether that be daily routines of changing and feeding or just talking and touching as we all do naturally to babies) the caregiver gains the baby's eye contact and actively engages the baby, taking turns, talking, smiling and touching. Helping families to understand the need to be responsive and interactive in the baby's pre-lingual first year and beyond is a challenge. Encouraging families from the confirmation of hearing loss allows them to enjoy their baby and provide the best start.
- Managing equipment on tiny babies optimally. Wearability during normal routines and activities can

be challenging at different ages and stages. We have the technology but it will only support language and learning if it is worn and managed well with interactions that are fun and meaningful.

- Being natural and normal is about being observant, aware, acting in a timely way, being on top of equipment and recognising the need to listen and respond; it isn't about leaving it all to chance. It is demanding on family time and energy. That takes some understanding but if the family is actively involved in the monitoring and tracking of developments, they soon see they are making a difference. It can be a challenge to introduce the Monitoring Protocol as it is a large document but when introduced well, families are proud to be first to point out the developments and to recognise the difference they are making to the progress of their baby/child. They take the Monitoring Protocol to the clinic to share what their child can do. They are in control and can talk confidently about the readiness of their child to take the next step. By understanding the process they widen their child's experiences, value and maintain their equipment and recognise their home is a rich learning environment. Once in control the family can make informed decisions and can set realistic targets in their Family Plan or EHCP.
- Supporting families where English is a second language is not the challenge it may first be thought to be. Language fluency comes from a child immersed in the language and culture that is around them and through which they are spontaneously and meaningfully interacted with by every member of the family. Therefore our support needs to be flexible to ensure involvement of the whole family to invite questions, help the family to make informed decisions and maximise their natural potential in providing a richly interactive environment, within their culture using their language. Without exception these families do use the Monitoring Protocol and they do own the document, using it to track, evidence and anticipate the next steps. Along with the Family Plan they are empowered in their understanding and control of their child's needs and share these at appointments with other agencies.

And on into Early Years settings and schools:

- The Local Offer includes information about how support is provided for children with hearing impairment in Early Years settings.
- Many babies with an early confirmation of hearing loss and positive pre-school experiences will reach the normal milestones of their normally hearing peers. There lies the next challenge. Educational settings and schools need to understand the difficulties of learning and access to the curriculum in a noisy setting with additional equipment to manage. Helping schools to realise that the teaching styles that are essential for children with a hearing impairment are usually very effective strategies for all children is an important first goal and ongoing training is essential.
- Identifying any needs additional to hearing loss as early as possible is supported by the close monitoring and tracking of progress in the Early Years. It requires action from and engagement of other agencies as well as the support and engagement of families, who may have to make additional choices.
- Recognising the child's independence and abilities and those of the setting, whether additional support is needed and then, if so, how much support to provide, is a decision that needs to be made when considering an Early Years setting. What that support will look like also needs careful consideration with both the family and the setting. Inappropriate support could interfere with independent learning, functioning and development. A plan needs to be in place so that roles and responsibilities are clear and the involvement of the family is central. The Teacher of the Deaf will put together a document called an 'Intervention Log' that identifies the interventions required to enable the child to function actively within the setting in the shorter and longer term. It is an active document that guides the Teacher of the Deaf in his/her support of the individual child and identifies strategies, roles, responsibilities and the adaptations required. From this document the setting can be supported to understand their role, working with the family and involved agencies to achieve family-led outcomes.
- Included within the Intervention Log with a separate focus is a consideration of what is needed for an accessible learning environment. This might include the need for acoustic advice/adaptations and/or for equipment such as FM or Sound Field Systems.

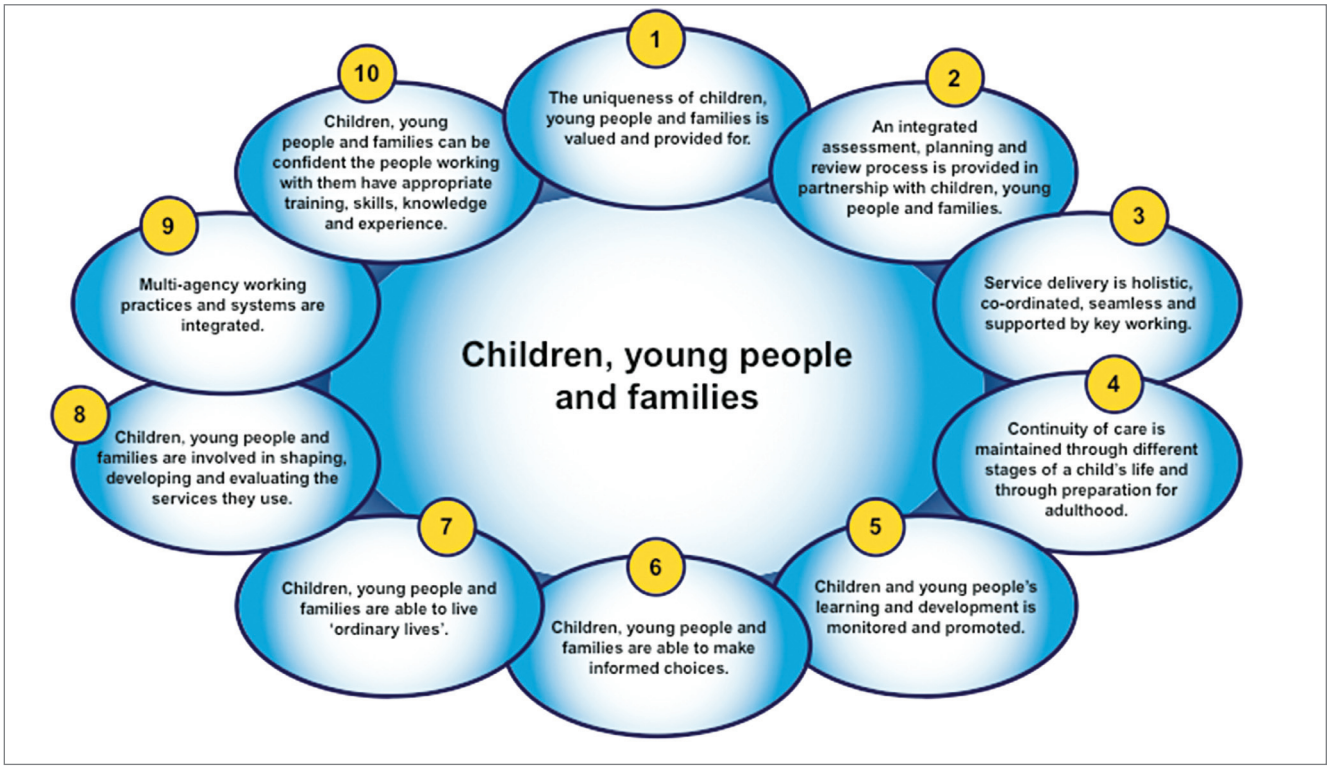
…and for the future?

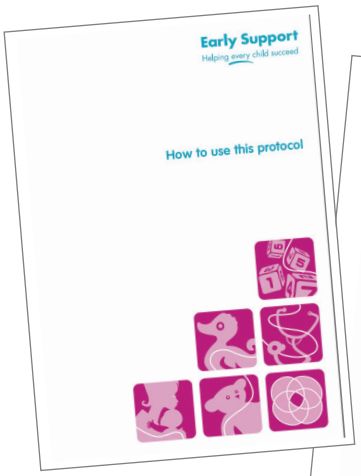
For the families of children with more complex needs the investment in work force training and an increasing understanding of keyworking is already noticeable. The first Education Health Care Plans are family friendly and aspirational with professionals working together with families towards shared outcomes that are most important to the family for their child at any one time.

It is an interesting, exciting and challenging time to be working as an Early Years Teacher of the Deaf. The SEND reforms offer new openings to reinforce and extend the opportunities for parents to develop the services that will best meet the needs of their families. We will be continuously asking families what it is that ensures effective support for children with hearing impairment in the Early Years and as the SEND reforms become embedded we should expect that provision will develop accordingly.

Acknowledgement of Protocols and Materials

Early Support Principles







Introduction to the Monitoring protocol for deaf babies and children

Stage 2 Materials





Fridge Cards

MAPIT

Access the following online by going to
www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

- **Early Support App**
- **MAPIT (Multi Agency Planning and Improvement Tool)**
- **Developmental Journals (Monitoring protocol for deaf babies and children)**
- **Fridge Cards**

  N.B Stage 2 Materials are no longer available on this site; however they can be accessed through the BATOD website
  (follow **Resources ▸ Early Years ▸ Supporting Materials**)

Service Protocols and working documents

Hearing Support Service Early Years Protocol

Multiagency Protocol

FM Protocol

Protocol for Earmould impression taking

Intervention Log

Family Service Plan

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