

No Limits

If mainstream schools really want to improve outcomes for hearing-impaired learners, they should probably check out what the specialists are doing, says **Sal McKeown**...

SCHOOL PROFILE
LOCATION:
Newbury
PUPILS:
233 (4-19)



Young deaf people face many challenges. The *Must do Better* campaign report from the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) showed that 60 per cent of deaf children fail to get 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C, compared to 30 per cent of hearing children. Another significant report, *Views of young people with SEN and their parents on residential education*, showed that while 66 % of parents of deaf children hoped their child would go to university, only 22 per cent thought this would actually happen.

The vast majority of the 45,000 deaf children in the UK go to mainstream schools but how 'included' are they? All too often children with hearing loss are given a Learning Support Assistant or a British Sign Language signer but remain on the sidelines of the school community. Nonetheless, while there is concern about the poor academic achievements of many young deaf people, some schools are bucking the trend.

I spent a day at Mary Hare School, a residential special school in Newbury for deaf pupils aged 4-19, and visited several classes to see what is so different about this school, where going to university is the norm.

It's not about selective intake, either. "We take children from right across the country so we have very varied student intake, who have different levels in literacy and numeracy at point of entry," observes vice principal Simon Thompson. Ofsted confirms this: "Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Their levels of attainment when they join the school are well below average overall, but are generally in line with national averages when they finish Year 11."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SAL MCKEOWN IS A FREELANCE SPECIAL NEEDS JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR OF BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR USING ICT IN THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM (ROUTLEDGE) AND A BOOK FOR PARENTS, HOW TO HELP YOUR DYSLEXIC AND DYSPRAXIC CHILD (CRIMSON PUBLISHING).

Tech Specs

Technology is hugely important at Mary Hare; programmes and websites that staff and students find useful include:

- Kaz touch typing (kaz-type.com).
- Accelerated Reader Renaissance (renlearn.co.uk), which helps pupils improve their reading skills and more importantly to enjoy reading.
- Claro Learning Access Suite (clarolearning.com), especially the Screen Ruler facility, which improves students' eye tracking skills and makes their silent reading more fluent.
- Write Online and Clicker (cricksoft.com/uk) – the predictive element gives learners access to a wide vocabulary so their language experience is enriched.
- Ginger software (gingersoftware.com), a proof reading tool that checks spelling and grammar.
- Numicon (numicon.com), which uses patterns and shapes to represent numbers.
- Slavonic abacus (xavier-educational-software.co.uk) – a hundred-bead abacus that promotes visualisation of numbers as patterns.
- Nessie (nessy.com) offers online games for phonics and times tables.

Mary Hare is an auditory/oral school so children are using written and spoken English all the time. This approach is possible because all the staff are trained teachers of the deaf and all the classrooms are acoustically treated so even children who relied on BSL at home or in primary school are able to learn and make good progress.

Some pupils are emotionally immature when they join the school and need support to manage their behaviour. Some speak English as an additional language and quite a number have dyslexia as an additional barrier. Yet the vast majority make accelerated progress and go onto tertiary education.

There are many reasons why children do well at Mary Hare, which could be replicated in other schools. First of all, the school makes exceptionally good use of technology. Mike Bush is 19, doing A-levels in photography and design, and technology, and is hoping to join the police. He works part-time in a bar and uses ClaroRead to help him overcome the problems of dyslexia. He has yellow text on a black background, plugs the headset into his cochlear implant and gets text read back to him so he can see if it makes sense.

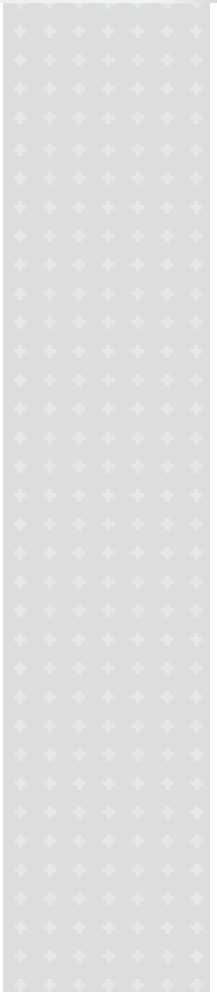
Mike is a competent touch typist. He did not enjoy learning it but finds it a useful skill now as he can look at the teacher or the whiteboard while making notes. He also uses e-books to access literature texts. Staff have used Dragon Naturally Speaking to read texts so their learners can access them. "Most of our learners do not have clear enough speech to use speech to text software," says Higher Level teaching assistant Lesley White, "but we use it to support them in practical ways."

I visited a year 7 group who were learning what 'evaluation' means. The teacher had put up a picture of a house he had made in an art package and children had to take turns picking out good and bad things about the image. This was a very simple but effective approach and having worked as a group, listening to one another, the pupils had learnt the concept and could apply it to their own work.

There were only six children in the group with a wide range of ability. Jack has high levels of literacy, for example, while Jessica, recently arrived from overseas, has minimal English but is making exceptional progress. The group had visited Snelsmore Common and created mind maps and she understood the concept perfectly and produced neat detailed work bringing in icons and images from the web to illustrate her points.

"Inspiration is brilliant," comments Lesley White, "and we have a site licence. All our teachers use it as it works very well for children who are struggling with writing. Some of our students are outstanding users and become very creative in their use of mind mapping."

Next, I went to a year 8 maths class. Recall and insecure



10 tips for mainstream schools with hearing impaired students

- 1 All deaf children need to feel fully part of the school and given the opportunity to take on responsibilities and express their views and opinions.
- 2 Do not 'Velcro' the deaf child to a Learning Support Assistant, as it puts up barriers.
- 3 Deaf children need to talk directly to subject teachers and classmates and not be the onlooker in the classroom.
- 4 Do lots of pair work; this helps with language and friendships as children learn from one another.
- 5 Sit the child close to the front but to one side. This means he or she is near enough to the teacher to see lip patterns clearly, and radio aids will pick up a better signal. Make sure the pupil can see and hear the rest of the class, too.
- 6 If a scribe or lip speaker is required for an exam make sure they get plenty of practice well in advance.
- 7 Remember that incidental learning does not happen as readily for deaf children as for their hearing peers.
- 8 Teach specialist vocabulary very clearly and deliberately.
- 9 Opt for a practical approach wherever possible so text is illustrative and not the sole source of learning.
- 10 Revisit topics often, as memory may be an issue and vocabulary fall from use.

knowledge of basic number bonds are two problems the maths teaching staff have to address. Firstly, children deaf from birth will have missed out on a lot of incidental maths vocabulary. They won't have heard all the silly number songs such as *One Potato or 5 Little Ducks* that most children experience in early years, so the school provides very visual and concrete materials for them to revisit basic maths.

Language and vocabulary is also an issue. Sometimes a phrase such as 'write down' or 'in the table below' confuses deaf learners who may have a very literal sense of language, so it's important that the lexicon of examinations is taught in a very deliberate way.

I spent some time talking to a year 10 geography class studying water transfer for the GCSE. Oliver, a young man with a multi-sensory impairment affecting his vision as well as his hearing, was project manager, Daniel was the land agent studying plans, and others in the group took the roles of land agent, archaeologist, ecologist and environmentalist. One of the key factors in academic success is to teach the language of the subject very specifically, so a word such as 'globalisation' was broken down into units of sound in order that students could pronounce it and practise saying it, as well as learning what it means and how to spell it. Desk mats for different topics with the key words on them ensured learners had access to specialist terminology and useful vocabulary. This very precise teaching, combined with lots of practical hands on activities, group work and discussions helps with understanding and recall and teaches learners the language they need to express their ideas.

"Our aim at Mary Hare is to create independent young people able to stand on their own two feet in a hearing world," states Simon Thompson. And after just one day in this inspiring and outstanding setting, I can certainly see why so many of the students I met were confident, outgoing and had high aspirations for their future lives.

