

An investigation into whether the current training and monitoring of mainstream teachers in the use and management of personal FM systems leads to effective practice in the classroom

Emma Dudley

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Mary Hare Training Services in collaboration with Oxford Brookes University

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ABSTRACT

'When used correctly, radio aids can be a great help to deaf children. If they are not used properly, they will no longer be useful. In the worst case, a badly used or poorly maintained radio aid could make the listening conditions more difficult for the child.' (NDCS, 2009: 18)

Teachers of the Deaf are responsible for ensuring that deaf children have access to good audiological solutions and they provide training for new FM users in schools. This study looked at whether the current training and monitoring of mainstream teachers locally in the use and management of personal FM systems led to effective practice in the classroom.

A measure of effective practice was devised in the form of an observation schedule with ten basic and five more advanced performance indicators which could be quantified and analysed. Eight teachers were observed and then interviewed to discover other aspects of provision such as their attitudes and the influence of school policy on effectiveness. A questionnaire was also given to Heads of HI Services in the South-East from which comparative data could be obtained.

Results indicated that local TODs were training most teachers in how to use the FM system in similar ways to out-borough TODs. Where teachers missed this training, they were not as effective in using the system. However, even when trained, practice differed tremendously. Verbal and written feedback did not always change this. Factors such as a positive attitude towards the system and HI pupil, understanding of the child's difficulties and good deaf-friendly teaching also make a difference.

The service needs to develop a policy around FM provision. A local expectation should be established that all teachers (not just TAs) working with deaf children must undertake a structured programme of deaf awareness, deaf-friendly teaching strategies, FM use and management training and ongoing quality assurance. TODs need to explore what are the most important aspects of a training curriculum in order to cultivate a teacher's personal commitment to the inclusion of deaf children and to overcoming their difficulties in the classroom. Quality assurance should include the use of robust monitoring tools such as the observation schedule, which could also be used by non-specialists in schools, and evaluation questionnaires. Finally each child with a personal FM system should have a care plan, reviewed annually, which details when and where this will be used and what the team around the child can do to support its use and management.