

PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION (PIE)

Full report on the findings from research on the involvement of children with little or no verbal communication

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Introduction

The Participation in Education (PIE) project is a two-year research project (2005-2007) funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The research is carried out by academics from two departments within the University of Bristol: the Graduate School of Education and the Norah Fry Research Centre. The aim of the project is to address the exclusion of disabled children with little or no verbal communication from decision-making processes in education. This report is based on the findings from the first phase of the research, a national (England) survey of schools. The second stage of the research involves studying twelve children with little or no verbal communication by observing their involvement in choices and decision-making at school. Teachers and other professionals will also be interviewed at this stage.

Methods

Aim of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to identify current national (English) practices for involving disabled children with little or no verbal communication in their educational decision-making. Respondents were asked for information about the numbers of children involved, what strategies are currently used to involve children with little or no verbal communication in their Annual Reviews, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and target setting, as well as wider decision-making within school and ideas for future improvements.

Development

The questionnaire was initially developed in partnership with key experts in the field, including two disabled professionals with experience of working with children with limited or no verbal communication. A Head Teacher of a local special school was also consulted, as well as a member of staff from a local Connexions service.

The project's Research Advisory Group met to discuss the questionnaire which was revised to take account of comments and suggestions.

Pilot

The questionnaire was then piloted with eight schools – six of which were the first schools identified by LEAs as examples of good practice in the field, the remaining two were local schools that were involved in the development of the

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project. Respondents were given a choice of methods to complete the questionnaire – they were sent a paper copy and a web address to complete it on-line.

Final version

Revisions were made relating to comments received in the pilot stage and a letter sent to all relevant primary schools in England. The letter asked that they respond to the on-line version of the questionnaire, but that a paper copy could be requested by phone, email, fax or letter. All schools that were likely to include children with little or no verbal communication were contacted, using a database purchased and designed by the School Government Publishing Company (SGP). This included Directors of Education, special schools, primary, middle and independent schools with special units, but excluded schools specifically for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, hearing impairments and visual impairments.

Results

117 schools replied to our request to complete the questionnaire. 26 were completed in paper form, 91 were completed on-line. Five schools were subsequently excluded as they indicated that the questionnaire was not appropriate for their school. Two schools indicated that they did not have children that were in our target group at present, but they completed the questionnaire with useful information based on previous experience and were therefore included in the final total of 112 schools. Of the 119 schools that were recommended by Directors of Education as having successful strategies with children with little or no verbal communication, 43 (36%) completed the questionnaire. The schools that responded represent 69 different Local Education Authorities out of a possible 151 in England (46%). Two independent schools and two non-maintained schools replied and one respondent worked in schools but was not based in one.

The table below represents the positions held by respondents to the questionnaire. Most respondents were either Heads or Deputy Heads of schools, with co-ordinators and SENCOs being the next most frequent respondents. 'Other' respondents refer to a range of managerial professionals.

Table 1: Positions held by questionnaire respondents

Role of respondent	No.	Comments
Head Teacher	36	
Deputy Head Teacher	17	
Co-ordinator	10	Includes personal skills, curriculum, P.E., P.D., special resource, communication, access support and assessment co-ordinators
SENCO	10	

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Role of respondent	No.	Comments
Class Teacher	7	
Head of Unit	5	Includes speech and language unit, opportunity unit, hearing support unit
Assistant Head Teacher	4	
Specialist / Advisory Teacher	4	Includes language and communication teacher
Inclusion Manager/co-ordinator	3	
Communication manager/co-ordinator/developer	3	
Speech and Language Therapist	3	
Acting Deputy Head Teacher	2	
Acting Head Teacher	2	
Senior Teacher	2	
Senior /Lead/Principal Speech and Language Therapist	2	
Other	4	
Total	116	Some respondents had more than one role such as teacher and SENCO

Types of schools/provision

The respondents were based in a variety of types of school. Just over half of the schools (51%) were special schools, with the next highest category being mainstream primary schools and units within mainstream primary schools (25%). The table below depicts the range and spread.

Table 2: Type of school/provision where respondents were based

Type of school/provision	No.	Comments
Special school	57	Cater for children with a range of impairments, from more than one category, including one that provides outreach support
Mainstream primary/junior school	17	Support children with special needs in mainstream classes
Unit or class in mainstream school	11	
Schools for children with physical disabilities	9	

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Type of school/provision	No.	Comments
Schools for children with autistic spectrum disorders	4	
Schools for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties	4	
Schools for children with severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and profound and multiple learning difficulties	3	
Schools for children with moderate learning difficulties	2	Including children with ASDs
Residential special school	2	Includes non-maintained and epilepsy specialism
Schools for children who are profoundly deaf	1	
Schools for children with severe learning difficulties	1	
Enhanced resource school	1	
Residential and day school for children with communication impairments	1	
Residential school for children with ASDs	1	
Residential school for children with severe challenging behaviour	1	
Total	115	Some schools had both a special unit and mainstream provision

Age range

A high proportion of schools catered for a wide age range of children, with considerable variation nationally. The two main groups were schools that catered for children aged 2-3 to 18 or 19 (32%) and schools that were for children aged between 2-5 to 11 or 12 (29%). 59% of schools took children up to the ages of 16-19.

Table 3: Age range of pupils in respondents' schools/provision

Age range (years)	No. of schools
Under 2 to 11	2
2 to 19	7
2 or 3 to 11	14
2 to 13	2
2 or 3 to 16	5
2 or 3 to 18 or 19	36

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Age range (years)	No. of schools
3 or 4 to 7	2
3 to 17	1
4 or 5 to 11 or 12	19
4 to 9	1
4 or 5 to 19	10
6 or 7 to 16	4
7 to 11	5
7, 8 or 9 to 19	3
Not applicable (not based in school)	1
Total	112

Number of children/young people in school

Respondents were asked how many children with little or no verbal communication between the ages of 7-11 they had in their school. 59% of responding schools had less than 15 children within this category, with only 6% of schools having over 36 children with little or no verbal communication.

Table 4: Number of children/young people on school rolls

Number of children	No. of schools
0 to 5	29
6 to 15	31
16 to 25	24
26 to 35	12
36 to 50	4
Over 50	2
No response	10
Total	112

In total, schools reported having 1,558 children with little or no verbal communication, making an average of 14 children per school. Of these, 627 (40%) had physical impairments, 1,442 (93%) had learning difficulties and 625 (40%) had both physical impairments and learning difficulties. In almost all (i.e. except 33) cases, children who were reported to have physical impairments also had a learning difficulty (98%).

Range of strategies, Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs), equipment and ICT

When asked if they used a range of strategies, equipment or ICT to support children with little or no verbal communication, the majority of schools (108) responded positively. Three schools indicated that they sometimes used a

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range of methods. The only response with a 'no' to this question was from a school for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and the reply indicated that the children's difficulties related to social understanding and communication abilities rather than the mechanics of speech.

When asked for more details about the range of supports that the schools used, comprehensive information was given that has been categorised into: signing, symbols, equipment, programmes, strategies and software programmes. Most schools used several different types of communication method.

Signing

The responses in this group include all those methods that were reported that involved some degree of physical signing either to, or with, the child with communication difficulties. Makaton was the most commonly used signing method, with Signalong the next most popular. Others included:

- Body signing
- British Sign Language
- Cued articulation
- Paget Gorman
- Sign Supported English

Symbols

This section includes all the approaches that the responding schools mentioned that involve the use of symbols to represent words and actions. The most commonly cited symbols were the Rebus symbols developed by Widget, but communication books, boards and trays were also frequently used. The full list of cited methods includes:

- Bliss
- Chailey symbol books
- Communication boards
- Communication books
- Communication trays
- E Tran book
- E Tran frame
- Makaton symbols
- Moon
- Objects of reference
- Picture Communication Symbols
- Pictures
- Rebus symbols
- Symbol World
- Tactile symbols
- Visual cue cards
- Visual timetables

Equipment

*Strategies/equipment mentioned more frequently are marked with asterisks. Included here is the electronic equipment (other than computer programmes) that schools reported that they use. The items in the first section are sometimes referred to as VOCAs (Voice Output Communication Aids). A VOCA is any device which uses electronically stored speech as a means of communication. This includes equipment from a very basic short message

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recorder to a more sophisticated communication software which can store between one and several thousand messages. The second group includes other equipment, some that supplement VOCAs, and some that have independent uses.

1. Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)

- 4 Talk 4*
- Alpha Talker
- BIGMack*
- Chatbox
- ChatPC 11
- Delta talker
- DV4
- Dynamos
- Dynamyte
- Dynavox*
- Dynawrite
- Eclipse
- Enkidu
- GOTALK (inc Pocket GOTALK)
- Language masters
- Liberator
- Lightwriter
- Macaw
- Message Mate
- Mighty Mo
- MT4
- Multi-message aids
- Pathfinder
- Say it Sam
- Single message voice output devices
- Step by Step
- Super-talker
- Tape recorders/CDs/dictaphone
- Tech Talk8*
- Tech/Speak32*
- Techscam 8
- Tellus
- Touch Talker
- Traxsys (Scan 4)
- Vanguard
- VoicePal 8

2. Equipment (computer-related and other)

- Adapted keyboards*
- Banana keyboard*
- Alphasmart
- Big Keys
- CD boombox switch
- Concept keyboard
- Dark rooms
- E Tran frame*
- Echo mikes
- Exchange bars
- Eye blink switches
- Hearing aids (personal) and radio aid soundfield
- Infra-red tracker
- Intellikeys
- Interactive toys

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- IPAQ
- Joysticks*
- Liblap 7
- Personal laptop enabler
- Pointing boards
- Radio uplink switches
- Reward box
- Robots
- Rollerball, tracker ball*
- Smart boards
- SmartNAV
- Switch systems, e.g. Switch 8, Don Johnson - box and switches, switch mounts, step-by-step, Jelly Bean*
- Tizzy's Video Toolkit
- Touch screen*
- Trackerball
- Tric Trac communicator wrist band
- Whiteboards (including Interactive Whiteboards)*
- Word boards

A wide range of these methods were frequently used, but switches and adapted keyboards and mice, joysticks and whiteboards were the most often mentioned.

Programmes (not computer)

This group includes those methods by which children in our survey were reported to be supported with their communication by means of a planned programme:

- Intensive interaction (the use of mirroring)
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Sensory Integration
- TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children)

TEACCH and PECS were the most often cited programmes used.

Strategies

This group includes all the methods that the schools that responded to our questionnaire have developed, either formally or informally, to aid communication, but generally they do not involve equipment:

a) Consultancy from other professionals and training:

- Advice from Speech and Language Therapists*
- Making use of Wolfson centre, Communication Aids Project, specialist teachers, other professionals
- Hearing Impairment and Visual Impairment advice
- Training/courses, e.g. Team Teach

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- Whole school approaches:
- Differentiated curriculum
- Multi-disciplinary teaching
- Routed schools
- Sensory curriculum
- Total Communication systems/environments, including Somerset Total Communication*
- Visual timetables
- Whole school policy to promote involvement*

b) Advocacy and peer support:

- Use of advocates
- Peer support

c) Classroom strategies:

- Behavioural support plans
- CHAT groups
- Circle time
- Colour coding
- Cued articulation
- Eye pointing*
- Giving choices*
- Giving extra time
- Hand gestures
- Knowing the child well*
- One-to-one teaching
- Passports
- Pencil grips and dycem
- Prompt boards
- Puppets
- Reduced timetable
- Repetition
- Scanning
- Sensory Integration
- Simplified speech
- Small group work
- Smart chair
- Smells/tunes of the day
- Specific positioning
- Talking partners
- Touch cues
- Use of 1 or 2 words
- Use of different text/paper/colour
- Use of schedules
- Velcro boards
- Vocalisation
- Word banks
- Wrist bands
- Yes/no strategies*

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Software programmes

Responses to the questionnaire showed that there are several software programmes for children with little or no verbal communication. Clicker 4/5, Writing with Symbols and Boardmaker were the most commonly used:

- Clicker 4/5*
- Writing With Symbols*
- Boardmaker*
- Kaleidos
- Laureate
- Number and Word Shark
- OPTEC
- Penfriend
- PEX
- Quickfire
- SwitchIt
- Talking Words
- Textease

Involvement of children with little or no verbal communication in decision making at school

Half of the schools (50%) indicated that the children with little or no verbal communication were involved in decision making at school, with a further 36% sometimes being involved. 14% schools said that the children were not involved, with several of these indicating that either the children were too young, or too profoundly disabled, or that staff were hoping to improve on this in the near future. These results are encouraging, in that they imply that 86% of schools are making positive moves to include children with little or no verbal communication in decision making at school.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

53% of schools responded positively when asked if their children with little or no verbal communication were involved in their IEPs. There was, however, quite a high level of qualification of this, with over a third (36%) of these respondents saying, for example, 'if able to contribute meaningfully', or 'with the more able pupils'. Several indicated that they would like to improve on their practice. 21% of respondents indicated that they did not currently involve these children in their IEPs, but one quarter (25%) of these were working on this, and would include them in the future.

The most usual way in which the children were included in their IEPs was, as we shall see, through target setting. Ways of involving the children included:

- Through the Annual Review process
- Target setting – eg targets set and written in the first person, so the child could understand, work on PSHE and behaviour targets particularly, use of child friendly target sheets, photos, displayed targets in classroom
- Through the use of a questionnaire
- Use of symbol assisted technology
- Provision maps

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- Through the pupils taking ownership of the IEPs as part of an on-going process, designed to be tailored to each child through the use of symbols, few words and a lot of detail.

Target setting

Results showed that 38 (34%) of respondents indicated that they did not regularly involve children with little or no verbal communication in setting targets, with 14 (12%) having no involvement with target setting at all. Table 5 below shows the breakdown of the responses.

Table 5: Non/partial involvement of children in setting targets

Response	No,
No involvement with target setting	14
Only with older or 'as appropriate' children	11
Will be doing this in the future	4
No, but the children are aware of their targets	4
Sometimes	3
Informally involved	1
Not applicable	1
Total	38

There was some overlap with the previous question regarding target setting, but generally, of the 48% of respondents that indicated that they involved children with little or no verbal communication in target setting, more detail was given in this section. Of the schools that did involve children in their target setting, a range of approaches was used:

- Symbol sheet/targets written as symbols in child's book
- Self review exercise
- Giving child a choice of targets
- Child evaluating own performance
- Use of child friendly language
- Reward system with tactile and visual components to illustrate progress and encourage active participation
- Particular emphasis on behaviour and social skills
- Documentation of child's views on IEP paperwork
- Work with children so they come up with their own targets

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- Targets are written up in home/school diary, and displayed in the classroom
- Parental involvement in target setting with the child
- Use of symbolled questionnaire
- Pupil has a self-evaluation file, level of self-advocacy is recorded
- Look at the child holistically and experiment with the child's reaction to a target
- Achievement portfolios
- Targets set in Annual Review, and then broken down into very small steps
- Reinforcement of displayed targets and constant reminding when child is working

Ten schools did not respond to this question.

Annual Reviews

A similar number of respondents indicated that children with little or no verbal communication were involved in their Annual Reviews, with 51% schools responding positively. The responses that indicate that schools did not regularly involve the children are presented in the table below.

Table 6: Involvement of children with little or no verbal communication in Annual Reviews

Response	No.
No	10
No, only do this with older children	10
As appropriate/where possible	19
Through parents or advocates	3
Looked After Children only (in PEP)	1
No response	12
Total	55

From this we can see that 38% of the schools did not routinely involve children with little or no verbal communication in their Annual Reviews.

There was a wide range of ways in which 57 schools did involve children with little or no verbal communication in their reviews. A small number of schools (3) indicated that it was ultimately up to the parents whether or not the child was involved in this process. The range included:

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- Written contribution from the child
- Photographic contribution
- Use of video
- Use of digital photography
- Symbols/symbol questionnaire, happy/sad faces*
- Symbol supported discussion*
- Visual Annual Review being developed
- Child attends for part of review
- Completion of 'views sheet' / 'pupil's views' before Annual Review*
- Awareness that review is happening*
- Pupil report is presented at Annual Review*
- Interpretation of contribution by an adult
- Use of Dynavox/Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)*
- Powerpoint presentation
- Invited to bring examples of work he/she is proud of
- Review report read to child, child makes mark on front to indicate this has been done
- Report written in rough while working with child
- Child asked set of questions
- Scribed report
- Use of form provided by LEA, but adapted by the school
- Completion of a response form

*The use of symbols was widely cited, as was the completion of pupil's views sheets and questionnaires.

Choice of secondary school

The schools involved in the survey were asked to indicate whether or not children with little or no verbal communication were involved in making choices about which secondary school they might attend. We anticipated that, for quite a large number of children, this might not be relevant as many special schools cater for children up to the age of 19. This proved to be the case, with 41% of schools indicating that this was not applicable to them. Of the remaining schools, 16% did involve children with little or no verbal communication in this process, with only 7% not involving the children at all. 9% of schools said that they had little involvement overall. 27% of schools did not respond to this question.

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The schools that did involve children with little or no verbal communication in decisions about secondary schools did this in the following ways, the most intense involvement being cited first, with lower levels of involvement last:

- Programme of visits, increasing in length and including observations of reactions
- Take the children to visit schools
- Supported the children, using familiar staff to help them to express opinions
- Ask the child to respond to visit by means of happy/sad faces, symbols or PECS sentence strip
- As part of Year 6 transfer programme
- Educational Psychologist would discuss this with child at a transfer visit
- Individual meeting with Speech and Language Therapist
- As part of the Annual Review process
- Encouraged parents to take the children to visit
- At parents' request would involve a conductor
- Provide support for parents

Other decisions in school

The respondents were asked in which ways the children with little or no verbal communication were involved in other decisions in school. The most frequent response was concerning School Councils or Forums, either the development of one (3%) or the running of one (26%). Other responses mentioned Circle Time, giving choices wherever possible, especially around snacks and activities, filling in questionnaires, rule-making and decision-making in class, rewards/trips out for good work, decisions about clubs and extended school activities. Some schools also mentioned that they involved the children in activities such as a complaints process, consultation about the Government's Green Paper, Person Centred Planning and Progress files, staff interviews, buddying schemes and evaluations of lessons and activities.

Wider decision-making

When asked about wider decision-making in school, i.e. decisions that would affect the whole school, not just the child or child's class, 19% of schools stated that they did not involve children with little or no verbal communication in this process; and a further 46% said that they did this 'where possible'.

However, 32% of schools, about a third, said that they did do this. Similarly to the previous question, the majority of schools that did involve children with little or no verbal communication in wider decisions did this by involvement in their school council or forum. In addition, the children were included in:

- Class meetings

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- Choosing activities/outings
- Eco school group
- Lunchtime clubs
- Commenting on school lunches, snacks, etc
- Contributing to and planning school assemblies
- Contributing to and planning performances, events, celebrations and memorials
- Completing questionnaires
- Designing new school/playground
- Planning curriculum
- Consultation event
- Choosing staff/Head Teacher
- Involved in before/after school clubs
- Racial Equality Audit /Consultation on Green Paper
- Choosing school charity
- Choosing school uniform
- Choosing school logo

The respondents were asked about situations in which it is more difficult to involve children with little or no verbal communication. This provoked a wide range of responses, the most frequent of which (13%) referred to difficulties in involving these children in discussions and Circle Time activities. The next most frequent response (11%) was that it was difficult to involve children with little or no verbal communication where abstract or complex decisions or choices needed to be made. A small number of schools (between 2 -5 for each item) mentioned difficulties in including children in:

- Target setting
- Assessing what children do well
- Where good comprehension levels are needed
- Performances/presentations/concerts/assemblies/news sessions
- Full student council
- Noisy environments
- Where there is limited time/other pupils are in a hurry
- Formal lessons
- Decision making rather than choice making
- Where no symbols are provided for the activity
- Social times, i.e. break and dinner

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- New situations where they have no former experience
- When in competition with more able children

The final section of this question asked what situations would make wider involvement of the children with limited verbal communication possible. The two most common, but perhaps unsurprising, answers to this were that one-to-one support was necessary and adequate time for preparation was vital. Small numbers of schools (2-6 for each item) also suggested:

- Improved communication and links between schools
- More signing/symbols/visual systems for communication
- Acceptance and knowledge in the wider community
- The use of advocates
- The staff knowing the children very well
- A whole school understanding about communication
- Improvements in communication resources
- Training and development opportunities for staff
- Smaller groups of children

Training

Nearly half (41%) of respondents had not been involved in any training about strategies to involve children with little or no verbal communication in their education. This may partly be explained by the fact that many of the respondents were either Head or Deputy Head Teachers, whose direct contact with children with little or no verbal communication may not be as extensive as that of other staff. It is worth noting here that it is reported later that a high number of schools indicated that they would like to see improvements in training.

When asked for details about the training that they received, 53% of respondents *had* received training in this area, and a range of responses were recorded (in order of frequency):

- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- In-house training (including that delivered by Speech and Language Therapists)
- Makaton
- AAC user information systems
- Signalong / other signing training
- Communication aid training
- Whole school training, including on PECS/AAC

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- ICT training
- Total Communication training
- Attendance at conferences
- Literacy courses (specialist)
- Use of symbols
- SENSE training
- Own study (e.g. M.Ed)
- Talking Mats/Pupil Passports
- Intensive interaction
- Use of objects of reference
- Use of advocates

Meetings

Respondents were asked whether children with little or no verbal communication attended meetings where decisions were made about their education. Where details were given, it was clear that most responses related to Annual Review meetings, although other meetings such as behaviour meetings, medical meetings, Looked After Children meetings and parent evenings were mentioned. As shown in Table 7 below, only 4% of children with little or no verbal communication always attend meetings. A further 16% mostly attend and 53% sometimes attend. Of the remaining results, 27% either never attend, or only attend as an older child, have their views represented by a questionnaire or report or will be attending in the future.

Table 7: Attendance of children with little or no verbal language at meetings

Do children attend meetings?	No. of responses
Always	5
Mostly	18
Sometimes	59
Older children only	6
Views represented by questionnaire or report	2
Will do in the future	1
Never	21
Total	112

When asked in what ways the children were supported in these meetings to ensure that their views are taken into account, the most frequent response

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(30%) was the use of staff, especially those who knew the child very well. Parents were also key to this involvement, as well as the use of signing, symbols and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) generally. Other responses included:

- The preparation of communication aids in advance of the meeting
- The use of facilitators and advocates
- Prompt sheets/boards
- Pupil advice/views sheets
- Visual Annual Reviews
- Reports and evidence prepared in advance, including video evidence
- Adapted pupil participation form
- Meetings discussed with child after they have occurred, including the use of transcriptions

Table 8: Formal recording of the views of children with little or no verbal communication

Are children's views recorded formally?	Number of responses
Always	38
Mostly	24
Sometimes	33
Will do in the future	1
Never	10
No answer	6
Total	112

The table above shows the frequency of responses to a question about recording the views of children with little or no verbal communication formally. Approximately a third (34%) of respondents indicated that they always formally record the children's views. The respondents were then asked how recording was carried out. The most frequent response (36%) was that an adult would write down what or how the child communicated. More detailed responses included the use of the following:

- Photographs
- Symbol record
- Video/audio tape /CD
- Minutes of meeting taken

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- Communication aids
- Signing
- Pictures
- Talking Mats
- Communication Passports
- LOG files
- Knowing and understanding the child and reading emotions
- Forms/questionnaires
- Smiley/sad faces
- Journals
- Mind maps/spider charts
- Choice boards
- Peer support
- Child writes report

Schools were asked how the staff that are involved in meetings where decisions are made about children's education were supported or trained to ensure that the children's views are taken into account. Training was seen as very important, with the majority (39%) of responses relating to training, with respondents stressing that staff had been trained to do this work. It was not clear that this training explicitly included training on meetings, however. The other most frequently reported factors that helped staff to take account of children's views during meetings indicated the importance of staff knowing the children very well and being very experienced. In addition, the following, more explicit responses were given:

- Use of photos/video
- Speech and language therapist/communication team support
- Parents' support
- School policy and practice/development of students' voice/ Total Communication school
- Through whole school discussion
- Specialist advice/support
- Through links with nearby centres/schools with expertise

The level of accessible recording of children's views was low, with only 10% of respondents stating that they did record the views of children with little or no verbal communication so that they were accessible to the children. 51% of respondents said that they did not do this, and 29% said that they did this sometimes. The ways in which this was done included:

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- Digital imagery
- Feedback through class teachers
- Symbols/pictures/charts
- Makaton
- Talking Mats
- Read a form, if appropriate
- Photographs
- Minutes of meeting
- Pupil response forms, with photos
- Notice board with accessible symbols, words, pictures
- ICT programme

Protocols and guidelines

Schools were asked whether or not they used or were aware of any national, local or school protocols or guidelines on involving children with little or no verbal communication in decision-making. The responses to these questions indicated very low awareness (or availability) of relevant protocols or guidelines. A third (33%) of schools were not aware of any protocols or guidelines, 15% schools were able to name at least one national resource, 10% named local resources and 15% schools had their own policies or guidelines. Details on national, local or school protocols/guidelines mentioned by respondents are presented below.

National protocols/guidelines

- ACE Centre Advisory trust
- Use national mainstream guidelines and adapt for own use
- South West SEN Regional Partnership Self-Evaluation Framework
- SEN Code of Practice
- Every Child Matters
- The Call Centre - AC Guidelines
- The Evaluators Cookbook (ne-cf)
- Mencap – Listen Up
- Person Centred Planning
- Progress files QCA/Assessment Level Descriptors
- I-CAN
- Communication Matters advice
- National Autistic Society website
- Communication Aids Project (CAP)

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- P levels
- Talking Mats
- Commenius European project

Local protocols/guidelines

- County based decision making project
- LEA Annual Review paperwork adapted for own use
- County SEN advisory team – guidance on involving pupils in Review process
- Guidelines for a speech and language friendly school
- County psychological service – Scheme to Promote Early Interactive Conversations (SPEIC)
- NHS guidelines on sensory integration
- Annual Review and IEP guidelines

School protocols/guidelines

- Inclusive school policy
- Integration into mainstream policy
- Total Communication policy
- Annual Review policy
- School Council guidelines
- AAC policy
- Pupils views forms and guidance
- Guidance on involving children with little or no verbal communication is written into all school policies

The SEN Code of Practice was the most frequently cited national resource, with Every Child Matters and the Progress files QCA/Assessment Level Descriptors being the next frequently cited. However, no resource was mentioned more than four times, showing a strong degree of diversity across schools relating to protocols and guidelines. Local protocols were only ever mentioned by individual schools, and inclusive school policies were mentioned five times, with Total Communication policies and Annual Review policies the next frequently mentioned.

Advocates

The schools were asked about their use of advocates. By this, we mean an independent person who can support a person with their communication. Half of the schools said that they did use advocates with children with little or no verbal communication. However, when asked to give details, almost half

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(43%) of these respondents indicated that the advocate was the child's teaching assistant, support staff member or teacher, therefore not truly independent. A further 7% said that the child's parent or carer acted as an advocate, again, not an independent person. Of the others, a range of types of advocacy were used:

- A local advocacy service
- Older children
- Parent of another child
- Member of School Council
- Buddy scheme being developed to include advocacy
- School social worker
- Deaf support worker
- Physical Impairment and Medical Support Service (PIMSS)
- Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)
- Independent person
- Family liaison co-ordinator

Three schools mentioned that Looked After Children have used advocates, another school mentioned that they used an advocate during a police investigation, and another used an advocate to support a parent in the Annual review.

Current approaches

The schools were asked to state how well they thought they were doing in relation to their current approaches to involving children with little or no verbal communication. Table 9 below shows the results:

Table 9: Self-rated competence in involving children with little or no verbal communication

How well do you involve children?	No. of schools
Very well	8
Well	32
Quite well	45
Not very well, but improving	23
Not well	4
Total	112

It is encouraging to see that 69% of the schools therefore thought that they were either doing well or quite well, with a further 7% doing very well. This leaves 20% not doing very well, but improving and only 4% not doing well.

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The schools were then asked what improvements they would like to see in strategies to involve children with little or no verbal communication. The responses showed a clear need for improvements in training, with 22% of the responses indicating this. Other improvements (in order of frequency) were:

- More opportunities and time for involving the children in decision-making and to develop awareness and skills around choices
- The development of the use of ICT, AAC and communication aids
- An improved service (including technical support) and more resources for equipment
- Extend pupil involvement in IEPs and Annual Reviews
- School needs to work towards being a Total Communication environment
- Improve consistency in using aids, signing and symbols across the school
- Increase in Speech and Language Therapy time and advice
- Improve the use of advocates
- More training and support for parents and carers
- Improve/widen the School Council
- Develop systems for giving feedback from meetings
- More support from national project that shows good practice
- Make pupil consultation survey more accessible
- Improve staffing ratios
- Share good practice across schools
- Develop multi-professional teaching groups
- Develop links with wheelchair services

The respondents were finally asked to add any further comments. Most responses related to the particular difficulties of involving children with learning difficulties, autism and epilepsy, especially at a relatively young age. In addition, the need to work with other agencies was raised. There was enthusiasm shown for the PIE project, and a will to improve practice.

Conclusion

It is clear from the results of this survey that a wide range of often innovative and creative methods is being employed to involve with children with little or no verbal communication in their education. Over half the children were involved in their IEPs in a variety of ways, a third of schools involved the children in wider decisions at schools and a high proportion of schools thought that they were making positive steps towards involving children with little or no verbal communication in their education. However, it is also apparent that there are few consistently used guidelines or protocols to support staff in this work, with a third of respondents not being aware of any relevant guidelines or protocols. There were also few opportunities for sharing practice and using

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advocates. In part, this may explain the relatively low levels of involvement of children with little or no verbal communication in meetings, reviews and target setting and the very low level of accessible recording of children's views.

Involving children with little or no verbal communication is a problematic area for many schools and we believe that a need for further research and training has been demonstrated. Nearly half of respondents had not been involved in any training in this area yet there is a clear need for this type of support. It is also demonstrated that experienced staff, who know the children well, are vital to effective communication. With an average of 14 children in each of the schools that have responded to this survey, the numbers of children across England are clearly significant, and with an increasing awareness of children's rights, this is an area that deserves serious attention.

The second phase of the PIE research project involves time being spent with twelve children with little or no verbal communication and interviews with families, teachers, Head Teachers and speech and language therapists. This will lead to the development of resources for teachers and other professionals and provide training opportunities.

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