NCSE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2025/26

SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY

School name: Midwest School for the Deaf

Practising teacher lead: Aisling White and Niamh O'Connell

Research theme: Curriculum; Outcomes; Teaching and Learning

Research aim: To explore methods of including student voice when generating a new language and communication policy in our school.

Methods

This was a mixed method project using focus groups; thumbs up thumbs down; surveys; and interviews.

In total there were 29 student participants involved in this research.

Research findings

The research project allowed students an opportunity to reflect upon their preferences regarding language and communication in school and allowed them to have input into the generation of a new school policy.

The analysis of the data showed that in our context, consistent and accessible communication across all settings is essential for effective teaching and learning. When teachers, SNAs and substitutes use clear speech, face the students when speaking, and use two fluent models of communication (ISL and English), students demonstrate stronger engagement and comprehension. Regardless of their expressive communication preference, students indicated that ISL aided their comprehension of class material.

It also revealed that staff education, particularly for substitute teachers and those new to the d/Deaf education context, is vital to maintaining communication consistency and access to academic material. Creating structured supports such as communication profiles, substitute education methods, social skills education using ISL and a focus on ISL teaching will further strengthen the inclusion, social interaction, and overall learning outcomes for our students.

Our top three findings

1. Staff training: Ongoing training for all staff, especially new staff or substitute teachers, around effective communication with d/Deaf students, ISL use, radio systems and student communication profiles to ensure a consistent and inclusive learning environment.

2. Communication Practices: Clear speech with face visible for speech-reading, simplified language where necessary, use of pictures/text/spoken language/ sign for new vocabulary, access to two fluent models of communication (ISL and English) so students can choose what works best for their comprehension.

3. Strengthening ISL Use Across Academic and Social Settings: Increased emphasis and encouragement for students to use ISL both in the classroom and on yard to enhance communication confidence and peer connection. Linking into the whole-school golden ticket initiative. Ensure where possible two fluent models of communication are available during lessons and that ISL support is easily available during groupwork activities.

Impact of our research

The research findings will be used to create a new Language Policy in our school which has a focus on student voice. The incorporation of student voice within the policy will then be shared with the students. This will allow them to be cognisant of their influence on the generation of the policy and how this will impact students in the future.

Teachers are more aware of the importance of incorporating student voice in our school context. They are also now more aware of the communication preferences of the children in their class level.