



Why deaf families choose an oral education for their child.

In 2020 my husband and I made the decision to send our child, who had been in mainstream education up to this point, to Mary Hare School for Year 7, to be taught in the oral method.

What support did your son have in mainstream primary?

For the last 7 years, our son has been educated in a mainstream setting supported by skilled communication support workers (CSWs). The school made a concerted effort to integrate him with the other children and he has made good academic progress.

Can you tell us a bit about your son?

Zachary is highly motivated and has learned English and Maths to a standard that is comparable, (although lower), than his peers. He has received specialist Speech and Language Therapy to develop his lip reading and speaking skills and is demonstrating some aptitude in this area.

What were your considerations when choosing Mary Hare?

There were three things that led to our decision to move him to an oral method of teaching: peer group, speech (English) competence and direct teaching.

Tell us about Zachary's speech and language.

Our son is from a family that uses BSL as its first language, so consequently he is a proficient British Sign Language user. He developed some skills in English speaking and lip reading through support in school, but these skills were not sufficient for him to learn directly in English or engage with peers in more complex interactions. His written English was affected by not being able to hear and speak English proficiently.

KEY FACTS

Name: Zachary

- Current Year 7
- Joined Mary Hare in 2020
- First language BSL
- Bilateral hearing aids
- Profound bilateral sensorineural hearing loss



Secondary school is a key time for a young deaf person, it is this time when they start to notice they are different from others and when others can see the deaf child as different.



What were your concerns regarding a peer group?

In the first 5 years at the primary school, our son had been able to develop key relationships with peers without the need for adult intervention. In Year 5, relationships became more strained as peers wished to communicate at a level which our son was not equipped to understand without communication support from adults. This led to social isolation which was exacerbated in Year 6. We feared it would be worse still if making a transition to a large secondary school which had a small resource base where there would be few children with a similar profile.

Secondary school is a key time for a young deaf person, it is this time when they start to notice they are different from others and when others can see the deaf child as different. A large and diverse peer group, (a peer group with similar experiences), is essential at this age to promote social and emotional development. A peer group can give the deaf child the opportunity to learn from others, thrive emotionally and develop self-esteem that will be with them for the remainder of their lives.

What challenges did you face with your Local Authority?

The Local Authority suggested that our son could learn written English through a communication support worker and by engaging with other students who used Sign Supported English. We did not believe that this was a credible proposition, and we sought a change to the oral method to ensure that our son could learn spoken English, and in turn, written English.

The Local Authority rejected our request for our son to be taught in the oral method. They wished for him to continue his education in a mainstream school (with a resource base), by means of BSL with the support of a CSW. However, this approach would mean he would not have direct contact with his teachers, and he would be limited by the translation challenges associated when working between two languages. Critically, learning would be additionally challenging as our son would need to learn both a BSL sign for a concept and the English word in order to learn and then function in assessments. This is made more challenging when we consider that many words in English that are required to be learned in the curriculum do not have equivalent BSL signs.

How did you think Mary Hare would help his language?

We were convinced that a small class size where children have good visual access to all speakers and the experienced teachers, would promote learning and development of language in every lesson. We understood that being taught in English directly would reinforce his use of the English language and ensure that his comprehension would increase dramatically. Finally, we knew that our son would receive Speech and Language Therapy support that would be integrated into his timetable so his speech could develop every day when in school.

We know for him to be successful in a hearing world, he will need excellent English skills to pass exams, learn in further and higher education, progress in his career and be a fully, functioning member of society.



I want to ensure that he is in an environment where he is nurtured and challenged and where his potential can be truly realised.



Why do you think the oral/aural method is so key?

We believe the oral method would place our son in a small class with equally competent children who could learn from each other in lessons specifically designed and delivered at a suitable speed. It would mean the children could learn the words and concepts directly from the teacher and cover more ground in greater depth that could not possibly be achieved in another medium.

Would you like to add anything else?

As an ex-pupil of Mary Hare, I understand the barriers my son will have to overcome through his education and later life. Like my son, I was from a deaf family where BSL was used as the first language and it was not easy transitioning to an oral method when I arrived at Mary Hare. However, I was motivated to learn to speak and develop my English because I knew that it would be the key factor that would open opportunities for me in the future.

When at Mary Hare, I learned to lip read, improved my speech and my reading/writing skills. This allowed me to overcome barriers in further education and gave me access to higher education. I had to work harder than my hearing peers in university to achieve my goals and dreams, but the skills and determination I learnt at Mary Hare were invaluable at this time.

After university I found fulfilling employment and later progression in the workplace. Ten years ago, I established my own successful business and started working as a translator and presenter. I believe these English skills were key to this success at every step of the journey.

Zachary has a beautiful and inquiring mind; many people tell me that he has so much potential. I want to ensure that he is in an environment where he is nurtured and challenged and where his potential can be truly realised. I look forward to seeing him make the most of this opportunity, to utilise these skills to progress in education and to see genuine success socially and in the workplace.

Securing the future of deaf children and young people