

Board Reporting Template

This template is designed for officers to report to the board, providing key updates, progress, and recommendations aligned with the board's objectives.

Submission Date: 25.6.25

Officer Name and Role: Rory McDonnell, Head of STLS Sensory and Physical Disabilities



1. Report Title and Submission Details

- Report Title: **How we capture youth voice**

“It made me feel proud to be deaf”.

This is a comment from a deaf child in Thanet who attended one of our recent activity sessions called “Sound Circle”. It’s a lovely quote and just as important: it is evidence of how we as a service listen to and engage with the learners we work with all the time, we value their comments and their thoughts and I hope this report will show this is embedded in all our practice.

There is a range of work on pupil voice within KCC and this report focuses on just one aspect from STLS Sensory and PD.

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- Reporting Period: June 2025

2. Purpose and Context

- Provide a brief summary of the purpose of this report.
- Explain how this report aligns with the board’s objectives or priorities.
- The purpose of this report is to give the board an overview of how KCC staff in CYPE capture the opinions of the children and young people we work with. In particular it will focus on the activities of staff working with learners who have sensory impairment, physical disability and complex medical needs, and communication needs. Other KCC CYPE teams are also involved in a great deal of SEN youth engagement work which could become a focus of a future report.
- The STLS Sensory and PD Teams are made up of 49 CYPE staff. They are specialist teachers, specialist outreach and technology officers, and administration support. This includes specialist teachers of the deaf, of vision impairment, and for multi-sensory impairment, specialist teachers for physical disability and complex medical needs, as well as play specialists for vision impairment, a technology officer for VI, and two intervenors for children with multi-sensory impairment. The team was based at Valence School in the past and joined KCC in January 2023. The team visit children across the whole county, they visit children in all educational settings and in their homes. The team are commissioned to work with children from birth to age 18 but work with young adults up to 25. The team provide a great deal of training, specialist advice and guidance, 1 to 1 and small group teaching, and provide technology to support learning such as remote microphone systems, and braille notetakers. Growing numbers

of the children that the team support are successfully placed in mainstream schools in their communities. A smaller proportion attend specialist placements.

- The team also run a range of inclusive projects that bring the children and families together (see updates and progress for some examples).
- The team has a strong reputation nationally. For example, the team acts as the regional centre of expertise for multi-sensory impairment (in the past described as deaf-blind); the team has consistently supported the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NATSIP); and two of the team teach at Birmingham University on the specialist teacher training programmes there. One member of the team co-chairs the CRIDE Survey committee (CRIDE - Consortium for Research into Deaf Education – is a national group of Multi-disciplinary professional who work with deaf learners. The group consider areas that impact deaf learners achievement for example staffing, resources, and service provision within deaf education). Together with a small group nationally one of our team led the planning and coordination for a national conference in MSI in Birmingham in May this year. The feedback from the event has been very positive and another is being planned for next year.
- Staff in our team know that by maintaining such national connections that we bring the latest initiatives and approaches back to KCC to reinforce delivery of strong outcomes for the children we support here in Kent.
- **Key data:**
- Number of children and young people we support (active cases, June 2025):

Please note that the areas of need we support are sometimes described as ‘low incidence’ disabilities, and that is why the data here will look rather different compared to data for children who are neurodiverse for example.

Area of Need:	Number of children and young people
Hearing Impairment	511 Total Preschool/Nursery 85 Primary 182 Secondary 244
Vision Impairment	527 Total Preschool/Nursery 63 Primary 186 Secondary 222 Year 14 and beyond 56
Multi-Sensory Impairment	37 Total Preschool/Nursery 4 Primary 11 Secondary 22
PD and Complex Medical	314 Total Preschool/Nursery 43 Primary 164 Secondary 107

3. Key Updates and Progress

- Summarize the status of ongoing projects or initiatives.

STLS Sensory and PD run a number of projects and initiatives, and youth voice is embedded into all of them. The projects include:

- **Sensory Student Council** (meets 3 to 4 times a year, the number of learners involved is 15 from across the county, when students have left and others have taken their place). Sophie Dann and her colleagues will attend the next meeting on Saturday 28th June.
- **North/West Kent VI meet up:** This group is run for learners in secondary school. Activities include: pottery, golf, goal ball, wall climbing and many more. It helps them not to feel alone and to socialise and make friends. A lot of the learners are friends now outside of the group and message and meet up. Recently one of the VI learners at the age of 14 got invited to her first birthday party of another teenage VI learner. This moment alone makes all of our efforts worthwhile. The normal attendance for this group is 12 to 14 VI teenagers.
- **All My Own Work** (run for years 2 through to 11)- opportunity for learners to come together to talk about their vision impairment and what that means for them, to develop ways of coping with difficult situations that arise because of their vision impairment and build strategies for these, to consider how they develop their independence and goals for the future, to consider the skills that they need for employment and how to advocate their needs. It also allows them an opportunity to talk to each other about their experiences and share thoughts on how things could be better for them. It allows them to have a voice and be open and honest about anything related to their vision impairment. They can also question and challenge ideas and get advice from the QTVIs running the sessions. For the most recent groups the attendance was as follows: Year 3: 11 attendees; Year 6: 5 attendees; year 9: 7 attendees; year 11: 9 attendees.
- **VIP clubs-** (Vision Impairment Primary Clubs in Thanet) run for Primary aged pupils currently. It gives VI learners the opportunity to come together in a relaxed environment and have fun, playing games and taking part in planned activities. They get to meet children just like them and talk about what they do in and out of school. It is a chance for them to celebrate being special and make new friends. They have the opportunity to share with the group what they have been up to when we have 'biscuit and drink' time! The attendance at a recent event was 8 attendees.
- **Sound Circle and Sound Social** are the HI equivalent of VIP club, also in Thanet. Sound Circle is for Primary and Sound Social for Secondary. The Secondary group is a lot more structured. See attached slides with comments from the children about the latest primary session. Sample comments: "I liked meeting and seeing other children with hearing aids". Another comment: "I liked playing the games with the older learners". Sound circle is regularly attended by around 10 learners and Sound social by 15- 20 learners.

- **Little Ears** Deaf Children's Toddler Group in Maidstone (changing name soon to Mini Sound Circle); 10 to 12 families normally attend, at least six times a year.
- **MSI Family Days:** three times a year, including an SEN friendly panto at Meadowfield on a Saturday every Christmas. 14 families regularly attend these events.
- **VI Toddler Group:** Folkestone, at least once a term, five families regularly attend.
- **VI Early Years Spring Event:** we have run this twice ('24 and '25), and are already planning the 2026 event, see attached for a summary, which includes parental feedback, some of the children are too young to comment but if you look at the photos their happiness at the event shines through. 11 families attended the event this year.
- **HI Family days** – this is a new initiative, and 6 families attend the initial event at local country park to meet families with deaf children. We intend to run 3 events annually and rotate the locations around the county.
- **The Great Kent Sensory and PD Exhibition** 13.7.25 This is the latest iteration of a series of events run by the service since the 1990s. We have run Deaf Expo and VI Expo a number of times, our next event aims to bring this together and be a little bit bigger as it involves children and their families across Sensory and PD, the next event will be at Cornwallis and is a cross between a Sensory/PD summer fete and an exhibition. Many of the children and young people we work with happily attend mainstream schools and nurseries... we know they also really value the opportunity throughout the year to meet other children with similar needs and we create those opportunities. It's very important for their well-being.

Sensory Student Council (SSC)

As a sensory service, we already gather views from our learners through a variety of means including postcards, questionnaires, and previously through our 'On the Road to Independence' events.

Every child has an annual report and there is **always a section for child voice or student voice** in their report. We value their views and regularly seek them.

However, we wanted to gather more in-depth views and felt setting up a student council for our learners would be one way to achieve this, please see the attached article published in the Magazine of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf in September 2023 for a summary. The article was written by Gill Coates, Specialist Teacher for Hearing Impairment with our service. The magazine goes out across the UK and internationally.

The SSC is an ongoing project and the learners and staff involved meet at least three to four times a year.

In the last year the learners involved have made video clips talking about school and life which we shared with DfE colleagues in January. We would be happy to share them with the board (sharing permissions are in place).

The next event/most recent SSC event is on 28.6.25, and student members of the SSC will also be attending our Exhibition event in July to help out.

Sample video comments from a VI learner/member of the SSC in relation to the future and support:

Question: "What would you want a parent of a newly diagnosed visually impaired baby to know?"

"I would want them to know that there's always going to be specialists and people that are willing to help in a time of need"

Question: "And how will the future look?"

"I think that a good way of thinking about that is that disability is not a barrier and that there's only other ways of going about it".

Annual Surveys of Parents and of young People age 16+

We send formal surveys out to parents, sencos and young people we work with annually. Comments are overwhelmingly positive, when they are negative we follow up to find out why and see what can be improved. In last year's 16+ survey 80% of respondents thought our service was excellent (rating our service as 5 out of 5), and 20% thought very good (rating of 4 out of 5).

Sample comments from the 16+ survey last year:

- "Teacher x would give my reports in a lot of detail and run back through them with me to ensure they were right, this allowed for clear communications and the appropriate decisions to be made for me in school"
- "Teacher x gave me so much information about my hearing impairment, she even taught me how to read audiograms which has been extremely useful".
- "Teacher x helped me a lot with career goals".
- "My school would appropriately respond to my needs due to the reports Teacher x would make and they have become more educated on my hearing impairment - this never would've happened without Teacher x's help"

Sample comments from the parental survey last year:

- “The team member is amazing, you can tell she truthfully cares about the children. She has assisted so much with visits at home, sessions out of home and at nursery. She’s always very detailed with her reports and has helped a lot with knowledge of which specialists my son should be under. He also loves the sessions and everyone leaves happy”.
- “The team member is brilliant. She is so good at communicating with us as parents and helping us understand what his challenges are visually in school and learning and what can be done to support him”.
- “The team member is an absolute expert in her field. She combines this with empathy & understanding to help me as a parent, but also to help teaching & members of senior leadership in schools understand and deliver their obligations. Her approach appears to make it easier for teachers & members of senior leadership accept necessary help and training from her”.

4. Impact Seen

- Describe the tangible or measurable impacts observed from the initiatives or actions undertaken.
- Highlight improvements or outcomes directly benefiting stakeholders.

Redacted comments from learner’s views in their reports, the views have been amended to protect anonymity, please note ... we include learner’s views in every formal report we write. All of our formal reports are proofread before sending by another colleague, we have a system in place for this, we encourage each other to proof read and edit so that we can ensure high quality reporting:

- Sample one: “Student one preferred being at College X but was open with me about why he had to transfer to a different college. He is enjoying his course and feels that he is accessing the learning well. Student one has decided he would like STLS HI visits bi-termly, but he knows that he can contact me, or ask a tutor to contact me should he need any support in between visits”.
- Sample two: “Student 2 explained that she likes going outside to play, in the big playground and the nursery garden. Nothing is tricky for her. She says her hearing aids help her; she likes to wear them all the time. She likes to help Mrs M clean her hearing aids and ear moulds”.
- Sample three: “Student three explained that she really enjoys school. She said she was not as happy at her previous school and she felt the other children were not as kind. She was happy to work with me, reading beautifully and taking part in the vision assessment willingly”.
- Sample four: “Student four says that she is happy in both of her school settings. She says that she has friends and when asked is able to name them specifically”.

All of our project work is well received by the learners, however we rarely sit still as a service and we seek the learners' views, and those of their parents and teachers to think carefully about future plans for activities. We recently hosted an MSI Family Day in Shorne Woods... we had not been there before, the learners all loved it there and we know we will be going back. It was also very positive to work with the park rangers there (who all happen to work for KCC too). The picture below is of the learners and their families pond dipping at Shorne, a very popular activity.



How youth voice and impact information from our service is used strategically for wider service development:

Our team meets together regularly and feedback from the learners and their families is a consistent topic. Data and evidence is analysed and discussed. A common theme that comes forward is that the learners, their families and school staff appreciate the opportunities to come together across the range of activities we provide. There is clear evidence that friendships and informal parental support forms; and the children and their families really value this. Many of the children and young people we support are in schools and settings where they might be the only learner with their needs or might be one of a small handful. Research evidence and our own anecdotal evidence shows clearly that when the children and young people with sensory and PD needs come together that it is of great importance to them socially and psychologically.

For example, "All My Own Work" grew out of the lack of employment available to VI learners, we wanted to better equip learners for the world of work. It shows how the whole team are always looking for ways to better support the learners. At first All My Own Work was a development plan workstream, since then it has become embedded in our practice each year.

Similarly, it was recognised in the Thanet area that there were cohorts of deaf children who needed a social opportunity to come together, "Sound Circle" and "Sound Social" came from this, they are development plan workstreams which will also become embedded in our practice.

The youth voice and survey evaluation information we have shows that our education reports are useful and valuable to the learners, their families and their schools. The youth

voice information we have also demonstrates the learners want and appreciate ongoing project work. We look for new venues and activities and do consult with the learners about this. We review all of our training, reports and information for settings to ensure it is relevant and useful, and this includes the youth voice element of our reporting.

6. Risks and Challenges

- Describe any current or potential risks.
- Outline actions taken or proposed to address these risks.

The Sensory Service has an appropriate number of staff to meet needs, and all staff hold the relevant mandatory qualifications for their roles. The PD Team are also well qualified, they may need more staff in future and the current Head of Service is asking for this to be reviewed.

Moving to KCC in 2023 strengthened the team's position, many staff within the team feel that being part of CYPE gives the team a better and more positive influence with schools and settings across the county, and better connections with other colleagues in SEN, the EP Service and with social care teams.

7. Recommendations for Board Action

- As a Service we welcome comments and feedback from the board. If the board would like to see some of our video clips of our learners we can share them. If board members would like to attend our exhibition event in July they would be welcome. The flyer for the day is one of the attachments to this report.

8. Supporting Data and Evidence

- Please see the attached documents:
- 1. "Student voice – Why did we feel the need for a sensory student council?" magazine article
- 2. Sound Circle Feedback slides
- 3. Early Years Vision Impairment Spring Event- Kent Life 2025 feedback report with parental comments.
- 4. Flyer for exhibition event

9. Follow-Up and Next Steps

- Outline next steps or future plans related to this report:

Next annual surveys to be sent out in September 2025.
All of the projects listed are ongoing.

We are interested in comments from the board about how we further use information from youth voice to develop our service, and how our information might inform future inspections and be used as inspection evidence.