

Listening Conditions in Schools

Hearing impaired pupils need the best possible listening conditions to enable them to fully access the curriculum. Schools and early years setting can be noisy places, and this leaflet gives some practical advice to help improve the acoustic environment.

Improved listening conditions will benefit all pupils – and staff.

There are three main aspects to making a comfortable listening environment in any room:

Reducing reverberation	Reducing background noise	Improving the signal to noise ratio
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Reverberation

Reverberation can be thought of as 'echoes'. A good listening environment should not be too 'echoey'. Soft surfaces will absorb sound, while smooth, hard surfaces will bounce sound back. To reduce reverberation, increase the soft surfaces in the classroom by:

- Carpeting the classroom
- Putting up blinds or curtains
- Covering hard surfaces with cloth or paper

Background noise

Background noise makes it difficult to pick out the teacher's voice or the voices of other pupils contributing to the lesson. Reduce background noise by:

- closing doors/windows
- adding rubber stubs to table legs
- switching off or replacing noisy equipment e.g. fans, heaters
- encouraging children to keep noise to a minimum

Children are the biggest source of background noise!

Improving the signal to noise ratio

This means, ensuring that the teacher's voice is louder than any background noise. As well as reducing background noise as above, sometimes it is necessary to increase the volume of the teacher's voice.

In some classrooms, pupils can benefit from a **soundfield system**. A loudspeaker is fitted, and the teacher wears a microphone. This increases the volume of the teacher's voice for all pupils, and makes it easier for the teacher to be heard without straining.

Some hearing impaired children are given **radio aids** which reduce the effect of background noise and of distance, as the teacher's voice is transmitted via a radio signal.

Further information

The HI Team can be contacted to arrange an acoustic audit of school areas by the Educational Audiologist. This includes calculation of reverberation rates and specific advice.

Radio aids and Soundfield systems can be borrowed from the Hearing Impairment Team, where there is a hearing impaired pupil in a class.