

Petition – Stop the Closure of the Hearing Unit at St Margaret's School

1,145 paper signatures
493 e-petition signatures

We the undersigned petition the council to abandon the plans to close the vital Hearing Impairment Provision at St Margaret's Academy. Ensuring our children resident in Torbay receive the support they deserve and upholding the values of inclusion and equal opportunities for all.

Children with Hearing Impairment are being let down by the administration of both Torbay Council and Devon County Council.

In October 2024, news of the closure of the Hearing Impairment Units at The Spires College and St Margaret's Academy was delivered to the families of those with children within these Hearing Impairment Units.

This decision means that Hearing Impairment needs will be moved from an enhanced service provided directly in school to a statutory service within education settings. One parent of a child at St Margaret's Academy stated that her daughter previously attended a school without a dedicated unit in the past, and would have to rely on the statutory service provided within education settings. This meant that her daughter would be seen once or twice a month if she was lucky. Since starting at St Margaret's – within 6 months her daughter has learnt to read and write, all areas of her education have improved dramatically. She will have one to one sessions with her teacher of the deaf 2 or 3 days per week, and the hard work and dedication that this team provide is invaluable to her daughters learning. At a recent visit to the cochlear implant team in Bristol, the specialists were astounded at how far she has come since attending St Margaret's Academy.

These plans have caused great stress and worry to the parents, families, and support systems they work with.

Critical for the well-being and inclusion of hearing impaired individuals, we consider the consequences of this decision have the potential to cause mass disruption to the children and young people who depend on education support.

As summarised by the National Deaf Children's Society in their document regarding Specialist provision for hearing impaired children within mainstream schools: The involvement of parents and young people, and the provision of information and support to enable them to participate in decisions is a requirement under section 19 of the Children and Families Act. This not only applies to decisions about individual support, but also about local provision more generally. Section 27 of the Act also reiterates the requirement to consult with disabled children and their parents when on wider SEND provision.

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/5560/guidance-for-local-authorities-on-rps-final-2019.pdf>

A number of parents were significantly worried about the impact of disruption to their children's routines and the detrimental effect of potentially having to take children out of learning environments where they were comfortable. We consider a deaf child with no deaf community would feel very isolated and this could be detrimental to their mental health.

In the latest published reports for the Torbay Councils School Forum team, the 'Safety Valve Agreement' (stated to be viewed as a 'high priority' across the Local Area Partnership) identifies in point 3.5 that 'building confidence within the parental community on the level of provision that can be provided within enhanced resource bases' is a specified 'Agreement Condition' that is not being well met. We consider the action taken by Torbay Council for children resident within Torbay goes directly against what it is trying to achieve.

We urge Torbay Council to abandon the plans to change the delivery model for this vital service.

Together, we can ensure our children receive the support they deserve and uphold the values of inclusion and equal opportunities for all.