



BSL goes mainstream

British Sign Language (BSL) is a visual language with its own vocabulary, syntax and grammatical rules. It is typically used by the Deaf community in the United Kingdom. BSL is a language made up of specific signs, facial expression and body language, which are all important components of the language.

Since BSL's formal recognition as a language in its own right in 2003, cogs have turned slowly but the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) are hopeful that young people will be able to take the BSL GCSE 'within the next few years'.

Alongside the campaign to introduce this qualification, the NDCS conducted a survey and found that over 90% of young people had an interest in learning sign language and wanted a chance to learn it in school.

What happens at Colman Federation?

BSL has been a language of the school community here at Colman in Norwich for many years and lunchtime 'signing clubs' have always been popular. Four years ago, Headteacher Julie Sandford wanted to go further and replace the modern 'foreign' language for BSL for all children joining the school in Year 3. At last, it was on the timetable.

Writing the BSL Curriculum

Colman joined the 'Sign Bilingual Consortium' - a group of Deaf academics, linguists and professionals who were developing the first Primary and Secondary BSL curriculum for schools. Through learning British Sign Language, their aim is for children to:

- develop an understanding of BSL and the Deaf community who are a linguistic and cultural minority
- learn how to express a range of emotions, thoughts and ideas using a visual language
- learn how to converse with Deaf people and users of the language
- develop their understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and equality

What does this look like in class at Colman?

The Year 3 children have 1 X 40 minute session every week. Members of the Deaf community join the sessions when they can, so the children can practise their signing and understand that this is a shared language. They are often surprised to recognise signs that they have learnt and are delighted when their signs are understood!

They are learning to:

- develop an understanding of BSL grammar and structure
- acquire, develop and produce a wide range of vocabulary in BSL
- appreciate Deaf culture and heritage
- chat, role-play, have fun and enjoy learning something new and different!

Beyond the timetabled sessions, our children see BSL used around the school every day and the art of 'singing and signing' has become a Colman speciality. It is beautiful to watch and adds another dimension to the songs that we enjoy. We all join in. We all sign and some signs have become part of our everyday language, such as 'Good morning!' 'Thank you', 'Kind' 'Well done!' 'Are you ready' 'Can I help?' and 'I'm sorry'.

What next?

Colman is one of only a handful of schools in the UK that offers BSL as part of its timetabled curriculum. As more and more professionals learn to a good level, other schools might then be able to do the same. Neuroscientists have shown that 'finger spelling' is beneficial to all children in their early stages of reading and it is interesting how some children at Colman simply 'take' to this language, expressing themselves by thinking VISUALLY! It is a joy to see.



The Martineau Group

The Martineau Group started during lockdown and we are happy to announce that it has re-started again.

Come and join us on Zoom from your school and meet other deaf children, play games, crafts and learn more about your deafness.

The Martineau Group is aimed at Year 3,4,5 deaf students in mainstream schools and only requires a Zoom connection. We meet once a month on a Friday afternoon at 1.30pm (see dates below). Our first session was held on the 12th November 2021 and we had students joining us from all over Norfolk. There were lots of questions about what hearing technology they had (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants), and what hearing equipment they use in school; so we saw mini demonstrations of Roger Touches, Pens and Inspiros. We even learnt about hearing dogs as well as other jobs that dogs can do - it was a packed session!

We will be meeting again on 10th December 2021. If there are any other students wanting to join us it is not too late, we just need parental consent and a teacher email address so we can send the Zoom invite. We will be making some Christmas crafts as well as doing lots of chatting, so you don't want to miss out!

The Martineau Group will meet virtually on the following dates:

Friday 10th December 2021

Friday 21st January 2022

Friday 25th February 2022

Friday 25th March 2022

Friday 29th April 2022

Friday 13th May 2022

Friday 17th June 2022

Friday 15th July 2022

Contact eleonor.craik@norfolk.gov.uk for more information.



Mental Health services for children and young people

Is your child struggling with poor mental health? Did you know that the following services are accessible from home?

'We are individed' is there to support primary aged children in Norfolk to develop positive mental health strategies through games and activities. You can follow them on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/weareindivided/> or contact them via e-mail talktous@weareindivided.com.

Kooth (www.kooth.com) is there to support young people between the ages of 11 – 25 years. It gives advice and help on the go, 7 days a week until 10 pm. Kooth is an online mental health platform that offers live chat with friendly counsellors, articles, advice, and live forums. It's free, safe and anonymous.

At VSSS we also have a range of materials to support positive mental health, so do have a chat to your child/young person's teacher if you have any concerns.



Research project

Is your child deaf or has a vision impairment, attend a mainstream school in England and is between 11 and 18 years of age?

If the answer is 'yes', researchers at the University of Roehampton are interested in learning how COVID has affected your child!

They are studying the impact of COVID-19 on the education of children and young people with sensory needs.

The COVID19 project explores how the pandemic has changed schools' ways of educating students (11 - 18 years) who are deaf or vision impaired and how the experiences of these children and young people compare to their hearing/sighted peers.

To participate your child needs to:

- be currently in Year 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12
- follow the same curriculum as most other students in their year
- be deaf (following BATOD criteria) or vision impaired.
- attend a mainstream school (including maintained secondary schools with a deaf/vision impaired unit, academies, or independent schools) in England

To take part and find out more about this project, please contact the research assistant Eilidh Rose McEwan at Eilidh.Mcewan@roehampton.ac.uk



VSSS permission form

Virtual School Sensory Support would like permission to send unencrypted emails to you with information about your child or young person, this could include reports and records of intervention.

If you are happy to receive this information electronically, please click on the link below and complete the questions.

Many thanks.

[Permission form](#)



Thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their ongoing support throughout this term. VSSS staff, schools, colleges, parents/carers and, of course, children and young people themselves have had to face ongoing challenges as we have continued to support them, to the best of our ability, in their education and wider learning. At times this has been difficult as we navigated our way through frequent periods of disrupted learning for many of the children and young people we support, caused by ill health in staff and the children themselves.

I would like to express my thanks to those of you who took up my offer of direct contact in the last newsletter. It was good to receive your feedback.

I hope everyone has a happy and healthy Christmas. As always, if you want to contact me at all, please email me at kate.stocks@norfolk.gov.uk.

Kind regards, Kate