

Kentalis International Foundation

Theory of Change

INTRODUCTION

Every child has the right to learn, grow and thrive, regardless of their hearing ability or background. Education is not a privilege; it is a fundamental human right affirmed by international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Yet too many children are still left behind. Many of those children are children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We believe in a future where no child is excluded. Denying children who are deaf or hard of hearing access to quality education is denying them their future.

The World Health Organization estimates that over 430 million people (including 34 million children) globally experience disabling hearing loss.¹ This number is projected to rise to nearly 700 million by 2050. Nearly 80% of people with disabling hearing loss² in low-and middle-income countries, where resources, policies and awareness are often lacking. For children who are deaf or hard of hearing the right to education is recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 24 emphasizes that these learners must have access to the most appropriate means of communication (such as sign language and/or assistive communication).^{3 4}

We are committed to contributing to Sustainable development goal 4 (quality education) while also addressing SDG 3 (health and wellbeing) and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities). Our approach goes beyond education alone: we recognize that early identification, diagnostics, health interventions and a broad awareness are essential to creating inclusive learning environments. Communication and learning begin at birth, making accessible hearing screening, health care awareness and support with early childhood development critical components of our strategy.

While there has been an incredible shift towards inclusive education, the practical implementation of inclusion for children who are deaf or hard of hearing remains a challenge. Having access to education by being present in a classroom is not enough to truly participate in their educational environment. They need a strong foundation in (sign) language and literacy, easy access to audiological care, and teachers, families and communities who understand their needs. Only with this multifaceted support can children who are deaf or hard of hearing truly be empowered to thrive.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have highly diverse communication preferences and needs. That is why we reject one-size-fits-all solutions. Each child must be at the centre of their learning journey, receiving support tailored to their individual wants and needs. Real and lasting change begins with those closest to the child. By training teachers, healthcare professionals, families, and local communities we embed expertise where it matters most. Using a train-the-trainer approach, we build local capacity and ensure that knowledge and skills are deeply rooted within communities. By empowering those closest to the children, we help build sustainable, self-reliant systems that last.

¹ WHO (2025). [Deafness and hearing loss](#).

² WHO (2025). [Deafness and hearing loss](#)

³ United Nations (...) Article 24 – Education.

⁴ UN (...) Article 24 – Education.

MISSION & VISION

Mission

Our mission is to contribute to a world where every child who is deaf or hard of hearing can learn in an educational environment that is adapted to their needs and is empowered to reach their full potential. Through knowledge sharing, local capacity building and systemic change, we work to make inclusion of children who are deaf or hard of hearing a reality.

Vision

We envision a future where every child who is deaf or hard of hearing has the opportunity to go to school, has equal access to quality education and develop the skills needed to thrive and participate fully in society.



1. FIELDS OF SUPPORT (LONG-TERM OUTCOMES)

Guided by our mission we focus on three interconnected fields of support that turn our goals into practical action. These three fields work together to create a holistic approach that addresses the diverse needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and the environments in which they grow and learn.

1.1 TEACHERS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Mainstream (inclusive) education programs too often overlook the specific needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. True inclusion requires teaching methods that are tailored to their unique abilities and lived experiences. Literacy and language development are foundational to learning. Without targeted support in these areas, children risk being left behind in both their learning, communication- and social-emotional development.

To foster inclusive classrooms, teachers must be equipped to adapt their practices to meet the unique needs and communication preferences of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Simple yet impactful adjustments, such as ensuring visual access to information, supporting social-emotional development and collaborating effectively with sign language interpreters, can make a significant difference in creating environments where all children are able to thrive.

- 1. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing fully participate in inclusive learning environments and develop strong language and literacy skills, supported by teachers who apply accessible, tailored teaching methods grounded in specialized knowledge, tools and practical skills.**

Through specialized training and evidence-based approaches, teachers foster both the academic and social-emotional development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, ensuring their full participation and success in education.

1.2 EASY ACCESS TO AUDIOLOGICAL CARE

In addition to educational adaptations and strategies, children who are deaf or hard of hearing also require support in the area of healthcare, particularly audiological care. They must have easy access to both routine audiological support and care and specialised services provided by audiological health care professionals. By training teachers in basic screening and audiological support tasks, the threshold for accessing care is lowered. Furthermore, by training health care professionals in audiological care the availability of qualified providers increases, ensuring more consistent and accessible care.

- 2. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing benefit from timely, high-quality, easily accessible audiological care through a sustainable, cross-sector system of early identification, intervention and continuous support.**

Embedding both basic and advanced audiology skills and knowledge across sectors is essential for ensuring early detection, effective referral and consistent access to audiological care. When children who are deaf or hard of hearing receive appropriate healthcare and can make optimal use of available hearing devices, they are better positioned to benefit fully from their education and thrive in society.

1.3 PARENTS AND COMMUNITY ARE AWARE

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing do not only learn at school. Learning begins at home, with their families and close communities. Oftentimes, strong stigmas surrounding deafness and being hard of hearing, along with gaps in knowledge about what children who are deaf or hard of hearing need to flourish, lead to a lack of proper support from family and community-members. Through increased awareness, knowledge and practical skills, parents and caregivers are able to support early language

development, monitor hearing and communication needs, access appropriate services and advocate for inclusive opportunities.

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| <p>3. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing grow and thrive in early development, education and care through the active involvement and empowerment of their families and communities.</p> |
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A strong home and community support system ensures that children are not only academically supported but also socially and emotionally nurtured, enabling them to thrive in all areas of life. Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, language and social-emotional development, and timely, responsive support can significantly influence long-term outcomes for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

2. OUTCOMES

Building on our long-term vision, we now turn to the specific outcomes that guide our day-to-day efforts and strategic decisions. These outcomes translate our broader goals into actionable targets, ensuring that our work remains focused, relevant, and responsive to the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

2.1 TEACHERS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

1.1 Teachers possess the knowledge and skills to lay a strong foundation for literacy development in children who are deaf or hard of hearing, using adapted, visually based language acquisition strategies and instruction methods that align with their unique learning pathways.

Literacy is a foundational element of education. For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, literacy plays a critical role in enabling access to learning, communication and full participation in society. From reading instructions to solving problems and communicating ideas, literacy skills are essential across all subjects and stages of education. Investing in literacy is therefore not just an educational priority, it is a cornerstone of lifelong learning and social inclusion. Recognizing that their literacy development differs significantly from that of their hearing peers, education systems and teachers should provide tailored approaches that ensure an equitable foundation for lifelong learning and participation.

1.2 Teachers are equipped with the knowledge and strategies to facilitate early sign language acquisition in children who are deaf or hard of hearing, fostering cognitive development and enabling inclusive participation in learning.

Language acquisition is a critical foundation for learning, communication, and cognitive development. It enables children to understand and express ideas, engage with educational content, and interact meaningfully with peers, teachers and family. Without a strong grasp of language, children may struggle to access the curriculum, participate in classroom activities and develop literacy skills. Early and effective language development supports not only academic success but also emotional and social growth. As their first language, early mastery of sign language enables effective communication, supports literacy development, and fosters full participation in educational environments.

1.3 Teachers consistently implement classroom adaptations that support the learning needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing through simple yet impactful measures.

Inclusive education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing goes beyond adapting teaching methods and materials, it also requires adjustments to classroom instructions and settings. Ensuring that the learning environment is accessible is essential for meaningful participation. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement simple yet impactful measures such as optimizing lighting, ensuring proximity to the teacher and integrating visual communication strategies. These adaptations help create inclusive classrooms where all students can participate, learn and thrive.

1.4 Teachers understand the distinct pathways of communication development in children who are deaf or hard of hearing and apply this knowledge to support their students effectively.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing follow different communication development pathways than their hearing peers, often relying on visual modes like sign language and facial expressions. Without early access to fully accessible language, they risk delays in communication and broader challenges in cognitive,

academic and social-emotional development. Teachers who understand these unique developmental pathways and adapt their lessons, strategies and interactions can create inclusive environments that support meaningful participation and learning. Equipped with the right knowledge and skills, teachers can play a transformative role in ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow and participate fully.

1.5 Teachers understand and actively support the distinct social-emotional development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and create emotionally responsive and inclusive learning environments that foster well-being, confidence and meaningful peer interaction.

Teachers play a vital role in supporting the social-emotional development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. By understanding their unique experiences and communication needs, educators can create emotionally responsive and inclusive learning environments where children can express themselves and interact with their peers, focusing on building their confidence, well-being and sense of belonging.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing often grow up in environments that are not fully inclusive, where communication barriers may limit their ability to participate or connect with others in their families and communities. This can increase their vulnerability to marginalization and abuse. When teachers are aware of these lived experiences and are trained to recognize signs, they are better equipped to support their students' social-emotional well-being and foster safe, supportive learning environments.

1.6 Teachers collaborate effectively with sign language interpreters, ensuring ethical, visible and synergistic partnerships.

Inclusive classrooms sometimes have access to sign language interpreters to support communication for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, the mere presence of an interpreter is not enough. Effective collaboration between teachers and interpreters requires specific knowledge and skills. Both parties must understand the ethics of interpreting, ensure clear physical visibility and facilitate two-way communication between student and teacher. When educators are equipped with this expertise, they can foster inclusive learning environments where communication flows smoothly, roles are clearly defined and all students benefit from coordinated, responsive support.

2.2 EASY ACCESS TO AUDIOLOGICAL CARE

2.1 Teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify early signs of hearing loss in children by classroom-based screening techniques and know how to take appropriate action.

Early signs of hearing loss can often be subtle, but when teachers are trained to respond appropriately, they can play a crucial role in initiating timely intervention. The earlier hearing loss is identified, the more effectively both educators and healthcare professionals can provide support. By understanding when and how to refer students to the appropriate health services, teachers help ensure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing receive the care they need without delay. This low-threshold-approach, led by someone who spends a significant amount of time with the child, can make a meaningful difference. With a clear understanding of referral pathways, educators become key players in early detection and intervention.

2.2 Teachers and healthcare providers are proficient in the basic maintenance and troubleshooting of hearing aids and assistive listening devices to ensure consistent auditory access for students who are hard of hearing.

Through routine tasks such as cleaning, replacing batteries, and basic tuning, teachers help maintain consistent auditory access, an essential component for uninterrupted learning and active classroom

participation. Since students may not always have regular access to healthcare providers for these needs, having trained educators on hand bridges a critical gap. By equipping teachers with the skills to perform basic maintenance and troubleshooting, schools empower students to use their hearing devices more effectively. This proactive support ensures that children who are hard of hearing receive the auditory access they need.

2.3 Teachers and healthcare professionals are trained in basic audiology and are able to recognize early signs of ear diseases and infections and subtle signs of hearing loss in children, enabling timely referral to appropriate medical professionals thereby improving access to hearing healthcare.

Through increased awareness teachers and healthcare professionals can both play a vital role in the early identification and intervention of hearing issues. When trained in basic audiology, they are better equipped to recognize early signs of (ear) diseases, infections and subtle indicators of hearing loss. This foundational knowledge enables them to take timely action by referring children to the appropriate healthcare services. Early detection and intervention are critical, not only for a child's academic success but also for their overall development and wellbeing. By empowering educators and healthcare professionals with the skills to identify and respond to hearing concerns, we create a more responsive and supportive environment for children who are at risk of hearing loss.

2.4 More audiologists are trained with advanced knowledge and skills in audiology, enabling them to deliver high quality diagnostic assessment, manage complex hearing cases and provide specialized interventions.

In many regions of the Global South, there is a critical shortage of audiologists and hearing healthcare providers, making it difficult for children who are deaf or hard of hearing to receive the care they need. Limited access to qualified professionals, combined with outdated or insufficient knowledge means that many children do not receive timely and appropriate support. To address this gap, it is essential to train more audiologists and equip existing hearing healthcare professionals with current audiological knowledge and practices. Expanding professional capacity strengthens hearing health systems and improves access to expert care. As a result, more children can benefit from early identification, timely intervention and ongoing monitoring and support, leading to better outcomes in hearing health, communication, learning and overall development.

2.3 PARENTS AND COMMUNITY ARE AWARE

3.1 Families and communities understand the unique communication and social-emotional development needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and are equipped to provide appropriate support.

Families and communities are essential in nurturing the communication and social-emotional development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. These children often follow unique developmental pathways shaped by their individual communication needs and lived experiences. When families and communities understand these pathways and are equipped with effective strategies, they can offer meaningful support that helps children feel valued, understood and empowered. By fostering inclusive and responsive environments, families and communities contribute significantly to the child's ability to thrive.

3.2 Families and close community members are aware of where and how to access appropriate healthcare and support services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Ensuring that families and close community members are well-informed about how and where to access appropriate healthcare and support services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing is essential. This

knowledge facilitates timely and appropriate interventions and promotes active involvement in the child's development. Such informed engagement strengthens the support network around the child, enhances learning outcomes and contributes to the child's overall wellbeing and inclusion.

3.3 Families and close communities are more aware of the lived experiences of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and know how to empower them by recognizing their needs, strengths and preferred ways of communication and learning.

When families and close communities are equipped with a deep understanding of the child's lived experiences, unique needs, strengths and preferred modes of communication, they are better positioned to provide meaningful and responsive support. This awareness is essential for fostering inclusive environments in which children feel empowered to participate fully within their families, communities, and educational settings. By recognizing and embracing each child's individual journey and embracing diverse communication approaches, families and communities can provide meaningful support that builds confidence, promotes belonging, and enables children to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

3.4 The broader community is aware of deafness and hearing loss, contributing to increased understanding, reduced stigma and more inclusive social interaction.

Greater awareness of deafness and hearing loss within the broader community leads to deeper understanding, reduced stigma and more inclusive social interactions. As this awareness grows it fosters respect for diverse communication needs and nurtures appreciation for Deaf culture. Consequently, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are more likely to experience respectful engagement and meaningful participation in everyday life. When community service professionals such as government officials and those working in the social sector, develop a deeper understanding of deafness and hearing loss they become better equipped to raise awareness and drive sustainable, systemic change. Their informed perspectives can positively influence education systems, healthcare services and the broader community, fostering environments that are more inclusive, respectful and responsive to children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

3. ACTIVITIES

To achieve our goals effectively and sustainably, we use a **train-the-trainer approach**. This ensures that knowledge and skills are embedded with those closest to the child, empowering local stakeholders and fostering long-term impact. We have developed several trainings aligned with our intended outcomes, tailored to the realities of working in the Global South and mindful of climate considerations. Our **blended training model** combines self-paced online e-learning for knowledge transfer with in-person sessions focused on skill development. The e-learning is accessible offline and compatible with all devices, with most participants using their mobile phones. These trainings are specifically designed for our key target groups: teachers, healthcare professionals and parents/communities.

3.1 TEACHERS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The **Reading Method for Early Literacy** empowers educators with the tools and strategies needed to teach reading effectively to children who are deaf or hard of hearing. These children acquire language primarily through visual pathways, requiring adapted approaches to literacy instruction. Through a train-the-trainer model, educators gain expertise in evidence-based language acquisition strategies and become facilitators of the Reading Method, enabling them to share knowledge and strengthen inclusive education within their schools and communities.

The **Sign Language Assessment** course equips educators with the tools to effectively support and monitor sign language development in children who are deaf or hard of hearing. As sign language is often their first language, early mastery is essential for cognitive, social and educational growth. This course enables educators to assess proficiency accurately, identify challenges, and strengthen language acquisition during the crucial early years – laying the foundation for inclusive learning.

Video Interaction Guidance is a course that trains educators to enhance communication and teaching skills through video-based analysis. By reviewing short clips of real interactions, participants learn to identify strengths, provide constructive feedback and guide teachers in improving their classroom communication. It equips teachers with tools to stimulate reflection, foster growth and support effective teaching practices.

Hearing Loss in the Classroom is designed to equip educators with the skills to detect hearing loss in children early and provide tailored classroom support to children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Teachers learn to recognize diverse signs of hearing loss, perform basic screenings, and adapt learning environments to meet children's needs. The course covers essential topics such as audiology, communication and social-emotional development, while promoting awareness and reducing stigma.

3.2 EASY ACCESS TO AUDIOLOGICAL CARE

Hearing Loss in the Classroom is designed to equip educators with the skills to detect hearing loss in children early and provide tailored classroom support to children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Teachers learn to recognize diverse signs of hearing loss, perform basic screenings, and adapt learning environments to meet children's needs. The course covers essential topics such as audiology, communication and social-emotional development, while promoting awareness and reducing stigma.

Basic Audiology is a course designed to help teachers and professionals recognize early signs of hearing loss in children and provide appropriate support. Participants gain a solid theoretical foundation in audiology, including the anatomy and physiology of the hearing system, levels and causes of hearing loss and suitable screening methods. The course also explores how hearing loss impacts speech, communication and daily activities, enabling educators and health professionals to identify symptoms early and adjust to support each child's development.

Advanced Audiology is an intensive course where theory and practical skills in diagnostics, care and advisory work for patients with hearing loss are taught. The course ideally features in a diploma program for Audiology technicians who can work in the health or education sector, as well as in private sector related to the provision of hearing aids.

3.3 PARENTS AND COMMUNITY ARE AWARE

Introduction to Deafness and Hearing Loss is a fully online, self-paced course designed for those who seek foundational knowledge to support deaf and hard-of hearing individuals. Covers key topics such as medical and socio-cultural perspectives of deafness, the basics of hearing and its impact, Deaf culture and history and principles of deaf-inclusive programming.

Parents Awareness Workshop is an in-person course developed by Kentalis International in collaboration with Deaf associations across Africa. It empowers Deaf community facilitators to guide parents and close community of deaf children through interactive workshops, practical communication strategies, and a positive outlook on their child's future. The course addresses myths and stigmas around deafness, emphasizes the importance of early communication and sign language and encourages parental involvement in education and community life- ultimately aiming to increase school enrolment and inclusion.

4. SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

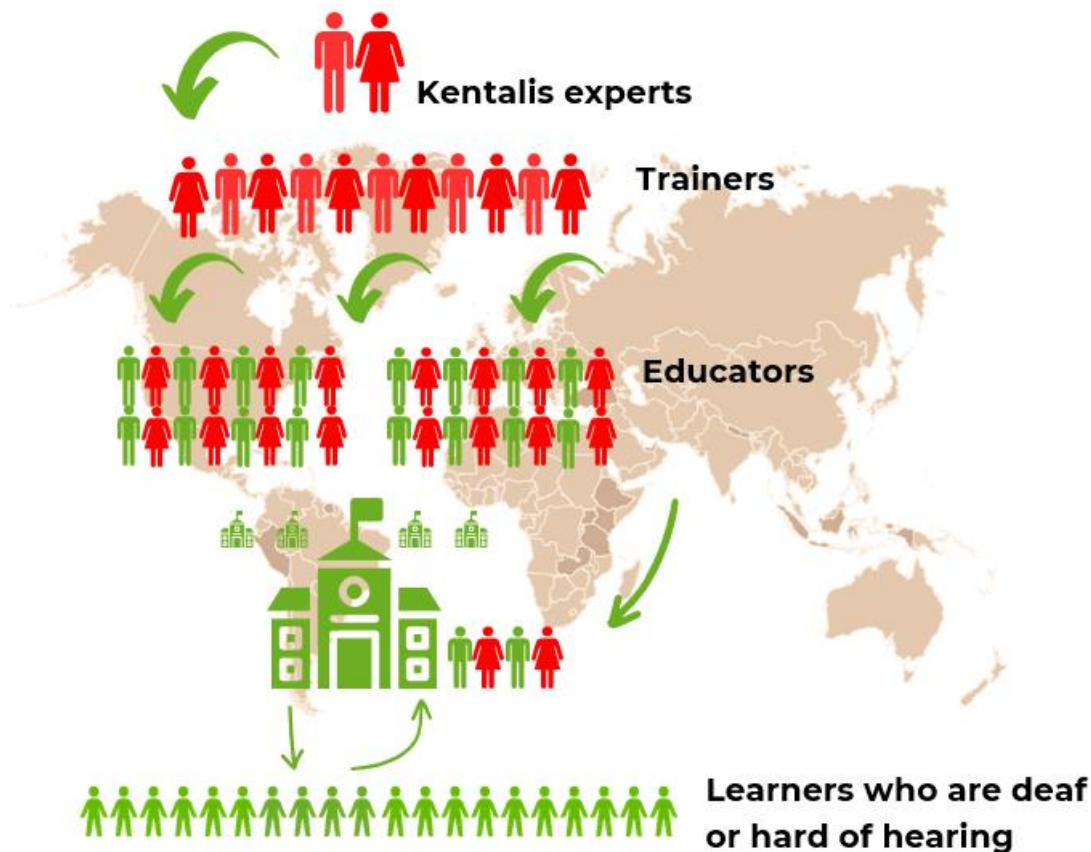
To foster meaningful and lasting improvements for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, Kentalis International works with three supportive strategies aimed at promoting sustainable systemic change.

Knowledge sharing on inclusive deaf education

Sharing of knowledge is essential to ensure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing are not left behind. Expertise in this area is often concentrated within a small group of specialists, making it difficult for governments, organisations, schools and communities to access effective strategies. To address this gap, Kentalis International employs a supportive strategy focused on sharing knowledge with a broad range of stakeholders, including government officials, professionals in the educational sector and the sustainable development sector. This strategy centres on raising awareness about basic audiology and Deaf culture, ensuring that key actors are aware of the specific needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. For example, NGO staff working on disability inclusion may not be aware of the unique measures required to support children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Similarly, policy makers play a vital role in shaping inclusive education and increasing their awareness can lead to more informed and sustainable decisions. To support this we offer an introductory course designed to raise awareness around deafness and hearing loss. In addition, we provide customized advice tailored to specific needs and contexts helping local partners, organisations and institutions take meaningful steps toward inclusive education.

A sustainable approach: train-the-trainer

Our train-the-trainer approach enables large-scale dissemination of knowledge by equipping local trainers, such as educators and healthcare workers, with the skills and tools to train others. It creates a ripple effect, reaching more people without relying solely on Kentalis experts. By building local ownership and long-term capacity, this model ensures that knowledge and skills remain embedded within communities. By working with local trainers, methods and strategies can be easily adapted to local contexts and needs, making it culturally relevant and practically applicable. Trainers are selected from within the community, often educators with who understand local challenges and opportunities, which enhances trust, relevance and long-term impact. We establish a network of master trainers in each country where we work, enabling widespread and ongoing teacher training across the nation and creating a scalable and sustainable model for systemic change.



Striving towards systemic change

Systemic change is essential because it addresses the root causes of exclusion rather than applying temporary solutions. Without systemic change, improvements remain fragmented and dependent on individual efforts. By embedding inclusive practices into local systems, curricula and institutional frameworks we help create lasting improvements for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Our efforts go beyond training teachers, healthcare professionals and families in methods and strategies tailored to these children's needs. We also advocate, together with our local partners, for the formal accreditation of these methods and strategies within local or national curricula or systems. This ensures that inclusive and effective teaching practices become standard, benefitting all children who are deaf or hard of hearing in a sustainable way. Systemic change ensures that inclusion becomes a permanent, embedded element of the system rather than a temporary initiative.

5. OVERVIEW

Every child who is deaf or hard of hearing can learn in an educational environment that is adapted to their needs and is empowered to reach their full potential.

