Total Communication Ethos in one English Hearing-Impaired Service.

I work within a Peripatetic Sensory Support Service, our office is based at the Primary School for the Deaf. We are very fortunate that our Head of Service is also Head of the School for the Deaf within our Local Authority. Therefore the provision we offer includes (not a comprehensive list):

- peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf who visit the home as well as nursery settings, primary,
- secondary, college and University,
- a High Needs Resource Base for nursery aged children where the children with hearing loss mix happily with children who have typically developing hearing.
- a Primary School for deaf children
- a Secondary resource base within a mainstream secondary school.

We have a Total Communication ethos. This means that whilst we prioritise spoken language wherever possible there are children and families for whom this is not the choice for them. For example, I have worked/work with families where the child has been diagnosed as having no auditory nerves, where the child has a tracheotomy, where the child is new to the country and therefore very late diagnosis and amplification. I also work with Deaf families who expect their children to sign fluently.

Our Primary setting for deaf children is specifically for those children who need more support than a mainstream school can offer in order to reach their full potential. These children can and do achieve and succeed. Again wherever possible we use an auditory oral approach however this is supported by Sign Supported English for those children who would otherwise be unable to access all that the Teacher of the Deaf is teaching. We decided on Sign Supported English because within the education system of the UK, you need to be able to write in correct English Grammar in order to pass the exams. Sign Supported English follows the pattern of English grammatical structures. The children and staff use BSL or spoken language in discussions or at break times etc.

In practice, within our service, what Total Communication allows is for Speech and Signs to match each other simultaneously, it ensures that the child’s contribution is verbalised giving them practice of using their voices. Total Communication gives parents and settings across the country the ability to choose the best mode of communication to allow each individual child to communicate their thoughts and ideas with others. It allows for fluidity between communication modes for example between Makaton and on the body signing thereby allowing every child to find the mode of communication that works for them. (Of course, it does require a very skilled workforce within the setting.)