Strategies: Environment

To be considered for students with Usher syndrome

Different spaces will have different acoustics and lighting, both of which will impact someone with Usher syndrome. They often have difficulties seeing when it's dim or dark, and peripheral vision loss affects their ability to see objects (such as trip hazards) at the edges of their visual field. Practical adaptations can make a big difference in making a space safe and accessible for a learner with Usher syndrome.

"If it's dark, like in the drama studio, I can hardly see anything, and that means I can't lipread either, so it feels like my hearing gets worse too. I think the teacher forgets that sometimes. I just stay close to my friend, and hope that they tell me where I'm supposed to be, and what I've missed."

13 year old

- [ ] Environmental audit to be carried out by Sensory Support professionals (addressing visual and hearing needs) prior to starting a setting, and recommendations put in place
- [ ] Good lighting throughout school (teaching rooms and communal spaces), and lighting switched ON in all spaces as general rule
- [ ] Where possible, designate group work in a quieter area of classroom so that CYP can access the group discussion
- [ ] Blinds in classroom to help reduce glare. Where glare is an issue, seating of CYP in classroom to be considered to reduce impact of glare
- [ ] Sound field system to be in place and used where required (as specified in environmental audit)
- [ ] Permission to wear cap/hat/tinted glasses in school to reduce glare if necessary
- [ ] Contrast signs / reflective strips on steps / entrance / change in level
- [ ] Evacuation plan to take into account hearing / vision / balance
- [ ] Plan ahead for school trips (e.g. visits to theatre at night) and residentials (how to wake up in morning or emergency procedure if CYP does not wear hearing tech overnight and won't hear alarm)
- [ ] Carpets within classrooms and noise reduction 'sound boards' where carpets are not feasible to reduce sound disturbance/maximise acoustic environment
- [ ] Use of carpet or noise reducers on feet of chairs and tables to reduce 'scraping' sound
- [ ] Avoid open plan classrooms (as CYP will have difficulties hearing teacher if multiple classes are taking place in same space)
- [ ] One-way system for movement in corridors and stairs within school
- [ ] Clear wide walkways (e.g. no use of lockers which open into walkways) which must be kept free of trip/peripheral hazards
- [ ] School campus has clear signage, and simple layout without level changes as far as possible
- [ ] Access to designated quiet and private (1:1) space for sessions with visiting external professionals (e.g. Qualified Teacher of the Deaf, Qualified Teacher of Vision Impairment, Qualified Teacher of Multi-Sensory Impairment etc.)
- [ ] *If there are lockers, ideal to have locker key (rather than numbers). (*for CYP whose central vision is also affected)
- [ ] If mobility equipment is used in school e.g. long cane, practical considerations must be made as to how this will be supported
- [ ] Reduce background noise (fans, AC units, projectors etc.) in common spaces and classrooms
- [ ] Need a designated safe place and process for battery charging in school for hearing aid / implant batteries and any other spare equipment - these might be required by student at any time in day
- [ ] For children and young people using Assistive Listening Device (e.g. FM system), compatibility with school systems to be tested prior to start of new academic year, and point of contact established for any issues which arise

"The classrooms are OK, but trying to hear my friends in the dinner hall is a nightmare, and I get tired of asking them to repeat what they've said, so I feel left out."

13 year old

Key: **CYP** = Child or young person