

Mainstream Education Through Irish:

My name is Amy Jordan, a transition year student at an all-Irish school in Dublin 24. I have a hearing impairment in both ears, meaning I'm supposed to wear hearing-aids at all times and although I've had them for twelve years, I have had difficulties coming to terms with the fact that I'm hearing impaired. I know it may be a selfish thing to say as most of you reading this are probably profoundly deaf, or are parents or teachers of children who are profoundly deaf; however I refuse to allow my hearing impairment affect my status in the hearing world. I can do just as much as a hearing person can, and so can you.

I would like to disprove the Department of Education ruling that deaf students can be exempt from Irish. I've attended an all-Irish school since the age of three and today I'm fifteen years of age and fluent in Irish. In my Junior Certificate Examination last year I obtained a B in honours Irish, including my aural. For my aural examinations I was in a separate exam hall on my own with an examiner for the duration of the aural. I was able to adjust the volume to my needs and afterwards I was brought back into the main exam hall with my classmates to complete my written examination. You can talk to your teachers and discuss with them what options are available for you.

I'm not saying that everything is easy breezy and that I have had my fair share of difficulties. As a child I was very quiet and shy and didn't want to interact with other children out of fear of not understanding them, or getting questions about why I have 'those things' in my ears. I hated asking people to repeat questions till I understood what they meant. I did have my close friends, many of whom are still very close to me today, I was one of the lucky ones. I spent much of my early childhood going in and out of speech therapy and hearing tests and often having to miss school. I've always been one of the youngest in my classes, but missing school didn't have an effect on my education as I always knew what was going on, and the teachers I had were amazing in understanding my needs.

It was in 5th class when things were beginning to change, I was that bit older and never really understood why I had to be taken out of class to talk to my visiting teacher. I was entitled to an FM system for school but never had one until then. From the beginning, I didn't like it, and I still don't like it today. It causes far too much extra fuss over nothing, when I was just fine with my hearing aids. I don't like the FM system because all its focus is on one person (usually the teacher) and I found that very difficult to cope with, in a classroom of 26 students. When we were having a class discussion, the only person I could hear was the teacher. I couldn't keep up with the classroom chats when the teacher's back was turned and it was an absolute nightmare. It got to the stage where I stopped wearing my hearing aids altogether in class, because then I could divide my attention as needed.

Going into secondary school, my visiting teacher explained to all my new teachers what the FM system was and why I needed it. The teachers began to put an awful lot of pressure on me then, I was in a new school with new students - people who have never had experience with a hearing impaired person before and I wasn't sure how it was going to work out. I got through my first year OK, but was getting sick of all the questions students were asking about my FM system, sick of all the teachers checking if I could hear and most definitely sick of having to remember my FM system between classes, having to charge it every night - the list goes on.

When I was in second year my visiting teacher stopped coming in to see me; to be honest I was quite glad, as she was condescending and always talked to me as if I was a child. She was forever giving out to me for not wearing my hearing aids and she also gave out to my mother. My mother encourages me to wear my aids but she knows I'm having trouble coping and she understands I will eventually come around and start wearing them again. I was very upset that my visiting teacher had done this. I haven't had a visit into the school in three years now.

In transition year now I still don't wear my hearing aids, my teachers encourage me to but I just don't, I prefer to lip-read. My classmates are used to me asking them to repeat sentences now so I really don't mind. I'm beginning to get more comfortable with the fact that I'm hearing impaired. I haven't quite come around to the hearing aids yet, but I will.