



The British Deaf Association endorses The School of Signs: A groundbreaking step towards BSL in every classroom

BSL -

<https://vimeo.com/1125844746/71d3110257?share=copy>

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The British Deaf Association (BDA) is proud to endorse *The School of Signs*, a pioneering new programme developed by Signature to bring British Sign Language (BSL) into primary schools across the UK, free of charge and accessible to all.

Created in collaboration with Deaf educators and organisations including the Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD), *The School of Signs* places Deaf signers at the heart of its content. Every lesson has been designed and delivered by Deaf BSL users, ensuring authenticity, cultural relevance, and a deep connection to the lived experience of the Deaf community.

Rebecca Mansell, Chief Executive of the British Deaf Association said:

“We believe this initiative has the power to inspire a generation. By introducing BSL to children at an early age, *The School of Signs* opens the door to a more inclusive future — one where communication barriers are broken down, and Deaf signing culture is celebrated and understood.

“BSL is more than a language. It unites families and communities, bridges divides, and builds belonging. As the beating heart of the Deaf signing community, it carries joy, identity, and pride. We hope this programme will spark curiosity and connect thousands of children with the beauty and richness of sign language and Deaf culture.

“The BDA is committed to supporting initiatives that align with our mission to promote and celebrate BSL. We encourage schools, parents, and educators to explore *The*

School of Signs, share it widely, and help us spread the message: BSL belongs in every classroom.”

Lindsay Foster, Executive Director of Signature said:

“We are delighted to see the British Deaf Association have endorsed our exciting initiative to get BSL into every primary school. Our belief is that the communication skills and inclusivity that children will experience, will be groundbreaking. We are pleased that the BDA acknowledge the important steps we are taking in creating an education pathway, that allows everyone to learn BSL from an early age.”

Together, we can create a future where every child leaves school with the ability to sign— and with it, a deeper understanding of Deaf identity and culture.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the British Deaf Association

The British Deaf Association (BDA) is the only national organisation that represents Deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) – or Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Northern Ireland.

The BDA was established in 1890 to fight for the rights of Deaf children to use sign language in educational settings. This followed the seismic decision by the International Conference of the Education of the Deaf (ICED) ten years earlier to ban sign language at school and introduce an inaccessible form of communication known as “The Oral Method”.

Decisions made by those educators a century and a half ago still shape Deaf people’s lives in Britain today. It was this event which gave birth to the BDA, and we have been fighting for equal rights for Deaf people ever since.

Our mission today is to protect, preserve and promote BSL and to campaign for our equal rights as a linguistic and cultural minority.

About The School of Signs

The School of Signs is a free BSL programme of study designed to support children in learning British Sign Language and build a more inclusive community. 18 months in development, the programme is both educationally rigorous and engaging for students.

After attending many childcare and education expos across the UK, we learned that many schools introduced Makaton into the classroom. The main reason was due to increased access to Makaton resources, as opposed to BSL resources. One of the reasons for creating The School of Signs was to offer a free, accessible way for schools to seamlessly introduce BSL into the classroom. Additionally, it is important to recognise that although Makaton does support communication with simplified signs, it doesn't offer a complete linguistic system like BSL does. Unlike Makaton, BSL is a recognised language, and provides access to the Deaf community. By providing free BSL resources, The School of Signs provides students with the correct resources for communicating with someone in the Deaf community.

This project plays a crucial role in implementing BSL into as many primary schools across the UK as possible. Through the programme, we hope to equip students with the confidence to use BSL, as well as the awareness to connect with people in the Deaf community. We are proud to have created something which represents an important step in bridging the communication gap between deaf and hearing communities.

The School of Signs has been thoughtfully designed to be accessible to all schools, with no prior knowledge of BSL required. Through our partnership with the Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD), all teaching materials are pre-recorded by a qualified Deaf teacher. This partnership supports Signature's commitment to both authenticity and educational rigour of the project, helping us to create a meaningful learning experience for young learners.

The programme of study features:

- 20 **FREE** online lessons delivered by Deaf BSL teachers.
- A blended learning model, combining classroom BSL lessons with an interactive series called Codebreakers.
- Comprehensive learning resources, including lesson plans, printouts, homework, and a dictionary of signs.
- Teacher support in the form of CPD.
- An online platform that allows schools to track progress and set homework.

To accompany the BSL lessons, Signature, alongside ITV Signpost are proud to have created Codebreakers, a series of short fictional films. The series follows two spies Max and Evie, who go undercover to turn the Curious Academy from a state of chaos to a state of harmony. Each episode of Codebreakers applies the topic of a lesson in a fun and relatable setting. By having a blended learning approach, a BSL classroom and Codebreakers, we aim to keep lessons engaging and dynamic, helping students stay motivated as they build on their BSL skills.

By having a hybrid format consisting of the BSL classroom which includes BSL teaching and practical activities, alongside Codebreakers which tests knowledge of the different topics, the programme of study reflects KS2 pedagogy. Through an alternation of languages, moving between English and BSL, pupils make connections across languages and become equipped with the skills to apply their knowledge in increasingly independent contexts. Overall, the programme supports both skill

development and cultural awareness, aligning with curriculum goals for communication, diversity, and enrichment at KS2.

Overall, The School of Signs goes further than being a programme of study, it is also an opportunity for students to learn more about the Deaf community and the richness of BSL. By tailoring this programme to be both educationally strong and exciting to learn, we are able to equip students with the tools to develop strong communication skills, while fostering a genuine interest in the language of BSL. We look forward to seeing UK primary schools embrace BSL, equipping the next generation of confident communicators.

<https://theschoolofsigns.org.uk/>

About Signature

Signature created the School of Signs. They are a national charity and the leading awarding body for deaf communication and language qualifications in the UK.

Since Signature became an independent organisation in 1982 to promote and teach British Sign Language (BSL), we have supported more than 600,000 people to learn British Sign Language. We have also had thousands of other learners who have completed other deaf communication and sign language courses.

<https://www.signature.org.uk/>

About British Sign Language (BSL)

British Sign Language is a signed, visual language that uses hand and body movements as well as facial expressions and eye gaze to express meaning. It is a language in its own right with its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. BSL is not dependent upon or related to English and is used mainly by people who are Deaf, their families and friends, and interpreters, teachers and other professionals who work with Deaf people.

British Sign Language is not international – there are hundreds of different sign languages around the world. For example, the sign languages used in Ireland and the USA developed separately from BSL, while Australian, New Zealand and South African Sign Languages are historically related to BSL.

Deaf people all over the world are proud to share a heritage – their uniquely visual approach to life. This strong visual nature is reflected in structures of BSL (and other signed languages) that have evolved across many centuries to represent Deaf experiences. These structures exploit the fact that BSL is produced with the hands, face and body, making highly creative use of three-dimensional space and movement, and have been refined over the generations to produce precise, powerful and dynamic linguistic forms.

British Sign Language is a full, natural, living language that is part of a rich cultural heritage of the British Deaf community and was recognised by the BSL Act in 2022 in law as a language of Great Britain.

About the BSL Act

The British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022 aims to “recognise British Sign Language as a language of England, Wales and Scotland; to require the Secretary of State to report on the promotion and

facilitation of the use of British Sign Language by ministerial government departments; and to require guidance to be issued in relation to British Sign Language.” The Act received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022.

Find out more: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/34/contents/enacted>

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