

## **Visit to The Elizabeth Foundation**

The Elizabeth Foundation is an organisation dedicated to supporting deaf children and their families. It is based on the Queen Alexandra Hospital site in Cosham, Portsmouth, in purpose built premises. The Foundation was started over 40 years ago by the parents of a young deaf child, Elizabeth, from whom the Trust gets its name.

My wife, Eileen, and I visited the Trust on a disgustingly wet and rainy March morning to see the work that the Trust do with deaf children and their families. We were shown round the centre by the Trust's Fund Raising Manager, Katherine Seaton, who told us that the centre is the only facility of its kind in Europe, catering for children from all over the UK, and from as far afield as Spain.

As part of the support for the children's families, the Trust provides facilities for remote working, so that parents (some of whom have travelled a very long way to be there) can carry on their jobs while their children are engaging with the staff at the Trust.

I noticed that there seemed to be little use of sign language, either British Sign Language (BSL) or Makaton. The Trust places real emphasis on Listening and Communication, and this was evident when we watched (through "one-way" glass) sessions in progress with small groups of youngsters. They were fully engaged with the class leader and two-way communication was very much in evidence – a far cry from my own experiences (from many years ago!) of children lacking in concentration, suffering frustration caused by their disability and being disruptive.

This is, of course, partly due to the amazing advances that modern technology has brought to the field, such as Cochlea Implants, digital hearing aids etc., compared to the technology available 40 or 50 years ago. What was clear, though is that it is primarily the dedication of the staff of the Trust and the vision of its founders which is enabling these children to be able to take their places in society rather than to be isolated because of their disability. I was delighted to be able to present Katherine with a cheque on behalf of the WM and the Lodge to go some way towards continuing their wonderful work.

WBro Paul Speak PPGStdB