

Visual Impairment

Sight Loss and Visual Impairment (VI)

If a child or young person wears glasses but this does not fully correct their vision, this is known as a visual impairment. It can range from a mild to profound sight loss. With reasonable adjustments and simple modifications to the teaching and learning environment, the child or young person will be able to successfully learn, make friendships and be part of their community in Leicester City.

Leicester City's approach to Visual Impairment

Children and young people, parents/carers and teachers will receive educational advice and/or direct teaching of specialist skills by the Vision Support Team (VST). They support blind children and young people from birth up to 16, or 25 with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). All children and young people are supported according to the recommended visit levels advocated by the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) Eligibility Framework. This can be used in conjunction with their professional judgement.

People and services for children and young people with a Visual Impairment

Role and expectations of the school:

Senior management team & SENCO should:

- identify and support the need for training, equipment, and resources to support vision loss.
- provide and a member of staff for training in braille, tactile learning, and simple modification skills in an agreed timeframe.
- be available for any meetings about a child or young person's needs or progress. Ensure that sufficient time is allocated for a pupil to practice skills – i.e., pre-braille skills, braille, typing with a trained adult.
- understand that it takes time, and training from a VST teacher, for staff to develop the specialist skills required to work effectively with a pupil, such as modifying resources or braille. Ensure that staff who have these skills consistently work with pupils and avoid continually changing staff. Provide a pupil passport of needs for unavoidable changes in staff such as, supply teachers.
- ensure that teaching staff know the importance of planning ahead so that resources can be modified in time for the lesson and check that this is done to a high quality.

Teachers and TAs should:

- read and act upon advice from the VST teacher. The class teacher is responsible for the child and should not delegate responsibility to a TA or specialist teacher. This may include differentiating the curriculum, modifying materials or the environment. It may also mean timetable for specialist skills.
- work in partnership with the VST to agree targets, interventions, and monitor progress.
- assign Level 3 TA(s) to learn braille and support a brailist, where possible. Be mindful of the skills needed to learn braille. The TA also needs to be IT literate.
- attend suggested LA training for the child or young person.

- ensure that planning is produced well in advance of teaching so that any modifications/resources can be sourced or made by the TA.

Role and expectations of the local authority

The Vision Support Team will:

- provide direct teaching in specialist subjects, such as, braille.
- make a referral to the habilitation officer to provide appropriate mobility, orientation, and independent living skills programmes.
- make a referral to the touch-typing tutor to develop touch typing/keyboard/ word processing and screen navigation skills.
- resource technicians can make adapted, enlarged and/or modified resources and materials.

Provisions and practice for children and young people with a Visual Impairment

Role and expectations of the school

Schools should:

- ensure that there is an ethos of value and belonging. Be an advocate for the child or young person in the wider school context and promoting their achievements.
- have effective communication systems in place so that all relevant staff have access to VST advice and that they act upon it.
- consider the physical environment and make reasonable adjustments as recommended by VST or an environmental audit.
- consider timetabling arrangements for specialist skills so that the experience is not impacting negatively upon the child or young person's experience of the curriculum or enjoyment of learning. Ensure that a suitable room is available for withdrawal sessions.
- devise learning programmes ensuring the curriculum offer is appropriate and includes/prioritises the development of core skills as recommended by the VST, including literacy and tactile learning, numeracy, mobility, social skills, touch typing, keyboard and ICT skills.
- ensure that the child or young person have access to effective pastoral care, if needed, and an awareness of any SEMH needs.
- identify any necessary exam access arrangements and apply for these within the published exam board deadlines. Provide practise exam papers in the same format as final exams.
- ensure that behaviour policies and approaches take account of the fact that a child or young person with a visual loss will not naturally acquire some of the skills associated with normal social interaction. Their interactions could potentially be misinterpreted as a lack of attention and/or disrespectful behaviour. Ensure that this is taken into account when considering any apparent infringement of code of conduct and or behaviour policies.
- ensure the school does not discriminate on attendance levels and that there are effective procedures in place to record absence for clinics appropriately as a medical absence.
- be proactive in recognising the importance of support and planning for all children and young people, not just those with an EHCP. For example, when planning for transition, facilitate meetings and invite parents, VST & SENCo from next school.

- ensure that any ICT policies and practices take account of the need for personalised accessibility settings. These should be set as part of their unique user profile and stored so that they can be easily accessed when the child or young person needs to. These should not be deleted annually.
- ensure that appropriate fonts are used. Cursive fonts should not be used with VI children for reading. Cursive writing by children should be avoided, as it is difficult to read back especially for revision or editing purposes. Cursive writing by teachers in marking and written feedback should also be avoided, especially written in coloured pens. Cursive writing on white boards may need to be provided as a near copy in plain font for clarity.
- be flexible in applying policies i.e., pen licenses. Use of pens rather than pencil is recommended for visual clarity - a visually impaired child may not be able to read back their work when written in pencil due the reduced contrast and would rather benefit from using a fine point black pen. Erasable ball point pens can be useful.
- set up transition meeting for pupils and invite relevant VST staff, both for students with and without EHCPs.
- ensure that children and young people are included in all offsite trips and that provision is made for access of the experience i.e., audio described/touch tours.
- have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place if needed.
- work with VST to provide opportunities for areas of the Preparing for Adulthood agenda to be included in the child or young person's curriculum.
- provide opportunities outside of school for the child or young person to meet and develop Preparing for Adulthood skills e.g., Junior Vision Ambassadors.

Role and expectations of the local authority

The designated VST teacher will:

- provide vision friendly strategies for classroom management.
- provide peer vision awareness training.
- attend transition reviews and contribute reports to this.
- support CYP, schools and families with the transition process, with and without an EHCP, including support such as environmental audits, training, advice, mobility, and independent travel.
- contribute to EHCPs either by attending or sending a report.
- provide environmental audits.
- provide advice about possible auxiliary aids to include specialist ICT/ equipment such as a CCTV, braille, low vision aids such as magnifiers.
- ensure that training for staff includes developing understanding of the impact of the environment on mobility and vision, general environmental awareness.

Resources for learning for children and young people with Visual Impairment

Role and expectations of the school

The schools should:

- provide access to modified resources and specialist equipment so that children and young people can access the curriculum effectively.
- put processes in place to ensure that personal visual aids, equipment, and resources are working and well maintained. Be clear about who is responsible for day-to-day management.
- provide support to encourage/develop a child or young person's skills in managing resources and equipment independently.
- ensure the provision of appropriate low-cost vision aids. These might for example include:
 - LP rulers, protractor.
 - Dome magnifier/bar magnifiers.
 - Adjustable sloping board.
 - Exercise books with modified lines.
- facilitate the provision of all work in correct font size, including assessments. Allowances for adequate time will be required to provide for all adjustments, for example, using large print and braille.
- ensure that all resources modified use a non-cursive font.
- set up a free book-share (RNIB) account to access enlarged and modified resources.
- where recommended by VST, facilitate reading from bookshare or Leicestershire Library for eBooks. This would require access to a basic tablet i.e., Kindle paperwhite. This would be expected to be provided from the school's notional SEND budget for that child or young person.
- any ICT used should have personalised schools as part of the pupil's user profile to optimise size / background colour/magnifier.
- understand and consistently apply health and safety procedures when using equipment in a range of curriculum areas. Risk assessments completed for practical activities should refer to the specific needs of the VI child following the specific recommendations made by VST.
- be proactive in informing VST and/or family where faults are identified with equipment which cannot be rectified by basic trouble shooting.

In terms of other learning resources:

- ensure the child or young person has access to an enlarged/modified school and homework diary. Homework set should be accompanied by accessible and suitably enlarged and modified learning resources which have been explained to the child. Regular home school communication should be implemented to ensure parents can support the completion of homework.
- as part of reasonable adjustments provide aids to facilitate access to the curriculum such as an iPad, tablet or laptop for screen sharing.
- provide practical experiences to support the development of new language and concepts.
- ensure that appropriate insurance is in place for any LA loaned equipment.

Role and expectations of the local authority

The designated VST teacher should:

- recommend suppliers for low-vision aids.
- advise on the resources a child or young person needs to access the curriculum – this might relate to font size, requirements for modifying resources, or specialist software and equipment.
- provide training and regular updates on modifications and specialist software as required/appropriate, particularly regarding any new equipment.
- advise on teaching strategies including the use of learning resources.
- provide a Keyboard Tutor who can assess need and provide tuition.
- provide training in maintenance of equipment.
- provide a swift response from VST if equipment is faulty.
- advise schools about how to access accessible materials for example, through bookshare.
- assess need and make recommendations for the provision of specialist technology and software such as speech and magnification software – JAWS, Zoomtext, Narrator, Read Aloud, iZoom to aid access to the curriculum.
- organise liaison between resource technicians who can produce and prepare adapted, transcribed, enlarged and/or modified resources and materials to facilitate access to learning and inclusion. This will be with clear advice to schools about time frames for resource production. They can also provide training and support to staff in educational schools on adapted, enlarged, or modified materials, produced resources and assistive technologies/equipment, including Braille, embossers, Tactile Image Enhancer machines and specialist scanning software.
- keep up to date with advances in technology to support the progress and achievement of children and young people where appropriate pilot the use of developing and existing technologies to replace traditional resources to verify impact and value.

Environment for children and young people with a Significant Visual Impairment

Role and expectations of the school

Schools should:

- assess the environment (with support from VST) and be prepared to take advice/ appropriate action to adapt the environment to ensure the best possible arrangement for mobility and where appropriate to improve lighting conditions and position to support effective use of functional vision. This might necessitate for example, considering the positioning of the child in the classroom, provision of blinds to reduce glare, and/or taking steps to improve lighting or minimise sensitivity.
- Consider any new developments or changes to existing environments and ensure that the needs of blind and visually impaired pupils are taken into consideration, as recommended by the VST and /or environmental audit. For example, this could include ensuring door frames contrast with doors and/or ensuring hazards such as raised flooring and steps are marked.
- ensure that a withdrawal room/quiet space is available for a visually impaired child to work in, for some of the time as appropriate to need and learning activity, taking advice from VST, as developing skills in using specialist equipment and resources requires concentration and quiet. Allocated space should be prioritised and maintained for this purpose for the duration of the year and not be routinely removed because of exams/meetings.
- ensure that a withdrawal room is available for a specialist teacher of the impaired to work with when they visit the child. It is important that this room has good lighting conditions.

Role and expectations of the local authority

The service should:

- provide guidance about best use of environment/actions that can be taken to improve mobility and conditions for maximising use of residual vision.
- carry out an environmental audit (or commission audit from Qualified Habilitation Officer).