Guidelines for Blind or Partially Sighted Pupils

School Buildings

- Cloak rooms can be busy and confusing so make sure your pupil with vision impairment has a clearly marked peg on an end where it is least crowded, and possibly the shortest distance from the classroom, that way it will be easier to find and there should be less pupils in the way. Make sure their name label is in object form and something which is meaningful (and age appropriate). Braille can be added, even if they have not formally learned to read it and when the pupil gets older, and has more experience of reading them, the object signifier can be replaced with a tactile picture or their name in braille/large print.

- It is useful to have object signifiers on other doors in the school. This allows children to orientate where they are when corridors can all look the same.

- Stairs/steps should have their edges marked (this should be an education authority responsibility and part of an accessibility audit)

- Time must be taken to help children with VI learn routes around the school. This needs to be done on a regular basis with objects/significant colours pointed out and discussed so that the child can build up knowledge of a school route. Build routes up one at a time as required, e.g. peg to class, class to toilets, class to playground door, class to office etc. It is important to keep the corridors as free from clutter as possible and make others aware of this. You are wanting to encourage as much independent movement in the school environment as possible, while also keeping the pupil safe. Busy corridors can be confusing and frightening. Allowing the pupil with VI to leave class a few minutes earlier with a friend will facilitate less stressful navigation of the school environment, provide a bit more time for the journey and help them be ready for the next class and support independence.

Input from habilitation services is vital to ensure formal mobility skills are taught effectively and consistently

An audit of the school environment should be carried out to identify any areas for concern or where adaptations should be installed

For more information and advice visit the Royal Blind Learning Hub website section on Mobility & Orientation.
Playground Environment

- The outside playground environment can be very difficult for pupils with vision impairment to navigate especially if there are large open spaces. Restricting play to smaller areas until they are familiar and also showing them where play equipment is located as they will not see it from a distance. Playground area markers/colours are useful. Teaching the pupil to navigate to a certain point in the playground and encouraging other pupils to be aware of this. Setting up peer play opportunities in this area will encourage sighted children to stay and play.

- Make sure children with VI know what is available for them to play with. Children with VI often stick to one area/toy in a play environment because they cannot see what is available in other parts of the room or the toys do not have good tactile interest. They also tend to stick to the activity which is safe and familiar, where they understand the ‘rules’ and know they won’t make mistakes. A lot of thought needs to go into scaffolding a play environment which is stimulating but also peer appropriate so that others will engage in play.

Make sure the pupil knows who is playing next to them. It is important that the adult supporting the child/young person does not become the ‘go between’ in interactions between the pupil and their peers.

Learn more by watching the Let Me Play video on our website

The Classroom

- It is important to try and keep the classroom layout as static as possible and if you do make changes to the layout that you let the children experience that change and show them where you have moved things to. Also to try and minimise the amount of moving around from table to table and teach specific routes to the carpet/blackboard etc. Your pupil does need to learn to navigate unfamiliar areas but it is important that their immediate learning environment stays as unchanged as possible. This reduces their stress and allows them to learn better, it also gives them confidence to move around independently. If environments are always changing and have unexpected obstacles to negotiate all the time the pupil will become more reliant on others and ultimately less proactive in their mobility.

- It is important to create a clutter free and organised environment around the pupil. It is good to have a set of drawers close to their desk with braille/tactile labels for storing jotters, paper and other adapted resources. This ensures easy access to their materials and fosters a level of independence. An
organised environment also reduces their need to move unnecessarily around the classroom which takes time away from their task. It helps to keep finished work trays in the same place, making sure they have clear print/tactile labels or are different colours so the pupil can easily locate them. There is no reason why a child with vision impairment cannot be part of the class routine of handing out the jotters, each jotter just requires a large print or braille label.

- Be aware that what you put on the walls is unlikely to be seen clearly, if at all, by your pupils with VI. If you do want them to view something on the walls it important to take them and show them where it is and make sure they know they are allowed to leave their seat when they need to use it, e.g. word wall. It is good for your pupils to have a desk copy of something they may need to refer to frequently. For a pupil with no vision obviously it is not possible for them to access teaching information from the walls, however it is important that they know if their work has been put on the walls and how to locate that should they want to show someone. It is a good idea to make parts of any wall display tactile and have braille labelling.

- Be aware of the social needs of your pupil. As it is not a good idea to keep moving the pupil with VI from table to table, especially if their desk has a lot of assistive equipment, you can vary the other pupils working on the table to allow for new friends to be made and a different mix of personalities.

- It is also a good idea to let the pupil work in a space away from their normal seat and sometimes without all their equipment. This obviously involves devising a task where the fixed supports are less necessary but also gives them the freedom to be like everyone else for a moment. Not using their sloping board occasionally, depending on the type and duration of task, is ok.

“As a primary teacher myself, especially mostly in the infant department, it is hard not to make the classroom very visually stimulating. It is not possible to make everything perfect for the vision impaired pupil but be aware that a visually busy environment (visually or spatially) is an exhausting one. It is important to consider as much as possible ‘why’ something is going on the wall or in the room and how necessary it is.”

Sally Paterson, Learning Hub Manager

- Do not position a child with VI facing the windows and try not to teach with the windows or a main light source behind you. Be aware of the way the light coming into the room affects the board/ walls etc.

Matt laminates can be purchased to eliminate glare from information on the walls. Some children who are blind may still have some light perception and it important to have an understanding of how they see as possible
Teaching

- It is important that anyone working with the pupil with VI (whole school ideally) understands their developmental, educational and social needs. Consistency of teaching approach and in daily interactions build confidence and learning.

- Be aware that for a blind pupil ALL learning through incidental observational information will be lost. It is estimated that 80% of our learning comes from what we see and so a blind child will not pick up information clues from their environment, see what you are pointing at/alluding to at all and so you need to compensate by using more verbal instructions. “When a child’s vision is affected, there is a reduction in the information necessary for understanding how the world is organised and how it can be acted upon” (Juliet Stone, 1999).

“Children in this position “don't know what they don't know” and so you must be very careful how you establish prior knowledge and understanding. Blind pupils often have significant gaps in their understanding and this has a big impact on their learning experience/ability. Learning with exploration of real objects and experiences is crucial” Sally Paterson, Learning Hub Manager

- In the early years setting ‘active learning’ allows a range of learning opportunities to be incorporated. Tactile experiences in literacy and numeracy, including kinaesthetic learning benefit all the pupils and allow for peer interaction and learning. Even a braille user can ‘trace’ the shape of tactile letters and numbers and sighted pupils can be encouraged to experience braille on number/letter cards etc.

“Regularly check for understanding don’t just ask if they get it as they will tend to say “yes”, remember that they don’t know what they are not seeing” Sally Paterson, Learning Hub Manager

- It is important that braille jotters be made up to facilitate inclusion in the class routines as well as being totally functional for the pupil. The Learning Hub website has a short demonstration on making a braille jotter. If regular school jotters have a school badge or emblem this can be recreated in a tactile form if appropriate.

- When teaching remember to give the child with VI the object you are showing the class or have a duplicate for them to explore. Be aware also of using facial gestures rather than explicit instructions, always use the pupils’ names as they will find it difficult or impossible to read facial expressions.
This is a significant issue with their peers and often a cause for social difficulties and behavioural problems

- Your aim is always to make the child with VI as independent and included in the everyday life of the class as possible. There is no reason why they can’t collect the jotters, give things out, take messages etc. but they do require more support and input to do these things, e.g. it will take them longer to learn who everyone is in the class so give them the task of learning one table of pupils at a time, clearly mark the finished work trays with a shape of signifier rather than relying on colour, build in a bit more time for them to do the job.

- A blind child will often need more time to complete a task, be aware that they do not have to do every single thing the sighted pupils do. If they have understood the concept then 5 sums is ok rather than 10 etc.

Be aware that a VI child may never get space between activities or the finished work ‘treats’ as they never get finished or just go from one task to the next with no respite

- In art activities be aware of contrast of materials and equipment. Make things interesting and tactile where possible. Be careful when demonstrating as they will not see what you are doing. It is helpful to include them in your demonstration or have an adult alongside them going through the process as it is being talked about.

- Similarly in PE activities make sure they are close to you when demonstrating or get them to help you show the rest of the class when explaining to ensure they have understood.

Be aware that many PE activities especially ball skills and team games are difficult and need some adaptation. Children with VI should be included as much as possible or games adapted to suit. This is always a really difficult area to make suitable adjustments. Concentrating on fitness and particular skills is better than trying to play games. Relays are a good activity as well as running activities (see guided running video), dance and gymnastics. Games involving balls are difficult to adapt for meaningful inclusion)

- Similarly when teaching songs and rhymes to pupils with VI, make sure you do it with their hands to encourage their understanding of the actions etc. Body awareness of blind children is often poor and their understanding of
movements when they have not seen them inhibits their ability in physical activity.

- **TIME** is important. Use strategies to promote inclusion rather than them feeling left out. Find things that can be adapted for the ‘whole class’ to do rather than always making something different for the VI pupil. Find other ways for recording/displaying information, reading and writing in braille all the time is hard work.

**How to Make Accessible Jotters (Video)**

**Guided Running (Video)**

### Social and Inclusion

- A child with vision impairment will generally find it harder to make friends and have significant difficulty locating them in a busy or large space. It is important to try and scaffold some friendship groups, have an older child as a buddy etc.

> “If your pupil with VI has a support assistant it is really important to encourage ways for peer interaction and not have them playing with/being entertained by the adult all the time. Children with VI very quickly begin to rely on that adult interaction and seek them out. Preventing this scenario is not always easy. The overwhelming instinct is to intervene and fix a situation but this does not support resilience or build independence”.

**Sally Paterson, Learning Hub Manager**

- Being vision impaired in a mainstream classroom can be a very isolating experience. There is often a lot of equipment on the desk, the method of working is different, the pupil has to concentrate harder and there are fewer opportunities for peer interaction. Joining in with tasks and conversation are skills that need to be learned and supported. It is as much about educating those around the pupil as the pupil themselves.

For practical advice on this topic please visit our section on **Social & Independent Living Skills**

### Braille and Technology

- Depending on the pupil, an electronic version of a brailler (Brailenote is one version), can be introduced around P4. This allows the pupil to type in braille while their work appears on a monitor in print. Documents can be added via a
pen drive/ USB stick and taken and printed for marking. Obviously, everything produced on a manual brailler requires someone with a knowledge of braille to translate. Whereas it is important that support staff have some knowledge and understanding of braille, the braillenote allows wider access to the pupils work and a greater capacity for interaction with the pupil regarding the curriculum.

- Teaching a child to read braille is a specialist skill and does require support and guidance from a qualified vision impairment teacher for those working directly with the pupil. Learning braille is important as a means of independent expression and reading. Its value is often underrated due to teaching difficulties. There is not one set approach to teaching braille. Two useful texts are:
  


- Be careful with iPads. However, there are loads of built in accessibility features and voice over options. If you have to use one then it is better for them to have a proper sized one, not the mini version and for it to be allocated for their use only so that it can be set up to their requirements. There is a lot of technical support and training provided by CALL Scotland and RNIB.

Learning by audio means is appropriate for many tasks but not a substitute for a child having their own braille copy of a text. Listening is ok for some tasks but it is important the pupil is given the same experiences and opportunities for independent learning as their peers.

We have lots of resources in our section on Literacy & Braille if you'd like to know more on this topic.

Also to learn more watch our series of videos on Using Technology and Braille

Adaptations and Tactile Diagrams

- Adaptations of the curriculum and the production of tactile diagrams is a whole training day in itself. While it is important that pupils with VI in the early years have exposure to 2D tactile graphics it is important to give them as much exposure to real objects and experiences as possible. This builds their
memory bank of touch and allows them to learn more about their environment and the wider world

Something to consider if support hours are being allocated is that they need to be divided between time supporting the child with VI directly and the preparations required for curriculum access.

- Make sure there are library books with tactile signifiers/illustrations in a designated space where the pupil knows where to find them, otherwise a child with VI will learn very quickly that books are not worth looking at.

The issue of books and tactile illustrations is a whole subject in itself. There are two resources on the Learning Hub website which provide more explanation and support on the subject as well as links to information and book sources

Early Years Tactile Resources Video
Early Years Principles of Tactile Graphics Screencast