

Advice for Early Years Environments



Joseph Clarke Educational Service for the Visually Impaired

Tel: 020 8531 8361

jcservice@josephclarke.waltham.sch.uk

enquiries@sendsuccess.org.uk

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The Role of Vision in Learning

Young children learn by exploring the world around them through their senses. Vision accounts for 80—85% of children's sensory input. They depend on it for:

- Spontaneous and incidental learning in and out of school
- Directed learning
- Developing appropriate social and behavioural skills
- Making peer and adult relationships
- Mobility and independence



Developmental Landmarks

- At birth a baby will blink when it sees a flash camera
- 2 weeks—baby can find an object in his/her peripheral vision by using a series of small eye movements
- 1 month—colour vision distinguishes red and green, shows preference for a human face
- 0-3 months—attention drawn to the outline of objects
- 5-6 months—reaches and grasps for a visual target
- 6 months—fixates on an object with accuracy
- 7 months—discriminates simple geometric patterns
- 12 months—acquires visual form and perception, and images and pictures are related to the real world
- 2-4 years—visual acuity reaches 6/6 (normal vision)



Is a Child Visually Impaired?

The child:

- **Known to an eye specialist**
- **Has eyes of an unusual appearance—one eye turns in or out, eyes water excessively, eyes flicker constantly etc.**
- **Has a tendency to frown, screw up or rub eyes frequently**
- **Often complains of headaches, dizziness, itching or burning eyes**
- **Fails to make and keep eye contact**
- **Does not respond to gestures or facial expressions**
- **Holds her/his head at an unusual angle**
- **Views books, objects etc. very close to face**
- **Frequently bumps into equipment or children**
- **Reluctant to play outside**
- **Falls or trips frequently**
- **Prefers to stay close to an adult**



What to do if you think a child is Visually Impaired

- Talk to the child's parents/carer:
 - ❖ Are they aware of any difficulties?
 - ❖ Is their child known to an optician? – A sight test is free for children with your local optician
 - ❖ Are they happy for their child to be referred to our Service?
- With the parent/carer complete a referral form; try and obtain as much information as possible. Ensure that the medical permission slip is signed by parent/carer and forward the completed form to the Joseph Clarke Service
- Contact Joseph Clarke Service on 0208 531 8361 if you would like to discuss the child

Email: jcservice@josephclarke.waltham.sch.uk

Website: www.whitefield.org.uk/jcservice

Once the referral form is received:

- We will write for a medical report
- When we have received the report we will visit the child in your setting. Parents/carers are very welcome to be present
- If the child is taken onto our caseload we will:
 - ❖ visit regularly
 - ❖ offer advice and support
 - ❖ keep you and the parents informed of any changes
 - ❖ you or the parents can always telephone us



The Joseph Clarke Educational Service Team

How Can You Help in School

Environment:

- Keep the general lay-out of your nursery the same
- Walk the child around the nursery pointing out what equipment is where
- If you change the activities, walk the child to the activity and tell them about it
- Keep the setting tidy
- Small objects on the floor could be hazardous for the child
- Ensure that the lighting is suitable
- Place blinds at all the windows, and ensure that they are in working order
- Provide sufficient storage boxes for equipment, and make them accessible to the children
- Is the child aware of resources on the table? Pens, paints etc. placed in the centre of the table might not be seen by the child
- Sand in the paint allows the child to feel what they have created
- Keep bags, boxes etc. away from the line where children walk
- Make the child aware of projecting surfaces above or below eye-level
- Make the child aware of steps or change of surfaces
- Ensure the child's coat peg is at the end of the line



Hazardous Environment



Tidy/Safe Setting

How Can You Help in School

Organisation:

- Always use the child's name—she/he may not know that you are addressing them
- Facial expressions may be lost on the child—verbalise what you mean
- Group activities/demonstrations may need to be followed up on a one to one basis
- Fruit and food need to be placed in a contrasted bowl, and the child told what is in the bowl
- With help and encouragement the child will be able to pour her/his own drink and eat a variety of foods independently
- Don't assume the child knows where designated areas are—toilets and sinks can be frightening places
- Store small items in trays which are easily located—once dropped on the floor small objects can be difficult to find
- Keep all displays mounted at the child's eye level and explain what is on the walls
- Ensure that the child wears her/his glasses as recommended and that they are clean and fitting correctly



Good Contrast for Food

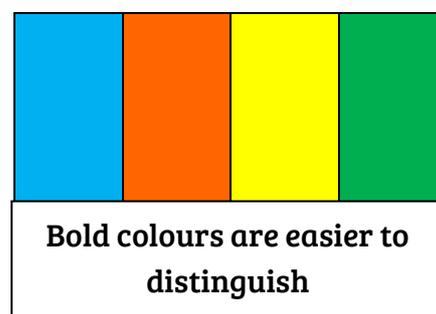
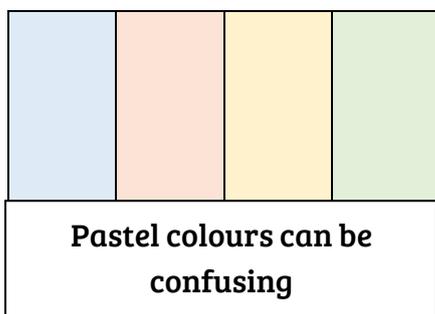


One-to-one Support

How Can You Help in School

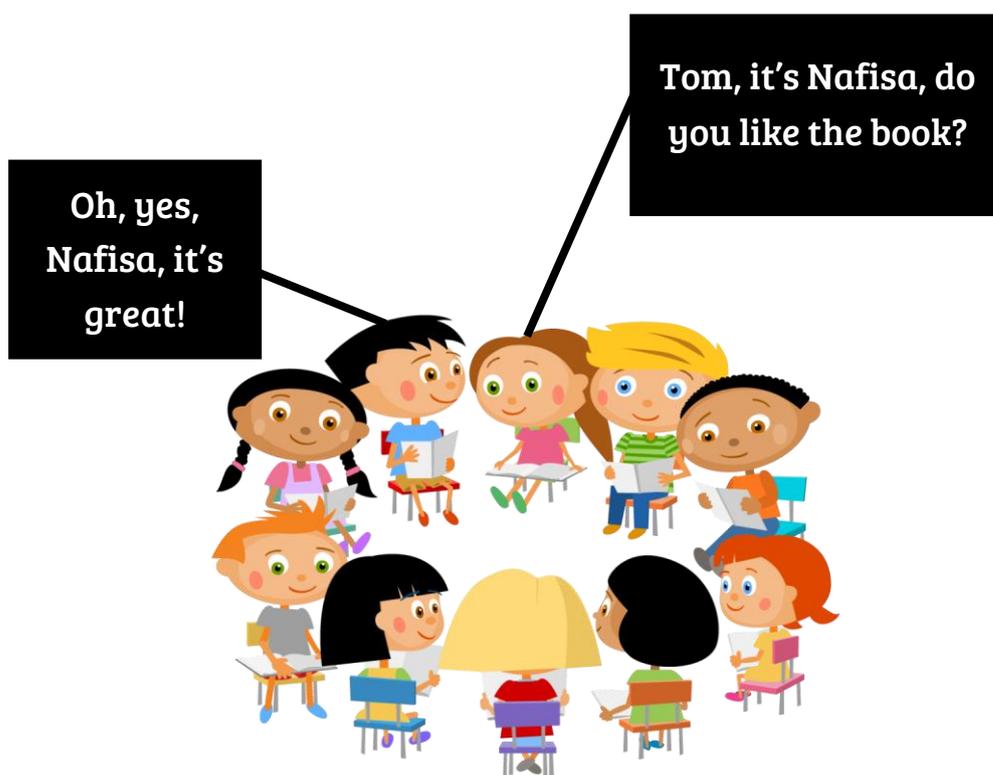
Learning Materials

- When reading stories etc. on the carpet, always sit the child at your feet
- Always show the child the object, picture individually—help may be needed to scan the picture
- Colours may be a problem for the child—light colours can be confusing
- Draw round outlines of shapes with a black pen for colouring and sticking
- Keep activity worksheet simple and well contrasted
- Where possible use concrete examples
- Use black, purple, red pens—pencils, light coloured crayons or pens will be difficult to see
- Help the child to locate resources when placed on a table
- Use tactile letters and numbers
- Ensure scissors are sharp and the child well supervised



Some Useful Tips

- Always use the child's name when talking to her/him, and identify yourself:
 - ❖ "Hello, Tom, it's Nafisa. Can I play with the cars too?"
- When in a group, identify each child by her/his name. The visually impaired child won't mistakenly act on an instruction or comment which was meant for another child
- Tell the child when you are leaving. Encourage sighted children to do the same "Tom, I am going into the garden".
- To help a visually impaired child feel safe and secure when first starting nursery, turn one area of the playroom into a 'safe corner'. Restrict this area to the visually impaired child and one or two sighted children. This will enable the child to explore and feel safe within her/his environment, giving her/his the confidence to venture further
- A visually impaired child needs to play in the same way as a sighted child. They should be encouraged to ride on tricycles safely with supervision, and participate in all activities



Some Useful Tips (Continued) - Activity Ideas

- Singing songs which use names can help a visually impaired child to get to know the names of small groups of new friends
- Most children find water play fun, sighted and visually impaired children will enjoy working together
- Sandpits can be a good introductory activity. This small defined area provides an ideal activity for the visually impaired child to play alongside one or two sighted peers
- The home corner provides a limited area to explore with a couple of friends. Use real utensils as miniature plastic toys can be too small and lack the interesting textures of metal or wood
- At story time, choose books which mention sounds, or add your own sound effects and props
- When cooking, let the visually impaired child feel the ingredients and how the mixture changes. Talk about the smells of the ingredients before and during cooking
- Always explain what you are doing and why. Remember a visually impaired child needs you to help them understand their environment. This will involve lots of explanations, concrete examples and time to explore



Playing with sand



Using different materials/textures