

Working with a Child or Young Person with a Visual Impairment in School



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The following items may indicate visual impairment.

The child:-

- **Is known to visit 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 head or work at an unusual angle when engaged in reading, writing activities**
- **Tends towards clumsiness**
- **Has poor hand/eye control**
- **When reading, frequently omits small words, confuses similar words, often loses her/his place**
- **Has badly formed writing, often not on lines. Makes simple copying errors and reverses letters and/or words**



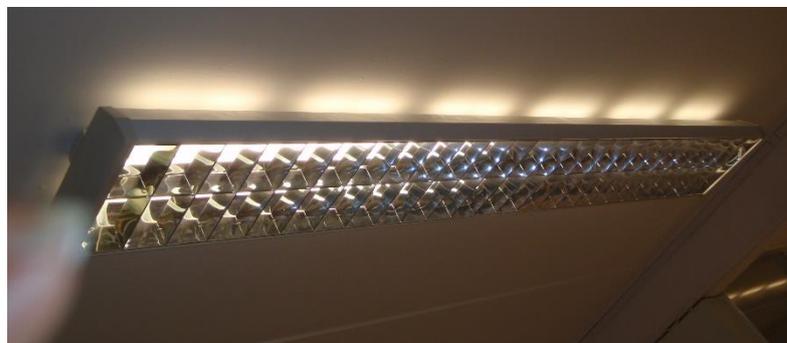
How can you help in school?

It is essential to understand the educational implications of the child's eye condition. The JCES Qualified Teacher will have this information and will provide written advice and strategies, however, the following general recommendations may help.

Environment

Lighting

- May need to be varied depending upon the eye condition. Some children are photophobic (light sensitive) and need shaded areas. Other children benefit from good natural light and additional task lighting. Ask your QTVI for individual recommendations



Example of poor lighting

- Appropriate working environment, preferably away from glare, and not facing windows. Blinds to be used where available
- Individual task lighting may be required
- A good level of lighting all around the school – be especially aware of stairs, entrances and exits

- When working with the child do not lean over her/him as this will cast a shadow. Sit opposite the child or on the "shadow" side. Remember to approach/sit next to the child on her/his 'good' side
- Usually, light coming over the left shoulder is best for right handed children, and vice versa
- The teacher should not stand with her/his back to the window as her/his face will be in shadow. The children, especially the visually impaired child will see only a silhouette without any facial expression



Glare

Glare can cause significant problems to children with a visual impairment. The following is recommended.

- Avoid highly polished surfaces on desks, work areas and floors as they create glare and discomfort
- Glass-covered pictures, decorations and similar objects on walls may reflect sunlight directly into the eyes when the sunshine catches them



Classroom Layout and Organisation

- Is the seating suitable, taking note of the development of the child's posture? Is she/he sitting in the best position in the room, i.e. favouring her/his "good" side, near the board, away from glare?

- Seating should provide maximum comfort so that the child's position in the seat is such that all materials used are at a comfortable eye level. A seat or desk that is too high or too low, too narrow or too broad, can cause much general physical discomfort as well as eye discomfort. Corrective steps may be taken by providing a raised desk properly placed so that material may be brought up to eye level
- Eliminate clutter and crowding on walls as this tends to confuse. Select pictures that are clear and colourful, and avoid those with too much 'fussy' detail.
- Easy access to whiteboard/smartboard, television, PC, teacher and any other frequently used resource
- Storage areas need to be accessible, consistently used and clearly labelled
- Bags, files, boxes etc. need to be stored away from the line where people usually walk
- Be aware of projecting surfaces, above or below eye level
- Keep furniture and resources as static as possible
- Paint radiators and doors contrasting colours from the wall
- Edge steps/stairs in a bright contrasting colour



Poorly contrasted handrail



Good contrast on edging



Boxes are labelled and path is clear

Organisation

- Glasses and all reading aids should be kept clean and properly adjusted, and worn as recommended by the specialist.
- Instructions need to be clear, concise and audible. It may be appropriate to call the child's name, thus ensuring attention.
- Read aloud what you are writing on the board.
- Non-verbal communication may be lost.
- The child needs to sit at the front for group work or demonstrations which may need to be followed up on a one-to-one basis.
- Small items may need to be stored in trays, so that they are easily located. A brightly coloured plastic mat on the work surface may help. Dycem is useful, as it stays put.
- Encourage the child to organise her/himself, by using the above methods and by replacing items tidily and consistently.
- Visual displays need to be mounted at the child's eye level, and be easily accessible.
- Provide the child with a flash drive (USB stick) to enable her/him to transfer work from laptop/PC between home and school.
- All staff should be aware of the students' visual impairment and the advice and recommendations provided
- Don't be afraid to use visual expressions e.g. "look what you are doing" or "can you see that?" - Students use them themselves.



Learning Materials

- Reading – print size – check on a suitable size and font. Ask your QTVI. Avoid excessive and unnecessary reading, particularly when it contains fine print. Supplementary materials in large print books which may be read with less fatigue than books with closely crowded print should be provided when recommended.

General advice for enlargement of resources – Keep enlargement to a maximum of A4 i.e. do not use A3 – Enlarge and copy information onto 2 X A4 sheets instead. Ask your QTVI for advice.

- Visually impaired children get tired easily because of the extra effort they have to make to read, write and copy from the board. Scanning pictures and text and adjusting focus between book and board is difficult and time consuming. Try to vary class activities between concentrated literacy and numeracy and practical activities.
- The child may need her/his own copy of board work. Do not expect her/him to share.
- All boards should be clean with a non-reflective surface, and must offer a good, clear contrast; for example, black pen.
- Print causes fewer problems than script.
- Avoid shiny paper, print on coloured backgrounds and print which is widely scattered on the page.



VS



- **Diagrams need to be uncluttered. Try tactile ones. Worksheets may need simplifying by identifying the task; for example, in maths, avoid over-use of language.**
- **Remember good, clear contrast. A faint copy or blurred print of diagrams or pictures on a worksheet are of little use to anyone. Give a photocopy or email a master sheet.**
- **Enhanced lined paper, larger squares, wider lines may all help.**
- **Writing implements such as heavy leaded pencil or pen are useful, offering good contrast.**
- **Photocopy or print notes in advance. Encourage use of a CCTV e.g. Opti-Verso, to promote independence.**
- **Encourage listening skills; record instructions and worksheets if possible.**
- **Encourage use of a pocket memo to aid note taking.**
- **Encourage the child to learn keyboarding skills so that a P.C. or laptop can be used.**

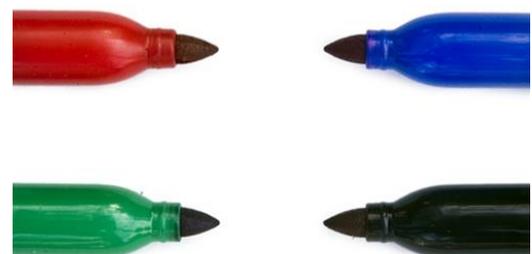


Adjustable workboard, bold lined paper & large print ruler

- Ensure other children in the class are aware of the difficulties of visual impairment, without drawing attention to any specific child.
- Allow extra time for completion of work; time to use a printer if work is word processed.
- Reading material for VI children should be chosen with particular care. Paper should be thick enough and of good quality to prevent the obverse face showing. Writing should not be printed over different background colours, pictures etc. (e.g. Oxford Reading Tree is very good, many French text books although colourful and interesting are far too 'busy').
- Writing that is clear, unfussy and of a good contrast is helpful.
- Board work should be in large, clear writing that is not too crowded. Use Comic Sans or Arial on a smart board as this is the clearest font (example of comic sans). Black on white gives the best contrast. Place all work on the cleanest, best illuminated, glare-free portions of the board.
- Provide the child with darker lined paper, larger squared paper where necessary.

**This is an example of
Comic Sans, Bold.**

- Try to keep writing periods brief and, more importantly, encourage the child to learn to touch type.
- Pens making a broad, heavy line are desirable. Felt-tipped pens are preferable to ball-point pens and pencils.
- Some VI children have very poor, laboured, unstructured writing which is time consuming and often almost impossible to read back. These children will benefit from using a laptop and other technology once their touch typing skills are proven.
- In some cases a reader will help access to the curriculum and will contribute to a higher level of understanding and achievement.
- Allow extra time for the visually impaired child to complete tasks. Apply for additional time for all external exams and make sure that where necessary enlarged and/or modified papers, extra time, rest periods and additional adult support are provided.
- The computer screen can also be adapted to provide:
 - ❖ larger icons and/or wider spacing
 - ❖ variety of font and print sizes
 - ❖ different coloured background – e.g. black background with white or yellow print is often effective
 - ❖ trailing or enlarged cursors
 - ❖ different sized title bars
 - ❖ more or less brightness



Brightly coloured felt tip pens