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# Meeting the needs of learners with visual impairment

A professional guide for teachers

In partnership with



## What is this guide for?

*In order to see clearly, our eyes and brain must work together.*

The majority of learners who require additional support because of their visual impairment (VI) are educated in mainstream schools. Those who have visual impairment as well as other significant and complex needs are generally supported in specialist provisions. It is estimated that 4,570 children and young people in Scotland have a visual impairment, making it likely you will have children and young people who have visual impairment in your class at some stage in your career.

The term 'visually impaired' is used to refer to a wide range of impairment that includes total blindness to a loss of vision that cannot be fully corrected using glasses or contact lenses. Some children and young people have Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) caused by damage to the 'seeing' parts of the brain. Children with CVI may present with different visual difficulties depending on where damage to the brain has occurred. The degree of impairment and the consequent teaching responses range from slight to significant, but many children with visual needs may have difficulties with learning

to read, write, spell and/or with numeracy from early in their schooling. However, they may be creative, talented, articulate and imaginative or perform well practically. Additional support ranges from basic advice that provides an understanding about the nature of needs and ensures the environment and resources are appropriate, to intensive individualised support from a qualified teacher of VI (QTVI).

The purpose of this guide is to provide support for teachers to reflect on their actions and consider whether they may need further advice or professional learning. This guide is intended to complement your employer's policies and help you meet the additional support needs of this vulnerable group of learners. It is part of a series of guides produced by GTC Scotland. The guides do not form part of the Professional Code for teachers. Teachers and schools may find them useful professional learning and discussion tools, but they are not intended for use in any competency or conduct process. They are part of GTC Scotland's services to teachers to enhance teacher professionalism as part of our advisory role as the professional body for all of Scotland's teachers.

## What is expected of teachers?

As set out in the Professional Standards for Teachers, you should demonstrate commitment to the professional values of integrity, trust and respect and social justice in all aspects of your role as a teacher. Supporting learners and other members of the school community who have visual impairment is a key part of that role. All teachers should understand what it means for learners who have visual impairment and should be aware of what support is available. Concerns about vision are often raised by parents at an early stage and confirmed by health professionals. However, class teachers are in the best position to identify undiagnosed possible signs of visual loss or difficulties with the interpretation of visual information and pursue referral for further advice.

The Review of Additional Support for Learning Implementation (2020) highlights that all teachers should hold and enact the professional values of inclusion and inclusive practice. Teachers

should be positive role models and demonstrate welcoming, encouraging and inclusive behaviours. In doing so, teachers align with the expectations of the Equality Act 2010 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended), which set out the legal requirements to protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and for the provision of additional support for learning. Moreover, the articles of the UNCRC ensure that children are protected, have the opportunity to participate and are provided for – these are known as the '3 Ps' (Participation, Protection and Provision).

Four key features of inclusive practice in schools are that the children and young people are present, participating, achieving and supported.

# How to address visual impairment needs in the Scottish education context

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains a defining mission of the Scottish Government. In a submission in December 2019 made to the recent Scottish Government additional support for learning review, RNIB Scotland says 'while 92 per cent of pupils with no additional needs achieved at least one National 5, only 64 per cent of those with sight loss did. And while 71 per cent with no additional needs achieved at least one Higher, only 40 per cent of those with sight loss did.'

*Nevertheless, children with visual impairment can do anything other children can do, given the right support from the start which includes:*

- ensuring glasses, if prescribed, are clean and worn;
- supported access to low vision aids e.g. magnifiers, task lighting;
- ensuring appropriate positioning;
- ensuring good lighting and reduction of glare; window blinds are fitted and working,

- ensuring that the classroom and school environment is not cluttered;
- providing clear, uncluttered materials of good contrast, in a True Type font in the recommended size and with correct spacing;
- providing uncluttered photos/pictures with good contrast;
- ensuring in electronic format, pictures have alternative text (Alt text) descriptions; and
- using relevant technology.

Learners with significant or more complex needs may require braille, augmented or alternative communication systems including on-body signing.

Teachers should be aware that given the challenges they face, children and young people with VI are at greater risk of wellbeing issues, of losing motivation and of disengaging with learning.

## What you can do

Ask yourself the following reflective questions to support your understanding and practice:

- Do I understand the nature of VI/CVI my learner has and how it may affect their learning in my classroom?
- How do I know that my teaching maximises the strengths and supports the challenges of my learner?
- What do I do when I realise they are struggling with their learning? Have I sought additional support for me, for my learner?
- Have I ensured that the learning environment is suitable for my learner?
- How well have I taken on board the advice I have been given in terms of meeting the needs of my learners with VI/CVI?
- How well do I ensure my learner feels included in the class, and is maintaining confidence and self-esteem?
- How aware are the rest of the class of the challenges faced by my learner, and to what extent have I encouraged them

to support this learner?

- How do I ensure the parents of my learner are essential partners in the learning and development of wellbeing of their child?
- How well do I plan with the QTVI to ensure that lessons can be adapted, appropriate resources obtained, and pre-teaching can take place?
- How well do I work with the classroom assistant who supports my learner?
- How well do I engage with the QTVI and continue their suggested strategies?
- Have I considered what special assessment arrangements should be in place to demonstrate true attainment for my learner?
- Have I considered the suggestions to support visual impairment using the How Good is Our Sensory Service (HGIOS?) Professional Learning Resource?

## Additional resources

If you have a learner with visual impairment in your class and require further support, please contact the service that delivers support in visual impairment in your local authority. If you wish further information and training, please also contact the [Scottish Sensory Centre](#), which is funded by the Scottish Government to provide support for all professionals involved in the education of learners with visual impairment.

- [BBC Two - Same but Different, Visual impairment](#) - Theo's story - a short video
- [A children's rights-based approach.pdf](#) - aims to help teachers embed a children's rights-based approach and effective learner participation into their teaching. Part of a series of professional guides produced by GTC Scotland
- [CVI Scotland](#) - information and helpful ideas to support those working with children and young people who have CVI
- [The Cerebral Visual Impairment Society](#) - sister site of CVI Scotland
- [Home - Albinism Fellowship UK and Ireland](#) - information and support for children and young people with albinism, and their families
- [How good is our Sensory Service? \(HGI OSS?\)](#) - a quality assurance document for sensory services
- [Messy and Muddy: A Guide to Outdoor Play for Children with VI \(RNIB\)](#) - particularly useful for those working in early years settings
- [Scottish Sensory Centre Professional Learning](#) - short courses/webinars for teachers, support staff and others. Learn braille by distance learning (SQA certified course)
- [See Differently \(RNIB\)](#) - curriculum resources and information on transition
- [Supporting Children and Young People with Nystagmus](#) - a variety of articles giving ideas of how to support children and young people with nystagmus
- [VINCYP \(NHS\) Common Eye Conditions Explained](#) - explanation of various eye conditions, in jargon-free language



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