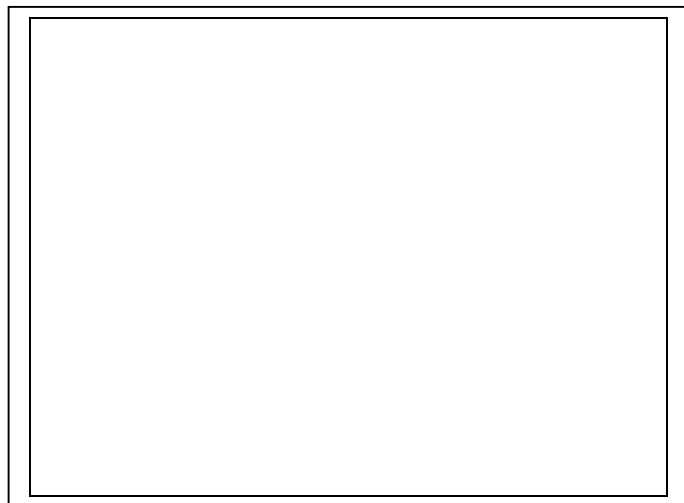


SEND Bulletin NO. 8



Visual Impairment

Visual impairment - having little or no sight - has been classified in a number of ways. Health and social services use the terms 'blind' for those with very little or no sight and 'partially sighted' for those with a small but useful level of vision. In education, the terms most commonly used are:

- **visually impaired** - this can be a reference to a particular eye problem or to reduced vision resulting from brain damage
- **totally blind** - having no sight at all.

A child is said to be visually impaired if their vision cannot be corrected to within normal limits by any means. Schools who have visually impaired children will need to make certain adaptations, such as adding white lines at the edges of steps, and to provide specially adapted equipment, such as magnifying screens and large print books. Outreach is usually provided, in the form of specialised advice and support, from a school for the blind, or direct from the RNIB.

Key characteristics

A child with visual impairment may:

- need the support of the advisory teacher for visually impaired children
- need to use a range of senses to become familiar with the school environment
- have a short attention span
- display unusual fatigue after any kind of visual task
- have poor balance.

A child who has problems with distance vision may:

- frown or scowl frequently and have a tendency to blink excessively or rub their eyes
- sit rigidly when reading or viewing a distant object
- turn their head to use one eye only
- lose their place when reading.

A child who has problems with near vision may:

- try to avoid close work
- cover or close one eye and hold their head close to the work
- be inattentive when taking part in guided reading
- have awkward head posture generally
- stumble against classroom furniture
- have poor word spacing and be unable to write on a line.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- allow more time for hands-on experiences, verbal explanations and completing tasks
- allow more opportunity for work with real objects
- make use of reverse-chaining - demonstrating what you want the end result to be like
- provide extra help with organisational skills
- keep the classroom tidy to avoid accidents
- put up bold and accessible wall displays
- verbalise everything that is written on the board
- make sure that the learner is sitting in the best place to see your face
- make sure that there is good lighting in the classroom, with no glare
- encourage the pupil to wear their glasses
- use colour coding to encourage them to locate or put away equipment
- provide them with their own books rather than expecting them to share
- encourage independence as much as possible.

Support agencies

- Junior Blind of America: www.juniorblind.org
- LOOK (National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children): www.look-uk.org
- RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People): www.rnib.org.uk
- Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR): www.education.bham.ac.uk/research/victar

If you have any particular items you would like information on or any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne