

• **henshaws**

*beyond expectations*

August 2020



- **top tips for a vision friendly accessible classroom**



# ● introduction

Much of what is presented within a classroom is visual. For children with a visual impairment to participate fully and learn independently, it is vital to make some adaptations to the environment resources. Whilst generic information is useful to consider as a starting point, it is important to understand each individual child's diagnosis and consider the implications to maximise their use of vision around the school environment.

A child's needs may also change over time, so regular communication and asking the child what works for them is key to making it work effectively. QTVI's (Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired) play a vital role in supporting schools and pupils so make sure you have contact details for any QTVI's supporting a child in your school or class.



# ● the environment

## **Classroom layout and furniture**

- The first consideration is the layout of furniture. Whilst you should not be afraid to rearrange the learning environment to accommodate children with a visual impairment, try to avoid making too many changes too frequently; remember that you will need to reorient the child to the room when changes are made.
- Make sure that furniture is well organised and there is a clear pathway to navigate through the room. Make sure that all cupboards, drawers and doors are closed. Ensure that enough tactile information is available to aid navigation.
- Make sure that any necessary equipment, such as trays, coat pegs, lunchbox trolleys etc are accessible and easy to locate. All equipment should be stored in the same place and clearly labelled using an accessible format for those who have some use of vision.
- If needed, provide extra space at a child's desk for additional equipment etc. It can be difficult for a child with a visual impairment to judge personal space and which area is theirs to work in. Brightly coloured/tactile tape on the table will help them to know which area is theirs.
- Teach all students to push their chairs under the table or desk when they get up; close or open doors fully; and pick up materials when they are finished with. Stress the importance of health and safety within the classroom.
- Resources should be modified to the correct font size rather than photocopied and enlarged so that high contrast levels are maintained.

## **Lighting**

- If possible, avoid being in front of strong light, such as a window that casts you in shadow. Ensure lights are coming from behind or to the side of the student. Be flexible with seating arrangements. Maybe allow the child to choose the best place in the classroom that allows them to see the board.
- Try to eliminate or reduce the risk of glare from the desk and whiteboard.
- When using printed materials, avoid high gloss paper.
- Allow time for eyes to adjust to different levels of lighting.
- Consider using different lighting for different tasks.

# • communication

- Always let a visually impaired child know when you are approaching or leaving. Identify yourself by name, especially if the child does not know you well. Try to ensure that the child is looking at you and responds to their name before you continue speaking. Teach other children in the class to do the same.
- A visually impaired child will rely on their sense of hearing more than other children. When a visually impaired child is required to listen, limit background noise, and make sure that they can hear exactly what is being said.
- Stand at a proximity to enable the child's best view of you – see their Functional Vision Assessment for more details regarding distance vision. Speak to your child's QTVI if you require any further information about this.
- The language you use to communicate to a visually impaired child should be precise, specific and descriptive, for example, rather than saying, "Your drink is on your mat", you might say "Your drink is on the mat at 3 o'clock". Remember, non-verbal communication, such as hand gestures and facial expressions cannot always be read, depending on the level of sight that the child has.
- Many sighted people are conscious about the type of language used and may try to avoid phrases such as, 'Look at me,' and 'Let's see if we can find some bigger blocks.' Phrases such as this are part of everyday language and do not need to be avoided.
- Briefly describe aspects of the environment that might be of importance or interest to the child that he or she cannot see.
- Read what you write on the board out loud. Also, consider how much you write on the board (unless it is a Smartboard and you can screen share what is on there.) Another alternative is to ask a teaching assistant to write down the same information in an accessible way on paper in front of the child so that they have access to the same information as others. Many visually impaired students are not auditory learners so it might be difficult for them to process the information in that way. Where possible, aim for less copying from the board.



# ● school work

- Ensure contrast of colour on any visual materials used: black and white is best. Any worksheets printed should be clear, of high contrast and uncluttered.
- Do not ask, “Can you see this?” They may say yes, but that does not necessarily mean that they can access it. Instead, say things like, “Can you find ...?” or “Can you read this line of text without guessing?”
- Consider the type of paper being used. Lined or squared paper may not be appropriate for all children. It is important to assess the preference with each child.
- Close work, which requires concentration can be extremely tiring; the child can become easily fatigued if focussing for long periods. A short break to sharpen a pencil or walk around the classroom allows the child to refocus the eyes, if needed.
- Avoid italic or decorative text. Also, try to use lower case lettering, where possible, rather than capital letters, because they have a greater number of ascenders and descenders, making them more visually distinctive and easier to read. Arial, Verdana, Tahoma and Sans Serif versions of any typeface are often more legible, since the letters are simple. It is always best to check with each individual pupil regarding the best font type and size for their needs and to bear in mind that this could change over time, so keep checking.
- Provide tactile learning experiences wherever possible. For example, instead of talking about rocks and showing images of different types of rocks, have physical rocks available in the classroom for them to touch and handle. The more ‘hands on’ experiences you can provide, the better!
- Allow extra time (2-3 times as long) for exploration of materials and to process any information.
- Provide students with all materials (lesson plans, activities, notes, definitions, handouts, etc.) in accessible formats such as braille, large print, digital, tactile, or audio.



Remember, the visual impairment is just one part of the child. They have the same strengths and difficulties in areas of the curriculum as other children. The difference, however, is that you need to ensure they have the same access to your materials and the same chance to contribute and complete the exercises as everyone else in the class. There are certain class rules that it would be helpful for the whole class to adhere to, such as closing doors and drawers and making sure there are no other hazards in the classroom. A whole class approach creates an inclusive environment, where the needs of all children are important.

**Useful websites:**

[www.natsip.org.uk](http://www.natsip.org.uk)

[www.positiveeye.co.uk](http://www.positiveeye.co.uk) (check out their Vision Friendly Schools initiative!)

For more information on what you can do to support students with visual impairments, please contact our **Children and Young People's Team** on **0300 222 5555**.



 /henshaws

 @henshaws

 [www.henshaws.org.uk](http://www.henshaws.org.uk)

Henshaws: 4a Washbrook House, Lancastrian Office Centre,  
Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 0FP.

Contact us on: 0300 222 5555 or email: [info@henshaws.org.uk](mailto:info@henshaws.org.uk)

Registered charity number: 221888