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#### EA Sensory Service (Vision Impairment)

#### Guidance on how schools can create an appropriate learning environment for learners who have vision impairment

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**Overview**

An accessible physical environment can do a great deal to reduce barriers to participation and learning for learners with vision impairment (VI), and it benefits all other learners.

[All schools must comply with legal requirements and have an anticipatory duty to plan for disabled learners.](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/school-accessibility) However, when a school knows it is going to receive a learner who has a significant vision impairment, a Qualified Teacher of Children with Vision Impairment (QTVI) may conduct an audit to suggest where simple improvements could be made.

**Carrying out an environmental audit**

Walk around your school looking for general areas where adaptations could be made to make the environment more accessible for a learner with vision impairment. Some of the features you may observe or consider include:

* Good lighting – both natural and artificial – is important to everyone. Are there good levels of lighting throughout the school so there are no sudden changes e.g. from bright to dim areas?
* Some pupils may have particular lighting requirements e.g. if they suffer from light sensitivity (photophobia). Is natural light through windows controlled by blinds, curtains or tinted glass?
* Blinds/curtains – do they fit the windows properly? Do they minimise glare? Do they operate properly?
* Signage – clear, well-positioned and easily visible, perhaps using braille or symbol.
* Are doors hinged so they cannot be left half-open?
* Are locker doors always kept closed?
* Is there sufficient space without obstructions to move easily within rooms, corridors etc.?
* Noticeboards – is the information on them easy to find and read?
* Steps, edges, pillars and other transition points highlighted with yellow paint.
* Steps/stairs/ramps – do they have handrails on both sides?
* Handrails to help with mobility.
* ‘Tactile trails’ – dado rails or other textured materials at hand height that learners can follow to find the route to a particular location in school – e.g. toilets, dining hall.
* Different floor coverings for different areas of the school to indicate a change of environment.
* Are the doors, doorframes and floor well contrasted?
* Clear panels on doors so people can be seen approaching from the other side.
* Are doorknobs, light switches, power points etc. highlighted in a contrasting colour to doors and walls?

Poor maintenance and poor use of colour contrast can make play times particularly hazardous for children who have reduced vision. Is your playground equipment safe and well maintained?

* Is playground equipment surrounded by soft textured ground?
* Does playground equipment stand out from the ground surface and background?
* Are painted ground games providing good contrast e.g hopscotch, number ladders?
* Does outside furniture contrast clearly with the immediate surroundings (e.g. benches, bins, signposts)?
* Are external hazards (e.g. low metal railings around flowerbeds, drainage channels) highlighted in yellow?
* Are potholes, lifted/subsiding paving stones, drain covers repaired immediately?
* A distinction between quiet and active areas in the playground, and shaded areas for learners with light sensitivity.
* Sensory gardens.
* Well-maintained grounds, free of obstructions.
* Corridors, cloakrooms and classrooms kept free of obstructions.

**Classroom accessibility**

It is also important to audit the environment in a classroom where a learner with VI is going to work. Consider:

**Physical accessibility**

* Are walkways clear? Are coats and bags put away safely? Does classroom storage create obstacles?
* Is the layout of the classroom kept consistent?

**Storage and labelling of resources**

* Are resources kept in the same place and clearly labelled with tactile markers, if necessary?

**Lighting**

* Is there good ambient lighting in the classroom?
* Does the light fall directly onto the learner’s work areas?
* Do the windows have blinds to reduce glare?
* Are reflective surfaces covered to reduce glare?

**Teaching position**

* Avoid standing in front of windows - this can reduce you to a silhouette and make it difficult for all learners to see you properly.
* Learners who have VI need to sit in the best position to see the whiteboard, etc. but not separately from the other learners.
* Do learners with vision impairment need to sit close to a power source if they are using assistive technology devices?

**Whiteboard**

* Make sure you use a clearly contrasting pen for writing on the whiteboard − eg black on white (Avoid using coloured pens or pens that are running out of ink.)
* Are whiteboards kept clean?
* What arrangements are/could be made for learners who cannot see the whiteboard easily, or at all? For example, do you provide individual copies of anything presented on the whiteboard for learners who need them?
* Have you enabled screen sharing/mirroring from the Smart Board/ Interactive screen to a tablet or other device to provide the student with visual access?

**Computers**

* Are computer monitors at pupils’ eye level?
* Are computer monitors positioned to avoid glare on the screen?
* If the QTVI advised that magnification software or screen adaptations are required to allow visual access to the computer have these been put in place?

**Teaching and learning resources**

* Are the print resources you use in an appropriate format for learners? (Consider print size, font and contrast. When working with vision impaired learners you should take advice from the learner, their parents/carers, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or the QTVI, as appropriate.
* Do learners have a good reading position? (Reading stands or raised boards are useful to help some learners get the best reading position.)
* Do you use real objects and artefacts to support your teaching?
* Do/would learners who use special equipment or large print resources have adequate space to work?

Adapted from [RNIB Access to Education](https://www.rnib.org.uk/health-social-care-and-education-professionals/education-professionals/teaching-and-learning-guidance) – accessed on 03/05/2021