Making your school accessible
for visually impaired pupils and visitors

Visual Impairment Service

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/visionsupport
This booklet is for school staff or governors working with children and young people of any age and/or ability range in any educational setting. It provides basic information about good practice relating to décor, lighting, classroom management and other factors.

The contents can also be used as a checklist to inform your planning for accessibility so that the physical elements of a school (buildings and contents) do not create barriers which turn an impairment into a handicap.

The booklet is not intended to replace the detailed environmental audit conducted by the Visual Impairment Service when a visually impaired pupil attends your school. It will, however, provide you with information and practical strategies on the general principles involved in making the environment less confusing and more user friendly for anyone who has visual difficulties.

**Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to use the booklet</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corridors, entrance halls and teaching areas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooring and furnishing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surfaces</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walls</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside areas</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to use the booklet

Each section is written as a series of questions. A positive “Yes” answer indicates good practice in your school; a negative “No” answer indicates that this could be an issue which you need to address. If so, you may wish to include it in your school’s Accessibility Plan.

Remember:

- Some issues might be impossible to address immediately as they might conflict with the specific needs of other pupils.
- Some may be simple “quick fixes” e.g. moving green chairs from the room with the green carpet to the room with the beige one.
- Some may be longer term plans – such as, when replacing existing equipment, furniture, fixtures or fittings, choose items which provide better colour contrasts with their surroundings and have a glare free (i.e. non shiny) finish.

As you work your way through the checklist you will also be developing your own and others’ awareness of environmental considerations. The improvements made will benefit not just those who are visually impaired but everybody who uses your school.

Thank you to the following schools for permission to use photographs showing good practice:

Meadowgate Special School, Wisbech
Neale-Wade Community College, March
Rees Thomas Special School, Cambridge
Spring Common Special School, Huntingdon
St Ivo School, St Ives
Visually impaired pupils benefit from good lighting (both natural and artificial), good colour contrast, an uncluttered environment and accessible information (signs, notices etc). These factors will help them to make the best use of their vision.

- Are the levels of lighting generally good throughout the school (i.e. no dark areas at all)?
- Are lighting levels consistent?
- Are doors clearly labelled at pupils’ eye level?
- Are there signs to indicate how to get to classrooms/areas (e.g. hall, reception)?
- Noticeboards – are they at eye level?
- Noticeboards – is the information on them easy to find and read?

- 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?
Flooring and furnishing

Once again, choice of colours and colour contrasts are important in helping people with reduced vision to move around safely and confidently.

- Is the flooring plain without confusing patterns?
- Is it a matt finish to avoid glare?
- Are changes in surfaces clearly defined? (e.g. between carpet and lino)
- Furniture – is it set out in an orderly way?
- Furniture – is it kept in the same place?
- Furniture – does the colour clearly contrast with the floor and walls?
- Steps/stairs/ramps – are edges clearly defined in a contrasting colour?

- Steps/stairs/ramps – do they have handrails on both sides?
- Steps/stairs/ramps – are the handrails the same length as the steps/stairs/ramps?
- Steps/stairs/ramps – are they well and evenly lit?
It is important to consider the effect of sunlight and shadow on different types of surfaces at different times of the day.

- Are table tops, work benches and work surfaces plain without confusing patterns?
- Are surfaces matt to avoid glare?
- Are work surfaces well contrasted with doors below (e.g. in Food Technology)

- Are computer monitors at pupils’ eye level?
- Are computer monitors positioned to avoid glare on the screen?
Equipment

Well organised storage and location of equipment can both ensure the safety and promote the independence of all pupils. Young people with a visual impairment may need to use a lot of specialist equipment (e.g. laptop computer) which will need to be stored securely.

➢ Is equipment always kept in the same place?

➢ Is it easily accessible when needed?

➢ Are storage areas (e.g. cupboards) clearly labelled?

➢ Is equipment which has to be stored in corridors located consistently and in such a way that it is not an obstruction or hazard?

➢ Are whiteboards kept clean?

➢ Are interactive whiteboards positioned at the correct height for pupils to view and use?
Walls

Well thought out colour choices and finishes can provide good colour contrast between walls, floors, doors, door handles and displays. Consistently appropriate positioning of wall displays, labels and signs is also important to ensure access to information.

- Are walls plain?
- Are they matt? (to avoid glare)
- Are they a pale colour?
- Are the doors, doorframes and floor well contrasted?
- Is the ceiling a pale colour?
- Are doorknobs, light switches, power points etc. highlighted in a contrasting colour to doors and walls?
- Can they be reached by a wheelchair user?
- Are displays easy to see/read? (i.e. not too much visually confusing information)
- Are they at pupils’ eye level?
- Are tactile labels within easy finger reach?
Good lighting – both natural and artificial – is important to everyone. 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?
- Blinds/curtains – do they minimise glare?
- Blinds/curtains – do they operate properly?

- Are light bulbs replaced immediately when they fail?
- Is lighting left on continuously in poorly lit areas?
- Are lighting levels consistent throughout the school so there are no sudden changes e.g. from bright to dim areas?
- Are there sufficient electrical sockets to provide additional task lighting without hazardous trailing leads?
Outside areas

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 steps and pathways clearly defined?

➢ Are steps/pathways weeded?

➢ Steps/stairs – are edges clearly defined?

➢ Steps/stairs/ramps – are there handrails on both sides?

➢ Steps/stairs/ramps – are handrails at least the same length as the steps/stairs/ramps?

➢ Are there tactile/visual clues to mark the boundary between outside and inside (e.g. metal grids, rubber/bristled mats)?
➢ Do doormats at entrances have weighted edges to stop them curling up?

➢ Does outside furniture contrast clearly with the immediate surroundings (e.g. benches, bins, sign posts)?

➢ Are the school site boundaries clearly identified?

➢ Are signs and sign posts clear?

➢ Are signs and sign posts at the best height for children to read?

➢ Are external hazards (e.g. low metal railings around flower beds, drainage channels) highlighted in yellow?

➢ Are potholes, lifted/subsiding paving stones, drain covers repaired immediately?

➢ Are areas prone to collecting surface water, dead leaves etc. checked regularly and attended to?
Case Study

My name is Rachel and I am five years old. I have albinism which means that I have no pigment in my eyes, skin or hair and my hair and skin are very fair. I am sensitive to bright light so glasses that I wear all the time go darker when I am outside on bright days. Even when I wear my glasses I can’t see things very clearly if they are a long way away.

Now I am at ‘big school’ – it’s great. There are lots of brand new signs which are very good for me to see because they have black writing on a yellow background. The edges of the steps in school are painted yellow and so are the door frames. Because the doors are dark it really makes them stand out and helps me get about and find places by myself.

My classroom has very big windows and it was very bright in there at times until the new blinds arrived.

In the playground they have painted the edges of steps yellow and the grey metal railings, which were really hard to see, are now yellow too. This means that I feel safe at playtimes with my friends.

In school everyone has been asked to help me by keeping places tidy so I know where things are and I don’t trip over things. (I have to remember to do the same!!)

I like my school and I think everyone else will like it and feel safe when they’re in it – not just me!