

The Physical Environment

Lighting

Signage

Physical Access

Fixtures and Fittings

How can we make the physical environment of a school more accessible for a young person with a visual impairment?

Lighting

Does the lighting in the school meet the needs of all young people?

It should be:

- As consistent as possible throughout the school
- Of good quality, even and without glare
- Controllable, with blinds for natural light and dimmer switches to control artificial light
- Easily accessible – light switches should be positioned at appropriate height and outlined with a contrasting colour to the background



Examples of poor lighting

Lights should not be switched off in areas of periodic use. Bulbs and fluorescent tubes should be checked regularly and immediately replaced where necessary.

Colour

Are colour, tone and contrast being used effectively in the school?

Make sure that:

- Surfaces are painted with matt finish to avoid glare. Pale colours are preferable
- Walls are contrasted to floors
- Door frames are highlighted in contrasting colour to walls
- Door handles are a contrasting colour to the door
- Floors are plain with a non-glare surface

Physical Access

Is the school able to provide young people with appropriate independent access?

Areas for consideration include:

- Stairs and steps
- Changes in level
- Doorways
- Cloakrooms, bathrooms and toilets
- Teaching areas
- Communal areas
- Pathways
- Storage areas

For example, stairs and steps should have:

- Evenly diffused lighting
- Preferably handrail both sides – colour contrasted with wall. The handrail should extend beyond the top and bottom of stairs
- Highlighted step edges, approximately 55mm in depth extending the full width of the step along the horizontal and lateral edge
- Ramps clearly signed at the top and bottom
- Uneven surfaces clearly defined.



Undefined and defined stairways

Fixtures and Fittings

Does the school have visually friendly fixtures and fitting?

Try to ensure that:

- Furniture is matt finished and clearly contrasted with surroundings
- Work is displayed on notice boards at an appropriate height, and mounted with contrasting colour to board
- Each storage locker/tray etc. is clearly labelled in an appropriate format
- Floor equipment is on a contrasting colour background e.g. coloured mat
- Slip mats are secure and well contrasted with the floor
- Coat pegs are a contrasting colour, at the appropriate height with uncluttered access
- Bins, lockers and other protruding obstacles are clearly marked or put away
- Avoid clutter
- Young people are advised of significant changes as appropriate

N.B. the way in which each young person experiences the physical environment will be affected by a unique combination of needs including eye condition, cognitive function, movement and mobility.

Some young people may require multi-sensory approach utilising the senses of smell, touch and hearing.

Children and Young People who are new to caseload will have their educational setting environmentally audited and any reasonable adjustments will be advised.

Case study

Josef

aged 8

My school is great, now that lots of things have been done to make it easy for me to get around and also for me to be able to go for days without falling over.

We have smart new handrails, different colours from the wall; we have had the end of the steps painted so that I can see easily where and when they end. The lines where the classes have to line up are all painted brightly and big enough for everyone to see and I am allowed to be at the front of the queue each time so that I can hang my coat on the end peg to save me hunting for it and getting trampled on!!!

In school everyone has been asked to help me by keeping each area tidy. This helps me to know where things are and stops me falling over things (I have to remember to do the same!!!!) This is good for everyone of course. The new blinds are a great help and I am still allowed to wear my peak cap inside, just in case!

Yes, I feel quite safe now!