

The Specialist Curriculum

Orientation and Mobility

Daily Living Skills

Independent Living

**Development of Visual
Skills/Low Vision Training/Use
of Low Vision Devices**

Listening Skills

Communication Media

Use of Specialist Equipment

ICT

This is sometimes also referred to as the “Additional Curriculum”, “Habilitation”, or “ Mobility & Independence”.

The “Specialist Curriculum” is integral to the development of essential personal, social and independence skills necessary to access the curriculum.

It is additional to and different from the mainstream curriculum. At times it may replace elements of the mainstream curriculum when choices have to be made as to what is a priority area of work for the young people with a visual impairment.

Integrating these elements into the daily and weekly timetable of a young person does not always mean withdrawing him; often the content is a parallel alternative to the work being done by other young people in the class. Collaborative planning between the class teacher and the QTVI will facilitate the best way to integrate each element of the specialist curriculum into each young person's timetable. At times withdrawal may be necessary to ensure quiet, one to one work. Child Protection/Safeguarding issues need to be considered. Work should be undertaken in a room within the main part of the school with open access or clear visibility. It is accepted practice that young people with a visual impairment need ‘hands on’ demonstration of tasks requiring close physical contact. These methods should be agreed with the young person and explained to other members of staff.

Orientation and Mobility

Orientation is about knowing where you are in space and Mobility is about moving around safely and independently in the environment. These skills are predominantly reliant on vision. Most young people develop these skills from birth e.g. learning through imitation of others. Young people with visual impairment can develop these essential skills through structured taught programmes provided by a Mobility & Habilitation Officer.

Orientation and Mobility skills may include:

- Body Awareness
- Spatial awareness – knowing where you are in space and the environment
- Getting from A to B – this can include familiarisation around home and school environment.
- Sensory training – using sound, smells and touch to supplement poor vision
- Training in the use of specialist mobility equipment e.g. long cane
- Gross and fine motor skills

If young people gain the ability to orientate independently in their own space in the classroom, they will be well on the way to becoming independent members of the class.



Daily Living Skills

There is a range of skills which people who are fully sighted take for granted and learn incidentally. Many of these are challenging for people with reduced vision. These may need to be specifically taught and time needs to be given to teaching these strategies.

Personal Care

This can include raising awareness of appearance and appropriateness of dress.

Persons Organisation

If young people can organise equipment, resources and personal belongings systematically, then they are becoming independent.

The QTVI will be able to suggest many ways of teaching the young person strategies regarding storage, organisation of space, developing methods of identifying materials and location. You can also help aid independence by making school equipment as accessible as possible e.g. having the young person's peg at the end of a row at the best height.

Independent Living

This will include specific activities such as making a snack, ironing and shopping. The Habilitation Office will be involved in teaching these skills. Specialist equipment may be provided.



Development of Visual Skills/Low Vision Training/Use of Low Vision Devices

A young person with a visual impairment can learn to use their residual vision more effectively. This can support their understanding of the world and increase their potential for independent learning.

N.B. An understanding of their own visual needs will help them to make decisions about:

- The best seating positions in the classroom
- Layout, print size, optimum colours and contrasts
- Favoured lighting conditions

Some young people will use low vision aids (LVAs) e.g. magnifiers and monoculars.

These can enhance functional vision and help them to work and socialise more independently and safely.



Listening Skills

It is often wrongly assumed that young people with a visual impairment have more highly developed listening skills. However, these skills need to be learnt, developed to a higher level and incorporated into their daily learning situation and study skills.

Specific programmes of work may be necessary to enable young people to:

- Gain knowledge and understanding of the world around them
- Help them engage with the lesson as quickly as their peers and participate by actively listening to instructions and information
- Be able to use devices to record homework, revision work or present work in an auditory format
- Enable them to be proficient in the use of specialist equipment e.g. laptop, iPad, computer with speech

Communication Media

There is a variety of communication media to enable access to the curriculum.

- Enlarged print
- Enlarged print with modified layout and adapted presentation of visual information
- Braille and tactile presentation of information
- Moon (a simplified tactile form of communication)
- Electronic information
- Audio

Not all young people who are registered blind or partially sighted will need to learn to read Braille. However, there are a small number for whom Braille will be the optimum communication medium.

If a young person is going to use Braille as a medium of communication pre-Braille and use of tactile skills will need to be taught. In many cases these skills will have been taught before school age.

Braille is a literacy tool and needs to be taught and monitored by a QTVI alongside the class teacher.

Young people with a visual impairment have to learn a range of sophisticated skills if they are to be successful in being able to read Braille, understand tactile diagrams and develop their haptic senses.

Some young people will use a combination of these methods. The suitability of all these media needs to be assessed and taught by a QTVI with careful monitoring of progress and application in accessing the curriculum.



Use of Specialist Equipment

There is a range of specialist equipment available which can enable young people with a visual impairment to develop independent access to the curriculum: e.g. brailier, recording devices, science equipment, talking equipment, embosser and specific LVA's.

- Young people need to be instructed in the use, storage and safe keeping of their equipment and this sometimes needs to be done on a one-to-one basis in a quiet environment
- Equipment needs safe storage space
- Equipment can be heavy and bulky and transport issues around school need to be addressed

- Specialist equipment can be noisy but there are strategies that can be agreed to minimise this problem

ICT

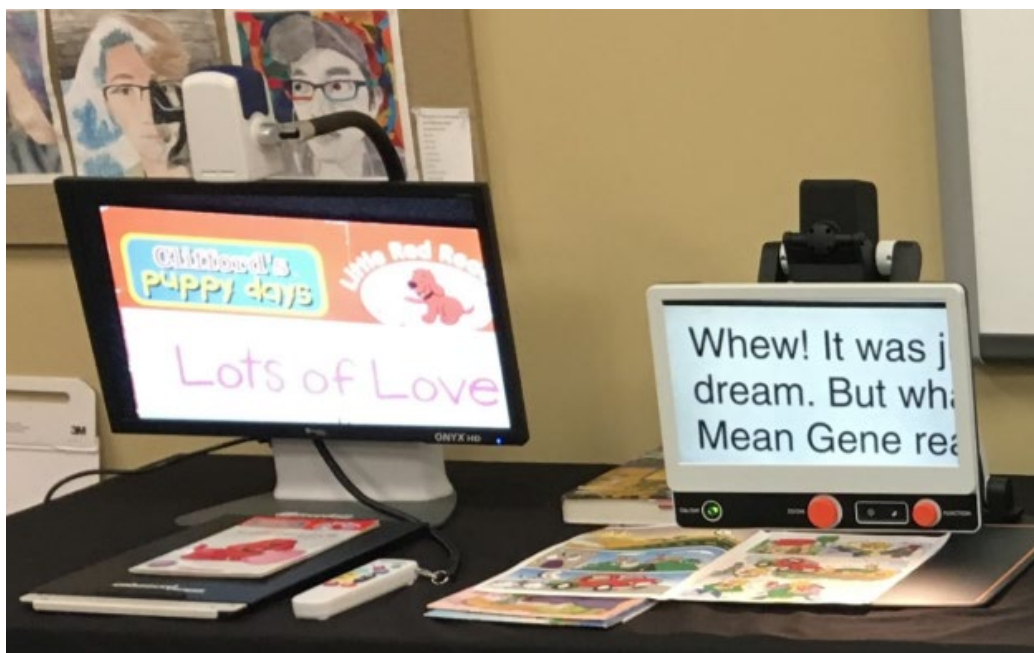
Young people with a visual impairment need to be introduced to ICT from an early age in order for them to become independent learners and have equal access to the curriculum.

- Use of touch screens, concept keyboards and/or sound based programs at pre-school will familiarise them with the computer
- Use of intellikeys/big keys enables the young person with a visual impairment to participate alongside their sighted peers
- Training on a structured touch typing program when they are ready, is essential to increase typing speed and accuracy to enable them to produce increasing volume of work more easily
- Training to use magnification and speech over programs are crucial for some learners with a visual impairment e.g. JAWS, Supernova
- Young people need to be independent in the use of computers so keyboard shortcuts/hot keys need to be taught.

Case study

Curt

aged 12



I am in Year 8 and I have just moved up a group in science. If the lesson is quick, my helper will write down the results so I can finish the experiment.

My favourite lessons are IT, maths, PSE, drama and food technology. I like to do things my own way. I think the vision in my good eye is all right. Another boy in my class uses enlarged materials but I don't always need them that big. Sometimes I get on with him and sometimes he gets on my nerves. My writing is all right except when I have to write quickly. I sometimes forget my school diary. I use a bar magnifier, but sometimes I forget to bring it. There are helpers in most of my lessons but not just for me. I always use the big French textbook and music book because they are easier to see.

My visiting teacher says that it's harder for me to copy from the whiteboard but I think I'm all right. Sometimes it's harder if the teacher's writing is scrawly or if there are bits in different places I have to copy or if the teacher's pen is running out. My visiting teacher is always asking my maths teacher to give me the work on paper. She says I should ask him as well but I like my maths teacher and he says I am coping. My visiting teacher says it's not about coping.