

Guidance for Teachers of Students who are Blind or Vision Impaired

Summer Programme 2023

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5d15a-summer-programme/>

Guidance on the 2023 Summer Programme for Mainstream Primary and Special Schools
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/246952/4c5f435c-a320-42ff-b2a7-e5fa01bd5659.pdf#page=null>

Text from the DE guidelines	Notes that may be relevant for children with vision impairments
<p>On page 9 of Guidance on the 2023 Summer Programme, we read, “A pre-programme survey should be issued to teachers, children and their parents/guardians to establish the child’s priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported.”</p> <p>This should enable teachers to individualise support by devising a Summer Programme Support Plan. Consideration should be given to including key aspects of literacy and numeracy into the</p>	<p>For children with vision impairments, it would be very important that the teacher working with the child for the Summer Programme, links with Class Teacher, Special Education Teacher (SET), Parent and Special Needs Assistant (SNA), if applicable. This is because the Guidance Document (page 9) explains that, “Consideration should be given to including key aspects of literacy and numeracy”. Parents and Staff working with the child will be very well placed to explain the child’s achievements in Literacy and Numeracy as well as where there are any challenges.</p> <p>Developing and exploring the areas below would be very important in these key areas of literacy and numeracy.</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>If the child reads in Braille or Large Print, ask the relevant teacher for materials in the child’s preferred format. This would mean that the reading material is planned in advance at the correct level. Emerging Readers and Reluctant Readers can be given help and support while fluent readers can be encouraged through being given material that interests them.</p> <p>Many children with vision impairments become very tired from reading. Therefore, audio books are particularly important to them. However, becoming accustomed to active listening needs practice. Listening to an audio book with a child would be very helpful towards developing listening skills and engagement with audio books.</p>

<p>plan together with supports for social development and enjoyable activities across various other areas of the curriculum.</p> <p>The challenge and pitch of the plan should be realistically achievable within the short timeframe of the programme.</p> <p>At the end of the programme parents/guardians should be provided with an overview of their child's progress and a record of their learning. The school should also retain this record of learning and ensure that it is used to inform approaches for the child or young person in September 2023.</p> <p>Where a child or young person is transferring to a different school, this information should be retained by the parents/guardians and provided to their class teacher/year head when the transfer occurs. This will help inform future educational planning for the 2023/24 academic year</p>	<p><u>Spelling</u></p> <p>Children with vision impairments have less access than their peers to incidental learning. Not seeing charts on the walls, signs etc. can mean that their exposure to written words is less than others. Therefore it would be very helpful if the Summer Programme could help the children with the development of their spelling skills, using the same programme as their class teacher.</p> <p><u>Braille students:</u></p> <p>The person providing the support should have some working knowledge of how braille differs from print in terms of phonics and word attack skills. The school's special education teacher (SET) can assist with preparation of materials for spelling, using the child's range of known wordsigns and contractions.</p> <p>For the young/early learners of braille, the student could use the LEGO braille bricks at home as a fun activity for revision and to target some areas of braille. Siblings/family members can also participate and play games together.</p> <p><u>Writing/Typing</u></p> <p>With younger children with vision impairments, the summer programme could be the opportunity to help children with pencil grip and correct letter formations. Children with vision impairments might not necessarily see the detail of their teacher demonstrating to the class and this summer programme could be the opportunity to help ensure children master these skills.</p> <p>Older children will be able to practise their writing through diary tasks or similar. Staff who work with the child will be able to explain if there is a preferred paper colour and line thickness. A 6B pencil gives a dark image (use a putty eraser for this pencil). Help the child make sure they have spaces between their words. The aim for the child is legible writing so that others can read it. Older children may have had typing lessons and the summer programme could be a good opportunity to practise typing. Through practising, children will develop speed and fluency.</p> <p><u>Braille students:</u></p> <p>Young Braille using students can be assisted with loading a page into the Perkins machine, Brailleing out words/sentences with contractions, copying exercises where they can read a line from a Braille book and then type it onto the Perkins or their electronic note taker.</p> <p>It would be beneficial to ensure that personnel working with beginner braille students are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supplied with a copy of the braille code • Info on apps e.g. Braille tutor • Child vision blue and yellow braille cell
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	<p>Mathematics</p> <p>Seeing the board is often difficult for children with vision impairments but Mathematics is traditionally taught from the board. Children with vision impairments may have missed out elements during the year. The summer programme would be an opportunity to explore key areas of Mathematics and help the children complete activities demonstrating their understanding. This could be delivered in a fun way, depending on the level the student is at, by organising for example trips to a shop for money skills, a bus station for time skills etc.</p>
On page 8 of Guidance on the 2023 Summer Programme, we read about the 'Use of technology to support engagement'	<p>Many children with vision impairments use Assistive Technology on a daily basis. Staff who work with the child will be able to explain what the child uses and, during the Summer Programme, the child should use the Assistive Technology to improve their access. Children use Assistive Technology best when the adults working with them enthuse about it. The Summer Programme is an ideal opportunity for staff to encourage and praise the use of technology.</p> <p>Blind students:</p> <p>Can the teacher assist with measurement / weight skills? The children can play games, measure out recipes, count seconds and minutes, they can also do some very simple money work.</p>
Aims of the Summer Programme	As these are outlined, they are all relevant to children with vision impairments
<p>The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance document are intended to assist teachers in providing a school-based programme to support children and young people to move forward in their learning by "Building Confidence and Connections" through:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidating relationships with their schools, their teachers and their peers. 	<p>Communication is eye gaze regulated and children with vision impairments can be excluded from eye contact and the subtleties of body language. Therefore, this summer programme can allow the time to tell children that they are welcome in their schools and important.</p> <p>Sighted children can be encouraged to take a look at the vision impaired child's equipment (under supervision). The VI child can explain what they are doing on their equipment and the functions of that equipment.</p> <p>Blind children can be encouraged to share Braille letters with their sighted peers. Schools can make up a simple card game, with the letters of the alphabet printed in Braille on each card. The children can match the cards.</p> <p>Many sighted children like to type on the Perkins. Leave a diagram with the letters of the alphabet in Braille beside the machine and show the sighted children which keys to press to make secret letters/birthday/Christmas/Easter cards for their blind friend.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidating their prior learning, their readiness for learning and, to the extent that is possible, reduce regression in learning. 	<p>Some examples:</p> <p>English: continue to read books with both low vision and blind children. Adopt a “Where’s Wally?” approach: find the word “ball” on this page of text ...</p> <p>Encourage older children to write about their day, this will assist both spelling and Braille contractions. Remember to get a list of known contractions from the Resource Teacher to help the child with this writing task.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing resilience and experience of wellbeing by promoting a sense of safety, calm, connectedness, self-efficacy, and hope 	<p>Some examples:</p> <p>Allow the low vision / Braille using child become the teacher and teach the person working with them some Braille / technology skills. Children love to be in charge, and to be the “teacher”, this will build their sense of wellbeing and create connectedness with the person who is providing the tuition.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing skills and routines to ensure they successfully transition into the next stage of their schooling. 	<p>Some examples - two weeks is a very short period of time and be realistic as to what can be achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Braille contractions – ask the teacher working with the child for suggestions of the next few relevant contractions as well as those that need review Money skills – in line with the programme the child is following in class Movement and mobility skills – practising the route from Reception to the child’s class or to the PE Hall etc Basic mathematic skills in terms of measurement, money, time in line with the programme the child is following in class This is a time for consolidating the skills that the child would have already been exposed to in school and the teacher could be able to explain what an individual child needs most. Personal spelling lists Personal story writing skills
<p>Programme Content</p> <p>In line with the aims of the programme, programme planning should be informed by the following guiding principles.</p>	
<p>1. Promoting a sense of SAFETY</p> <p>Promoting a sense of safety helps children believe that their needs will be met now and in the future and that they are protected from harm.</p> <p>The following can help promote a sense of safety:</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Routines create a sense of safety by providing predictability. Establishing routines will contribute to a safe and calm learning environment and give children a sense of security. 	<p>It will help children with vision impairments to get to know their school. Learning where their new classroom will be, practising the routes to the office, SET, toilets, PE and other relevant places will all be important. The school routines for safety on stairs and corridors can be explained and practised. The child might be shown a coat hook either at the very beginning or end of the row for their new classroom. By showing the child round their school and explaining routes they need, confidence will be built for going to a new class. The child might be able to look at their new classroom and try out a few desks to see which one allows the child best visual access.</p> <p>For the blind child, the use of braille around the new classroom will allow the child to orientate e.g. the door to the classroom, signs for the toilets in braille etc.</p> <p>Also helping to put up signs in Braille and learning where they are or exploring busy areas of the school.</p> <p>Additional safety issues can arise when there is a fire drill. Many children with VI get very scared with the noise of the bell. If they are allowed in the school building during the summer months, perhaps they can set off the fire alarm to learn the sound? They could have fun with this, to decrease their anxiety.</p> <p>We also have a lot of noisy items in any school, the bin lorry, the photocopier, hand dryers, echoing corridors. The children could be brought around the school into each relevant area and play with the sounds found in that area. Understanding of their environment will engender a sense of calm within the child.</p> <p>Some children do the summer provision outside their own school, so the above whilst very important may not necessarily be available to a child who is doing the scheme from another building.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recommended beginning with familiar learning activities and revision before progressively introducing new materials. 	<p>Pick one or two of the ideas above to revise and extend.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There should be a focus on consolidating familiar routines in relation to school attendance and engaging in learning activities to facilitate a sense of safety for the child or young person. 	<p>Most vision impaired students are good at attending school.</p>

2. Promoting a sense of CALM

The ability to calm ourselves and regulate our emotions is a fundamental element of wellbeing. The more regulated and calm we are, the more we are able to think, plan, engage and learn and the less stressed we will feel. Engaging in enjoyable and relaxing activities helps reduce stress.

The following can help promote a sense of calm:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities like circle time, small group session, art and music may support children's sense of calm. 	<p>Children with vision impairments may not see others in Circle Time and can be unaware of when it is appropriate to contribute. This could lead to them being quiet. In the smaller group, the teacher will be able to explore this and ask what makes Circle Time easier. Older children might be able to explain if they do not know when to speak. Then, introducing a prop such as a talking stick can help the child know when their turn has come.</p> <p>Calling the child's name first, and then asking a question, is also useful.</p> <p>Sometimes ask sighted children to use a blindfold and then play a game with a group of four to six children. They have to have a conversation where the word "YOU" is continually mentioned. "Will <u>you</u> give me a loan of a ..." The children have fun coming up with things they want to talk about, but they are also learning that the one under the blindfold is unaware of when they are being specifically asked for an item. All children get a go under the blindfold and then discuss how they felt when they did not know if they were being asked for an item. This leads to more empathy for the low vision / blind child. The children have now learned the importance of calling out the person's name before the "YOU" is used.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young peoples' experiences over the past two years are unique and varied. Some may verbalise their concerns, others may withdraw or present with behaviours which challenge. It is important to recognise and acknowledge that a wide variety of reactions can be expected and these are normal reactions to abnormal events. 	<p>This is true for all the children.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish regular rituals within the day e.g. greetings and goodbyes, regulation activities and transitions between activities. 	<p>Children with vision impairments will need the adult to come close to them. It will help to say your name so that they can be sure of who has come.</p> <p>Time management can also be taught during these activities. First we will do ... then at half past 9 we will do ... at 11.00 we will have a snack and playtime, at 12 o'clock we will have lunch. Talking clocks with timers are good for this activity. Often children with VI / blindness have no internal body clock and need specific instruction in this area.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use visual systems to signal expected behaviours e.g. where to line up, one way systems. Use visual and auditory signals to help prepare for transitions e.g. music for lunch breaks, count down timers for completion of work. 	<p>Give clear verbal explanations of everything that will be happening for the child with a Vision Impairment. Explain to them what will happen next and what is expected of them and this will allow them to participate more confidently.</p> <p>Tactile boxes can help the blind child to undertake their tasks. This is identical to the visual timetables used with other areas of special educational needs.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider ways to create a calm environment in the classroom using, for example, lighting, music, objects such as blankets, cushions, sensory toys etc. 	<p>Keep things in the same place and make sure walkways are free of clutter.</p> <p>Use age appropriate props, and have expectations that the low vision / blind child can actually move independently around a room once they have been shown where items are located in that room.</p> <p>Have bright / dark corners where a child who needs extra lighting or reduced glare can position themselves to be most comfortable. "Smelly areas" i.e. with nice smells can be quite attractive for blind children to explore. You can use perfumes, plants, calming potions (make sure the children are not allergic) to create this calm environment.</p> <p>Consider glow balls or sticks, toys with lights and music or different textures and shapes for a sensory space.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create safe spaces in and outside of the classroom to help children regulate, for example, calm corners, tents, relaxation spaces, sensory rooms etc. 	<p>The use of dark tents with disco lights and items that reflect hanging from the ceiling of the tent can be very quickly set up. Pop up tents are quick and easy to use and would be ideal to create this safe space.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity to engage in quiet rhythmic activities like walking, or yoga can be calming for some children and young people. 	<p>If any activity is being demonstrated, have the child with low vision at the front and centre. If the child is blind, they will need verbal explanations.</p> <p>Blind and low vision children may also need the relevant adult to move particular body parts into position, e.g. the Downward Dog in Yoga. Help the child to move their back, hips, legs, knees, feet, arms into position. It is best if you get a written permission slip from the parents which shows the agreed parts of the body which can be touched. The child should be involved in this discussion.</p> <p>Teach a blind child to walk independently at a fast pace. Many are scared that there are obstacles in the way and are reluctant to move at a pace which is good for mobility and health.</p> <p>Teach the child some dance movements, at some point in the future they may be going to discos and could feel very embarrassed if they cannot take part with their peers.</p>

	<p>The importance of daily exercise could be promoted, there are lots of 10 minute cardio workouts on Youtube.</p> <p>If the child is blind this may be difficult for someone working with them for two weeks. It would involve physical touch in order to demonstrate movement and this might be uncomfortable for student and teacher who may be relative strangers to each other.</p>
<p>3. Promoting a sense of SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS</p> <p>Promoting social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships with teachers and peers provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.</p> <p>The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and SNAs should take the time to build good relationships with children and young people by warmly welcoming them to the programme, listening to them and letting them know they are there to support them. 	<p>Reciprocal conversation may need to be revised, it can be difficult for a student with low vision and students who are blind to start or join conversation. Explicit teaching on how to hold a conversation with peers, adolescents and conversation with adults may be beneficial for some students. The following website may help with communication skills: https://do2learn.com/organizationtools/SocialSkillsToolbox/ReciprocalConversation.htm</p> <p>This is particularly important for the student with a Vision Impairment who may not see the smiles of Teachers and SNAs.</p> <p>An overlooked part of life for the VI students is the fact that they think they are the only ones who make mistakes, drop things, spill things, break things ... Give the child the confidence to know that adults and other children are equally as likely to do any or all of the above.</p> <p>Role model making mistakes yourself and acknowledging the mistake positively and brainstorm how you can learn from your mistake.</p> <p>For the blind/very low vision children, being aware of your tone of voice to help communicate feelings, expressions, i.e. alert them to potential danger, praising the student etc.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage with creative, fun, high preference activities along with teachers and SNAs and other children and young people will be an essential aspect of the 2023 Summer Programme. Important social and life 	<p>Staff working with the student may be able to tell if there is anything in particular that is needed here by the child with a Vision Impairment.</p> <p>Sports day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three legged race (the blind child will be linked to a sighted peer). Wellie throw, beanbag throw ... the low vision / blind child can be assisted to learn how to throw items. The obstacle course: concepts such as forward, backwards, above, below, under may not be fully developed, through fun and sports the child can quickly learn what to do, as they go through the legs of chairs, under a table, over a bench ...

skills can be targeted as part of same.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tug of War: the VI child can be a member of the team without any additional modification being required. • <p>You can get really inventive in this area 😊</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging more group work activities than might normally be possible during term time. 	<p>Role play, drama, make up a song, show and tell ... be inventive!</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting children to form friendships by providing lots of structured group activities within the class and during break times. 	<p>Vision Impairment can be a barrier to forming friendships. This is because the child with a Vision Impairment might not always see the other children so approaching to taking social initiatives might not be possible for them. On the summer programme, the adults can help bring the child to be with others, tell them who is around them, help get conversation started and, at the end tell the child that they did well and others enjoyed their company. Remember that the child could have had a great time but might not recognise the friends next day if they are on the other side of the room or forget to give their names when they come closer.</p> <p>Allow the peers to wear high visibility jackets or little wrist bells when the children are out on the yard. Now the VI child can spot who they wish to play with or talk to and to know where his/her friends are and if they move away from him during play time.</p> <p>Teaching the student some useful expressions or conversation starter phrases to help the student strike up conversation with their peers.</p>

4. Promoting a sense of EFFICACY in SELF and COMMUNITY

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that the school community you belong to can do what it needs to do to thrive and take care of its members. Feeling that you belong to a community that is **supportive**, can protect and promote wellbeing.

The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learning activities should be tailored to needs, linked to interests, underpinned by teaching strategies that take account of learning styles and individual needs and allow children and young people to experience success. Positive feedback, encouragement and affirmation will enhance their sense of self efficacy. This supports wellbeing, and enhances connectedness with learning and the school.	<p>We want children to be able to advocate for themselves, to tell what they enjoy and where they need help. Therefore, it is an important step along the way to tell them what they are going to be learning and then, at the end of the lesson, ask them what they learned. This helps us reflect on what we understood and where we need more explanations. Talking about this helps communication skills.</p> <p>Have times when the VI / blind child can be the leader. In general people tend to think that these children need to be minded and cared for. Create times when the blind / VI child has to help another child in the group. Partnership is important, not dependency.</p> <p>Also giving the blind/low vision child 'jobs' to do that create a sense of independence e.g. changing the date on the calendar; bringing messages to the office etc.</p> <p>Introduce growth mindset as a way to grow our brails and learn. So often, we think to ourselves, "I can't do that." But the person with a growth mindset instead thinks, "How can I do that?" Reduce fixed mindset of 'I'm not good at..' to a growth mindset of 'I just need more practice'.</p> <p>Encourage the student to join a school committee, i.e. Green Schools. This could help to build their esteem while also enhancing their interpersonal skills and encourage the student to work collaboratively with others.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Give children plenty of opportunities to play. Play is 'the work of the child' and provides children with opportunities to express their feelings and deal with their emotions. Some children may cope by re-enacting experiences through play or through their interactions with others. Provide opportunities for them to engage in creative activities through music/sport/ drama.	<p>Check that the child with a Vision Impairment has the best place to see, ensure there are good verbal descriptions and make sure everything is accessible for the child.</p> <p>Remember that the blind child will not have the same range of competencies or ability to control their environment, as a sighted child has. Make sure they understand the concepts being engaged in during an activity.</p> <p>Use the interests of the blind/low vision child to create opportunities for play with peers in the classroom and yard e.g. the use of toy cars.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on children's strengths, providing choice and including their preferences when planning activities. 	<p>Giving a child a turn at giving instructions, at explaining and leading helps develop skills of communication.</p> <p>Explore the child's talents and let them demonstrate that talent. Like all children, children with vision impairments have gifts. They may be good at singing or building LEGO models or baking or playing an instrument. Perhaps they could demonstrate for their peers at an appropriate point.</p> <p>It is very important to point out that the child can only be allowed to do this activity to the point where it is enjoyable for both themselves and the audience.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to provide some choice in their day e.g. seating, activities, jobs. Allow flexibility in how they can interact with learning materials. 	<p>This is important in terms of student – voice and choice.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching strategies to regulate emotions and manage anxiety will help children and young people to cope with any worries and anxieties that they may feel about school. The emphasis here will be dependent on individual needs and based on individual experiences. Work to support children and young people in regulating emotion and managing with anxiety should build on and complement previous work to support them as detailed in their school support plan. 	<p>Planned activities will give all the children opportunities for turn taking and listening to instruction and giving everyone the opportunity to tell their story.</p> <p>Standard activities for turn-taking and listening are relevant.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a sense of community by enabling children and young people to take an active role in the class by including them in planning and delivering enjoyable 	<p>Check that everything is accessible.</p>

group activities (e.g. Art, Drama, PE).	
<p>5. Promoting a sense of HOPE</p> <p>A sense of hope is related to fostering resilience and the expectation that things will work out for children and young people in the school community. The following can help promote a sense of hope:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers should reassure children and young people with calming, hopeful messages about what the school, teachers and others are doing to make the school community a safe and happy place. 	<p>Particularly important for the child with a Vision Impairment.</p> <p>Hope and calmness come from a shared understanding of experiences, so have expectations of the blind / VI child as well as the sighted child.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive reflection on things that children and young people enjoyed during the Summer Programme itself should be encouraged. Talking about these examples of resilience can be healing and reassuring 	<p>This is valuable for all the participants.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's and young people's participation in the Summer Programme will involve structured, predictable separation from parents/carers and will help to prepare them for their transitions in September. Supportive engagement with routines with an emphasis on fun, high-preference learning activities can help shift the focus away from any feelings of distress and allow children 	<p>This is valuable for all the participants.</p>

<p>and young people to enjoy the present moment and look forward with optimism.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark the end of the day with an acknowledgment of effort, progress and expectation for continued progress. Teachers should adopt a flexible and child-centered approach when planning a programme for participating children and young people. Therefore, it is paramount that the programme planning builds on the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each participating child by collaborating with parents and enabling the voice of the child. Where children and young people are transitioning to a new educational setting, support for the transition should be a specific focus within the Summer Programme support plan. 	<p>If a child with a Vision Impairment has to move to a new school, it could be most helpful to discuss this with the child, parents, SET and Class teacher to build on the transition plan for the student.</p>