



## Blind and Low Vision

### About blind and low vision

'Blind and low vision' refers to significant and ongoing challenges with the ability to see. Some children may be considered 'legally blind' if they cannot see beyond six metres (compared to 60 metres for a child with normal vision) or if their visual field is less than 20 degrees in diameter (compared to 140 degrees for a child with normal vision). Some children may be considered to have 'low vision' if they have permanent vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses and their ability to complete everyday tasks is affected. Children with low vision may have some sight, but experience difficulties with visual acuity (being able to see detail), accommodation (being able to focus), field of vision (the area that can be seen), colour vision and adapting to different lighting between environments.

As a teacher you can best support the student by knowing about the type and severity of vision impairment they have. Some children might be learning to read Braille, or use low vision aid technology like electronic magnifiers, closed-circuit television or iPads™. They might need large print materials. Understanding each child's strengths and abilities will allow you to develop ideas about ways to make education safe, fun, and as inclusive as possible.

### Strengths

#### What might be some strengths?

- Students who are blind or low vision may have the same capacity for learning as other children.
- They may have normal reading comprehension (i.e. they can understand what words and sentences mean).
- They might be skilled at identifying things through touch.
- Some might be able to learn number concepts through hearing.
- They can be resilient and adaptable.

#### Where you might provide support?

- Some students might have challenges with reading. This could include getting tired easily after reading for long periods, taking longer to read, or making more reading errors.



- Some children may have trouble making eye contact, reading facial expressions and observing social cues.
- They may have much less access to educational material than their peers.
- They might at times feel frustrated or disappointed with their vision or with looking different. They might feel self-conscious about using low vision aids which can be a barrier to making friends (e.g. magnifiers, CCTV, iPads™). They may feel like they don't fit in, or have low confidence or low self-esteem.
- Some students might have delays with movement, balance and object control. This may make physical education and being independent challenging for them.
- Some students may have difficulties with starting tasks, problem solving, planning, organisation and memory.
- Walking around in unfamiliar places can be difficult.
- They may not have as many opportunities to develop play skills and might not begin play activities without prompting.

## Evidence-based strategies

### Identify different ways that a child can learn

- **Find out the best size, type and spacing for printed materials.** Some students only need bigger text to be able to read. Some might have a certain size or font they like best. Providing extra material like this takes more time, so preparation is important.
- **Use hands-on learning.** Students might learn better using touch. Tactile materials (things to touch or hold) can be graphs, charts or drawings with raised printing, or 3D models, which let students use their hands to learn. These take time to prepare or need to be prepared before class. They also might take more time for students to use. The Statewide Vision Resource Centre has a range of tactual books and games ideas.
- **Describe images with words.** Describing images verbally or in writing can help students access more types of information. Try combining descriptions of images with large print, Braille or low vision aids.
- **Get students to re-read things.** "Repeated reading", or getting students to re-read material, can improve understanding.



### Consider the environmental setup

- **Let students choose their seating position.** If a student is able to read at closer distances or certain angles, let them sit wherever is best for them.
- **Increase writing size on boards.** Students with low vision might benefit from larger-sized writing on whiteboards and screens.

### Practice literacy skills

- **Provide a consistent reading practice.** Children who are blind or low vision learn to read more effectively with a consistent, organised reading practice. A daily practice is ideal.

## Best practice tips

### Be proactive

- **Give students work early.** Consider handing out work to students who are blind or low vision, or their families, before a class or term so they can pre-learn the material. They can then get a head start or have it reformatted into Braille or large print.

### Tailor teaching to students' needs

- **Allow more time.** Some blind and low vision students may need more time to read material.

### Consider the learning environment

- **Consider removing classroom clutter.** De-cluttering might help students who are blind or low vision focus. Having a simple classroom structure might help students move around the classroom safely. Consider removing unnecessary furniture and objects.
- **Keep things in the same place.** Try to keep things used by students in the same place. Tell a student if you are moving something and show them where it is being moved to.

### Encourage clear communication

- **Give clear directions.** Words such as “this”, “that”, “there” and “here” might not make sense to some children who are blind or low vision, if they can't see what you are indicating. Consider using specific words and statements to direct students, for example “Please put the box on the table”.





- **Develop students' communication skills.** Asking a student questions or giving detailed instructions can help students develop their communication skills. Using short and simple sentences and having predictable and repetitive routines can also be helpful.
- **Use short and simple sentences.** Sentences and instructions are more helpful when they are short, clear and simple.
- **Read aloud as you write.** Consider reading aloud anything you write on a board in a slow and clear voice. Check that the student has had time to complete their note taking.

### Help students develop their social skills

- **Keep students in the main class.** It is important for students to stay in the main class for most of the day, rather than with support staff in a different room. This helps them feel the same as other children and allows time for them to get to know other children.
- **Build social skills.** Consider teaching students how to make friends and have a conversation. It may be helpful to discuss ways they can act or respond in common social situations (e.g. joining in an activity), or to role play situations and provide feedback to them.
- **Encourage play.** Children might need help to learn how to play, and they may need more play opportunities. Consider playing with children and letting them direct the play. If they don't join in immediately, it may help to encourage them with general comments (e.g. "There are a lot of toys in the box"), specific comments (e.g. "Will you play with the dolls with me?") or by physically helping them play (e.g. "Let's race the cars together").

## Curriculum considerations

### The Arts

- Consider activities where students can use their hands and feel different textures.

### English

- Students who are blind or low vision may need more time to learn reading and writing skills
- They might 'guess' what a word or letter within a word is, instead of actually reading the word (these are called substitution errors).
- They may find it challenging to work out the basic sounds that make up a written word (this is called 'decoding').



- Many students will be learning to read with Braille, and might use devices such as Braille-writers.
- Some students might use assistive technologies like electronic magnifiers, closed-circuit televisions and text-to-speech devices for reading or taking notes.
- Encourage students and families to read as much as they can at home.
- Students may benefit from shared reading activities. This is where a teacher reads with a group of children and interacts with them.
- Encouraging parents to read to their child at home can also support learning.
- It may be helpful to encourage children to write by giving positive comments about their writing, getting them to read and write their name, and allowing plenty of time for drawing.
- Teaching children how to read books may involve showing them how to turn pages, or encouraging them to follow Braille or raised text with their fingers from left to right and top to bottom as you read. Different facial expressions, voices and sounds when reading stories can also help.

### **Health and Physical Education**

- Physical education can help improve confidence, self-esteem and independence.
- Students who are blind or low vision might spend less time being physically active than peers, and could be less confident in physical education classes. Encourage students to have a go at activities in safe environments. This might mean focusing on just having a go at first rather than learning a specific technique.
- Some children may not be able to watch others modelling a skill. Consider whether physical prompts or assistance when learning a skill may be helpful.
- Consider pairing blind or low vision students with sighted students and friends.
- Refer to AllPlay Footy , AllPlay Dance for more strategies and ideas.

### **The Humanities**

- Refer to identify different ways that a student can learn.

### **Languages**

- Refer to identify different ways that a student can learn.



## Mathematics

- Students who are blind or low vision may need extra support and time when learning maths, as maths can have a lot of visual content (e.g. tables, charts, graphs, plots)
- Consider teaching about numbers out loud. This could include clapping or saying numbers.
- 3D models and tactile graphics (large diagrams, graphs, flow diagrams or pictures that have raised surfaces) may help.
- Refer use hands-on learning and Describe images with words.

## Science

- Students who are blind or low vision may need extra support and time when learning science, as science can have a lot of visual content (e.g. tables, charts, graphs, plots)
- 3D models and tactile graphics (large diagrams, graphs, flow diagrams or pictures that have raised surfaces) may help.
- Teachings tips that might help include use hands-on learning and Describe images with words.

## Technologies

- Some students may have expertise in this area through using technology to aide their vision.
- Refer to identify different ways that a student can learn.

## Other considerations

### Statewide Vision Resource Centre

- The [Statewide Vision Resource Centre](#) has extra resources available for teaching students who are blind or low vision in all curriculum areas:
  - [Teaching typing](#)
  - [Physical Education](#)
  - [Art](#)
  - [Tactual books](#)

## Behaviour

- Some students might also show challenging behaviours. It's important to remember children are most likely trying to communicate a need or want that is not being met.





- Refer to the [ABC approach](#) for more information on how to reduce challenging behaviour by supporting the child and promoting more helpful behaviour, and our [emotions page](#) for more information about supporting a child with managing their emotions.

## Safety

- Students who are blind and low vision might need extra support with safety as they may be unaware of hazards in classrooms and outdoors.
- New objects, furniture and rearranging rooms can be a safety concern. They will need to be carefully oriented to new environments such as playgrounds or new classrooms.
- Consider having a buddy who can help children navigate busy areas safely (i.e. playgrounds). Refer to Remove classroom clutter.

## First aid

- When applying first aid, talk to students about what you are going to do and check they are happy for you to apply first aid (e.g. "I am putting on a band aid. Is that OK?").

## Safety drills

- Teachers will need to guide blind and low vision students through emergency drills. It may help to pair students with a buddy.
- Consider the accessibility of evacuation points and procedures.

## Friendships

- Children who are blind or low vision might need to be directed by another friend or teacher to find their friends in crowded rooms or areas, especially during recess or lunch time. Check if the student is happy for a teacher to intervene.
- Directing students to friends or providing quiet areas for friends of blind and low vision students can be helpful. Check if the student is happy for a teacher to intervene.
- Some children might be asked questions, or teased, about visual aids such as glasses, eye patches, strabismus (cross-eyed), canes or assistive devices. Consider teaching the other children about blind and low vision if the child and their family wishes for you to do so. This can help other children understand the child's experience and develop empathy.



## Homework

- Check that homework is accessible for blind and low vision students
- Some students may need extended due dates for homework and assignments.

## Excursions

- Excursions to places that are accessible for children with low vision or blindness, such as places where there are Braille signs and audio guides, can support a child's learning.
- Museums, galleries and science exhibits often have Braille signs and audio guides.
- Places with hands-on activities are ideal (e.g. the aquarium).

## Transitions

- Children who are blind or low vision may need extra support with the transition to secondary school.
- This might mean an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) including the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).
- The ECC is specific for children who are blind or low vision, and involves curriculum for things like assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, social skills education and more. The [Statewide Vision Resource Centre](#) page has information on the ECC.
- For more information about supporting students with disabilities when transitioning to a primary or secondary school setting access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).

## Braille

- Some blind and low vision children will be learning Braille. Braille is a system of raised dots which can be read by touch using fingers.
- Teaching Braille requires training, however teachers can support students using Braille. For example, organising for students names to be written in Braille and providing materials in Braille may be helpful.
- Visit the [Statewide Vision Resource Centre](#) page for more information on learning how to teach Braille and strategies for supporting children using Braille.





### Low vision aids

- Some children might use low vision aids (LVAs) like closed-circuit television (CCTV), iPads™ and electronic magnification to read standard printed material .
- Not all educational materials will be useable with LVAs.

### Other co-occurring conditions

- Children who are blind or low vision may experience [cerebral palsy](#) or [anxiety](#) and other challenges with [fine & gross motor skills](#), [learning and memory](#), or [social skills](#).

## Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for children with who are blind and low vision include our [audio stories](#), and:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Stay play talk poster
- Peer mediation steps poster
- Peer mediation communication prompts poster (for older children)