



Habilitation Strategies

Considerations for the Safe Return to School for Visually Impaired Pupils

Planning for the safe return to school. Some useful strategies for teachers who have a visually impaired pupil in their class.

- If possible the pupil with a visual impairment to remain in the same classroom as this will avoid having to learn new routes to toilets, exit points etc.
- If classrooms have been reconfigured with desks moved, pupils will require support to familiarise themselves with the layout. Ensure there is an easy access route from the door to the desk and chair. Maintain an uncluttered environment in the classroom and corridors.
- Position the pupil at the front of the classroom. If the pupil uses electronic low vision aids /technology ensure the pupil sits next to a socket to be able to recharge equipment.
- Always use the pupils name to get their attention.
- Antibacterial wipes need to be available to wipe any specialised equipment.
- Any changes to the environment need to be introduced to the pupil. Pupils may require some verbal guidance and the opportunity to re-orientate themselves around the school environment, especially if new entry and exit points or one way systems have been put in place.
- When developing routes identify landmarks to help with orientation. Be consistent use the same landmarks, same verbal prompts and the use of language to minimise confusion and support route familiarisation. The Teaching Assistant should open doors to reduce the contact and ease safe negotiation. The Teaching Assistant to remain at the side of the pupil whenever possible at a safe distance.
- Pupils may have to maintain contact with handrails and surfaces for safety and to aid orientation. A good hand washing routine or individual hand sanitiser will need to be adopted.
- If the pupil relies on trailing techniques to aid orientation then consider using a symbol cane to reduce contact with walls, door handles and handrails.
- Pupils will need the opportunity to explore and familiarise themselves to the layout of any outdoor space. Be aware that some pupils with a visual impairment may take a little longer to adapt to changes in illumination levels. A baseball type hat with a peak will help reduce levels of glare on bright sunny days.

- Staggered break times will reduce the number of pupils when entering and exiting buildings.
- Extra care needs to be taken when negotiating steps, changes in floor surfaces and gradients. Give verbal prompts when approaching steps and gradients. Never count the steps, give verbal warning steps up/ steps down.
- Pupils may need help with social distancing as they may not have a good concept of what a distance 2 metres looks like. They may not be able to visually access markers or signage prompting them to keep a safe distance apart. Some pupils may require a running commentary about the surroundings and what is happening around them.
- If the pupil is long cane user this should be encouraged as it supports social distancing.
- Sighted guide techniques should only be adopted when verbal instructions are insufficient to keep the pupil safe. Appropriate levels of PPE need to be used where physical contact is required. Staff should avoid coughing into the elbow used for guiding. Ensure pupil and guide wash their hands regularly.
- Pupils will require an increased level of independence – fastening their own coats, washing hands, toileting needs.
- Some pupils may need support for new lunch time routines as levels of independence may be reduced. If the pupil is having a packed lunch encourage parents to choose products that can easily be opened by the pupil e.g. drinks without straws that are difficult to put in, accessible packaging, mess free items. If school meals are provided pupils may require lunch trays to be brought to them. If support is required adopt side to side whenever possible at a safe distance– not facing each other.
- Where possible pupils should be dropped off and picked up by immediate family members.

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Some useful links:

<https://www.henshaws.org.uk/back-to-school-after-lockdown-a-guide-for-teachers-of-visually-impaired-children/>



Advice for Schools -
Transition Booklet (fin