

Féeach

For Kids with Low or No Vision

*A parent led organisation
that connects, informs
and empowers*



GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

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Introduction



If you are reading this, you probably have a visually impaired child in your school. As fully sighted individuals, it's hard to really understand what a school day is like for a visually impaired or blind (VI/B) student.

Students with VI/B need to develop additional skills to access the curriculum effectively and their needs tend to increase as the volume of work and reading demands increase.

Why this guide?

Your approach to our children will improve their outcomes and ultimately their futures.

In a 2020 survey with parents using NCBI services, the classroom teacher, SET teacher and SNA were identified as the most important supports in a child's daily life, after parents.

Visual impairment is a low incidence disability, many schools have never encountered it!



Introduction



What do you as an educator need to know to fully support a student with a visual impairment?

The Impact of the vision loss on learning: You cannot and do not need to know every type of eye condition to understand visual impairment.

You do need to know:

- What size text a student will need to read comfortably and efficiently
- What contrasting colours work best – black on white, yellow on black etc.
- What lighting works best – bright, dim, reactions to glare, adapting to changes
- How long before eye fatigue sets in and what solutions are needed here

This information can be found in a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) *



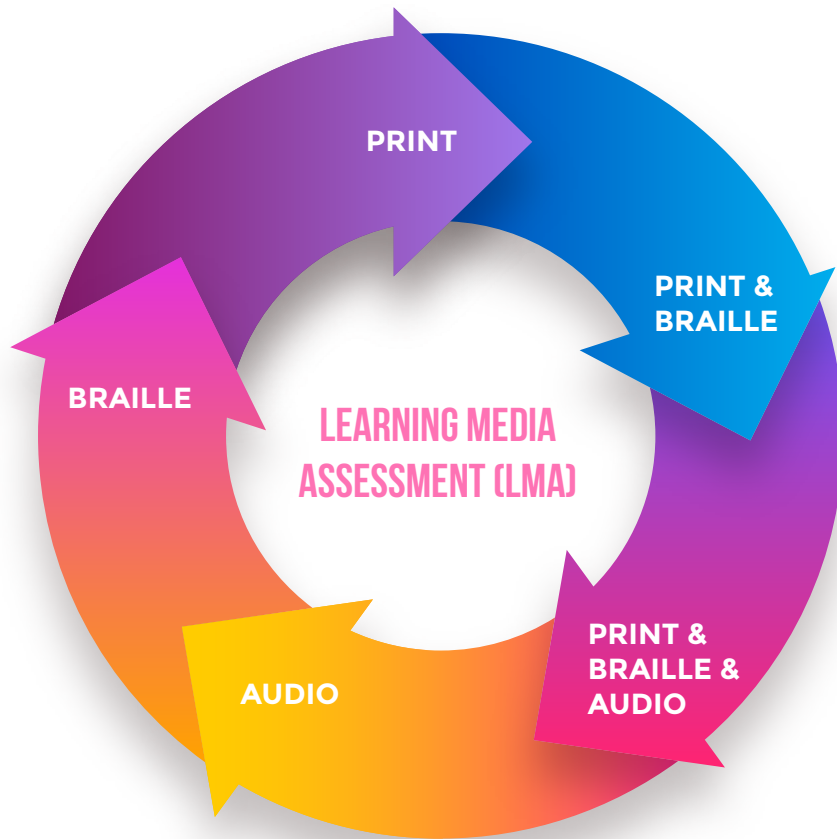
You also need to know what is the student's best way to access learning?

- Print
- Braille
- Braille & Print
- Auditory
- A combination of the above

Learning Media Assessment (LMA)



This information can be found in the **Learning Media Assessment (LMA)** *



Observe the Student: Your teaching skills will guide you here, observe from a distance, look at their outputs, talk to them in an age-appropriate way and read between the lines. They will have naturally developed many compensatory skills.

Talk to Parents: Parents are a great source of practical advice, often having an intuitive sense of how their child uses their vision and learns, they will give you information not found in textbooks but based on lived experience.

*You can get these reports from the VT/NCBI or the parent (LMA will need to be reviewed from time to time depending on stage of education and changes in eyesight).

This tool will give you a good interpretation of what your student sees
<https://visualacuitytool.bayer.co.uk/station>



What You Should Know About Incidental Learning



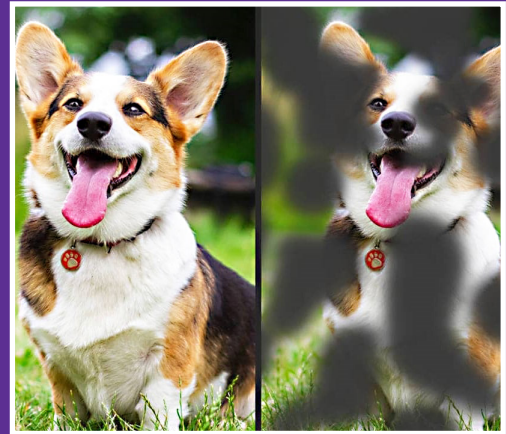
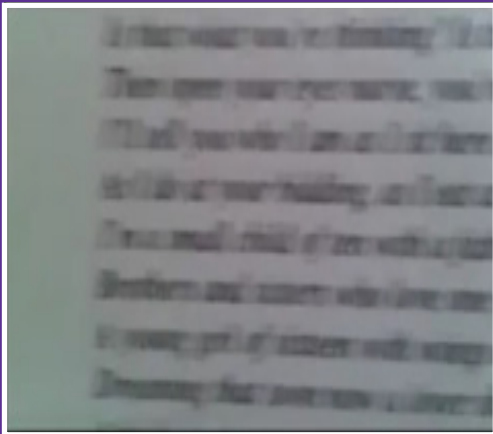
Learning needs to be compensated for with additional description, discussion, exposure, experience and with support strategies that will help children to compensate for information generally gained visually. Think **“Radio Teacher”** when you are standing at the top of the class!



Can You See The Board?



Can you see the board?



If you ask a VI child can they see you or the board – they will probably answer yes! Their vision is normal to them, they do not understand the clarity with which others see.

The above pictures are a few examples of their normal! This will give you an idea of the incidental learning they are missing all the time.



Myths **X**

5 Myths about blind / visually impaired children

- **Blind / VI children have so many barriers to overcome in education so take it easy on them** - Our children need strategies to become independent learners, oversimplifying / over helping leads to low expectations and outcomes.
- **All blind / VI children use a cane** – some use a cane all the time, some in new locations, many have enough vision to navigate independently, others may choose to be sight guided.
- **Blind children no longer need Braille, technology does everything** - A variety of access solutions is needed: Braille, audio, assistive / mainstream technology, large print, magnification. Each student is different but the more tools in the toolkit the better!
- **All blind children have stronger touch and hearing senses to compensate** – No, they are the same as their peers, they must learn how to use these to compensate for their lack of vision.
- **Blind children will have limited job opportunities** – with the right supports in education enabling independence, there are plenty of job opportunities for Blind / VI adults.



Facts

4 Facts about blind / visually impaired children

- **A student with VI will take longer to read printed material**, whether its large print, digital print, or braille, more time is needed to process materials.
- **A student with low vision will experience eye fatigue.** The strain of using their residual vision will often lead to a switching off, a headache or a listlessness. Visual breaks and alternative access solutions are needed.
- **A student with VI will take longer to take down notes**, even with good typing speeds, skills like tracking, scanning, locating position, focusing, seeing colours and whiteboards, all results in more time-consuming note taking.
- **A student with VI will take longer to transition from one activity to another and move to a different location.** Setting up / putting away equipment, adjusting to changes in light, locating books or other materials and navigating to the next location will all take time.

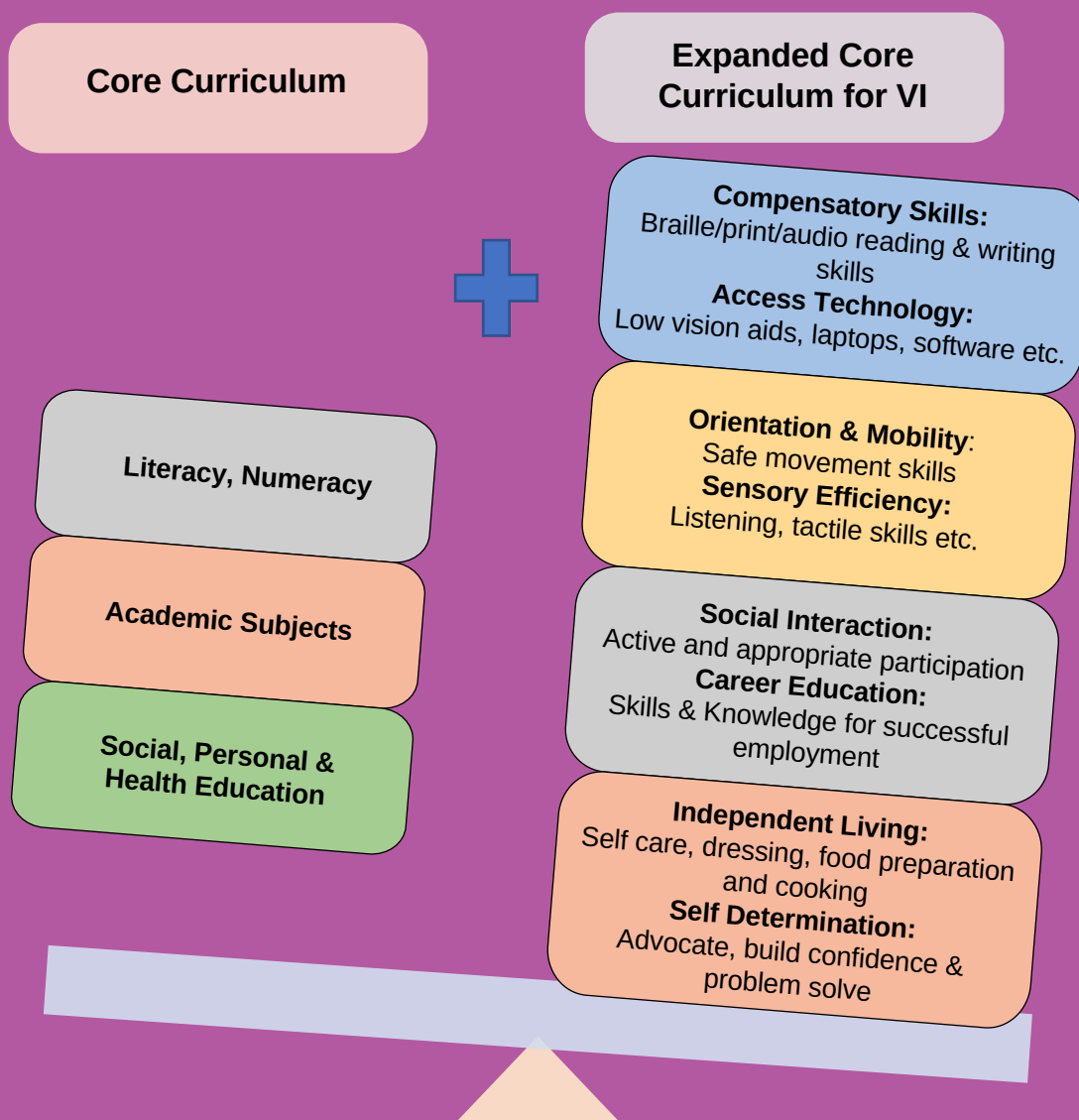


Expanded Core Curriculum - ECC



How can you compensate for this? Through the Expanded Core Curriculum - ECC

The ECC describes the additional learning competencies that are key to ensuring that students with VI have the skills they need to be able to access, keep up with and participate fully in education. Many of these skills need to be documented in the School Support Plan and taught on an individual basis as sighted students do not need these skills.





How to approach the ECC

A dual approach is needed

- Firstly, the student needs **access to learning** i.e. provide the curriculum in a format that they can access – large print, braille, close up work, assistance, low vision solutions, assistive technology etc. (Appendix 3 re: photocopying).
- Secondly the student needs to **learn to access** the curriculum themselves, i.e. file management, personalising accessibility solutions, touch typing / shortcut keystrokes, caring for equipment, troubleshooting, accessing and sharing work, improving overall efficiency, managing fatigue etc.

Your teaching will ideally manage transition from access to learning to learning to access for them as they progress through primary school. This will ensure they transition to post primary with the ability to function independently. Looking at least 2 years ahead helps to identify what skills they will need to ensure optimum outcomes.



Expanded Core Curriculum Made Easy

	What does it do	Learner Outcomes	How
Sensory Efficiency	Develops the use of hearing and short-term memory to access learning and instruction	Learning through listening	Memory Games Riddles Listening to stories coupled with verbal recall Listening to stories typing recall Listening to stories typing summary
Access Technology	Learning proficiency in AT in primary ensures access to the curriculum as they move through the educational system	Allows student access and produce class work efficiently	Fine motor – crafts, puzzles, games Use magnification on laptop Use magnification on tablets Create document, save document, file away and retrieve Send/receive email Use immersive reader Create tables in word Use PowerPoint Create folders and simple filing system on laptop
Orientation & Mobility	Orientation will enable a child to sense where they are. Mobility will teach a student to move safely and efficiently through their environment	Allows a student to participate in student life independently	Develop gross motor skills - Jumping/Hopping/Skipping Walk about - identifying where they are in school building – using feel of floor, colour of door, place of window Map the school Send child on job with another Send child on job alone Treasure hunts



Expanded Core Curriculum Made Easy

	What does it do	Learner Outcomes	How
Independent Living Skills	Enables a child with low vision to learn skills a sighted child learns incidentally	Allows a student to participate in student life and contributes greatly to them leading an independent life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hang up coat and retrieve it alone Organise books etc. to ensure they can retrieve independently Recognise money Role play buying things Use magnifier to understand timetables Develop strategies for finding people on the playground Set up and pack away equipment independently Take equipment to another room
Social & Communication Skills	These skills are the cornerstone of forming relationships and maintaining friendships later in life	Creating awareness and developing strategies when they are young will ensure integration in school and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication skills – What can you see? Communicate when you cannot see something, To adults, friends, family – (This can be done with 1 or 2 in group and then expanded) Turn taking – playing games Strategies to find place in line Understanding Facial expressions Physical distancing age appropriate

Let's not forget exams

Accommodations:

Throughout post primary school VI students are entitled to accommodations in exams, to level the playing field and compensate for the extra time needed in processing and writing. This will ensure that an exam reflects a VI students' ability and not their disability, relative to their sighted peers. It prevents the narrative of "he/she did very well for what they have". It also frames VI students experiences and raises their expectations.



We have found that if this practice is adopted in primary school it has the dual benefit of setting the precedent for the student that they do exams separately and ensures they maintain high expectations around exam performance. SIGMA -T Tests can be ordered in accessible format from the VT. Generally, an extra 10 minutes is added to every hour of an exam.

Competencies



Sample of Suggested Competencies and Toolkit ~ Visual & Audio Learners ~

Skill	Competency by 1st Class	Competency by 3rd Class	Competency by 6th Class
Developing listening skills	Recall short story verbally	Write 5 facts in short story	Type summary of short story
Assistive Technology	Use handheld or digital magnifier for near and distance work Be aware of screen reader	Access digital books Use email Use digital magnifier to see board/books/handouts etc Create word document Use phone/tablet to access information Touch Typing 20 hour grant for 3rd/4th class Develop knowledge of shortcut keystrokes Use screen reader for some classes	Typing 25-35 wpm Knowledge of keyboard shortcuts Use digital magnifier that will transition into PP school independently and competently Access all books digitally Proficiency in word & file management Proficiency of access to PowerPoint Proficiency in sending and receiving work from teachers electronically Use screen reader proficiently
Orientation & Mobility	Safely move around the classroom Map the school building and be familiar with common routes e.g. toilet, PE hall, yard etc.	Safely travel to areas outside of main classroom independently	Safely travel into, around and out of the school building and outdoor areas independently. Begin familiarisation of secondary school building
Independent Living Skills	Find coat, do buttons and zips, open lunchbox, tidy desk, access class materials independently.	Find books and other class materials independently. Develop strategies to find friends in yard. Identify money Time management – estimate how long tasks will take	Use timetables, order lunch, use money, pack, and unpack technology, purchase something independently, manage belongings, time management
Social and Communication	Take turns, find place in the line, good posture, face person speaking, ask for help when needed	Verbalise what they can and can't see with teachers and friends. Learn to problem solve	Maintain correct physical distance. Communicate needs and offer solutions

Guidance and information on any of the above can be got from VT- <https://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers> NCBI- <https://www.ncbi.ie> ChildVision - <https://childvision.ie/>



Sample of Suggested Competencies for ~ Blind and Tactile Learners ~

Skill	Competency by 1st Class	Competency by 3rd Class	Competency by 6th Class
Developing listening skills/tactile	<p>Recall short story verbally Be able to distinguish and use sounds to locate & source e.g. position of teacher's desk Identify voices Be able to use tactile skills to aid learning in visual concepts e.g. maths shapes, diagrams, tables, charts, time etc. Be aware of screen reader</p>	<p>Dictate 5 facts in short story (using scribe if necessary) Use sound to guide movement in the classroom and school building e.g. water from toilet/sink, corridor out to yard etc. Use Tactile maps and diagrams – NCBI/VT Use screen reader for some classes/homework</p>	<p>Type summary of short story Use memory recall alongside notetaking in class</p>
Assistive Technology	<p>Perkins Brailier – Learn: Type name/letters of alphabet/ word signs Be familiar with the parts of the Brailier machine, correct finger positioning and posture. Load & remove paper Use of both hands to read Brailleing similar level workload to peers, using number signs and punctuation Progressing from grade 1 to grade 2 Braille in line with ability.</p>	<p>Use Electronic Braille to produce class level readable documents in Braille or Word. Building grade 2 Braille skills to help improve speed and efficiency Access digital books through audio Use email Use phone/tablet to access information Be competent in using screen reading software</p>	<p>Use screen reader proficiently Proficient and competent touch typist, aiming for 25 wpm Proficiency in Electronic Brailier, using contractions, punctuation, number signs Access all books digitally Proficiency in word & file management Proficiency of access to PowerPoint Proficiency in sending and receiving work from teachers electronically Use tactile materials to aid learning of non-visual concepts. – NCBI/VT</p>
Orientation & Mobility	<p>Safely move around the classroom Map the school building and be familiar with common routes e.g. toilet, PE hall, yard etc. Pre-cane skills - NCBI</p>	<p>Safely travel to areas outside of main classroom independently, use range of cane skills (narrow spaces, stairs)</p>	<p>Safely travel into, around and out of the school building and outdoor areas independently. Begin familiarisation of secondary school building. Use travel apps such as google maps with audio output, use public transport apps with audio to track stops</p>

Guidance and information on any of the above can be got from
VT- <https://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers> NCBI- <https://www.ncbi.ie> ChildVision - <https://childvision.ie/>



Sample of Suggested Competencies for ~ Blind and Tactile Learners ~

Skill	Competency by 1st Class	Competency by 3rd Class	Competency by 6th Class
Independent Living Skills	Find coat, do buttons and zips, open lunchbox, tidy desk, access class materials independently.	Find books and other class materials independently. Develop strategies to find friends in yard. Identify money, Time Management - estimate how long tasks will take	Use timetables, order lunch, use money, pack, and unpack technology, purchase something independently, manage belongings, time management Begin familiarisation with new secondary school building
Social and Communication	Take turns, find place in the line, good posture, face person speaking, ask for help when needed	Verbalise what they can and can't see with teachers and friends. Learn to problem solve	Maintain correct physical distance. Communicate needs and offer solutions

Guidance and information on any of the above can be got from VT- <https://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers> NCBI- <https://www.ncbi.ie> ChildVision - <https://childvision.ie/>

Conclusion

This guide has been created as an aid to teachers, to bridge the gap in knowledge often missing when a child is in mainstream school with a low incidence disability. It is in no way exhaustive or definitive. It is written by parents for teachers. Over the last 25 years we have come to recognise that teachers are formative in how our children develop. Your input makes a huge difference to their outcomes. We would like to thank you for taking the time to read this, for your constant enquiry into how to support our children in education and your dedication to your job.

If you have any queries or want further information, please contact Féach on feachmail@gmail.com – we can send you a comprehensive list of useful links.

Eye Information Sheet

– Filled in by parent



Name of Student _____ DOB _____ Year _____

Name of Eye condition	Distance Vision	Close vision
Level of Colour Vision Accommodation:	Light Sensitivity – Accommodation:	Depth perception Accommodation:
Ideal Text	Ideal Colours for Text for AT	Colours for board
Fatigue point	Method of learning	Method of writing
Mobility	Any other issues	
Parents name:	Mobile:	Email:

Who are Féach?

Féach is a parent led organisation that connects, informs, and empowers parents of blind and visually impaired children to ensure equal rights, equal access and equal opportunities for all visually impaired children in Ireland.

We decided to gather all the expertise we have gained throughout the last 25 years and share it with schools to guide them on the best way to support our children. This expertise was shared by schools, teachers, parents and SNA's who have blazed a trail to ensure blind and visually impaired students can access the curriculum and reach their potential.

With the right teaching and support good schools have ensured our children become independent learners, are strong self-advocates and will succeed in reaching their potential as adults.



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