



Visual impairment support

Supporting a visually impaired pupil in PE and games

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet explains how to support a pupil with a visual impairment during PE and games lessons. The aim is to enable them to access these lessons and to maximise independence whenever possible within safety guidelines.

Planning the PE programme

A programme of PE for a child with a visual impairment will need to focus on the individual through the use of adapted and developmental techniques. The teacher must be able to respect the needs of individuals who have visual difficulties. Furthermore, attention should focus on abilities rather than limitations. Children with limited vision are capable of participating in a majority of activities but because there may be limitations, a broad curriculum is needed to accommodate each child.

There are five major areas that need to be considered when preparing a lesson into which a child with a visual impairment is to be included:

- Background to eye conditions
- Safety
- Teaching strategies
- Working area
- Equipment

Background to eye conditions

Before any physical activity can take place, teachers need to gain as much background information about the child's eye condition as possible as this will have a bearing on the choice of activities offered. For example, a child with a detached retina may need to avoid contact sports as rugby or judo.

Safety

Safety is obviously a primary concern but providing appropriate steps are taken this should not cause a problem.

Teachers need to make sure that:

- they familiarise pupils with their working environment, pointing out either verbally or physically any hazards it may have
- they remove any obstacles that may cause a hazard
- safety rules are known and followed by all members of the group
- where possible, lighting conditions match the needs of the individual

One to one support is provided where necessary

Teaching strategies

A child with a severe visual impairment will probably depend on receiving information through a medium other than vision, usually through hearing or kinaesthesia. Kinaesthesia is manual guidance and movement of the body parts administered by an instructor or other party. As many children with severe visual impairments have little understanding of spatial concept such as location, position, direction and distance, kinaesthetic feedback is potentially a more efficient method of learning than auditory feedback. Auditory feedback requires the teacher to use precise language and needs to contain clear verbal descriptions and explanations.

To get the best out of speech and kinaesthesia, it is important that the child with a visual impairment is positioned close to the demonstrator so they can see, hear or touch as needed.

The positioning of the teacher is also an essential factor. For example, avoid standing in front of direct sunlight and where possible wear a contrasting colour to the background (wear a bright tshirt if working in a gloomy gym).

Working areas

To enable children to make the most of the environment, they should be helped to utilise any residual vision available. Ideally the working area should be well lit but without glare or dazzle. If a lot of light enters from one place, it may be helpful for the child to work with their back to that place. Boundaries of working areas can be highlighted using tactile cues or luminous paint and could also be reduced in size. The working area needs to be clear of hazards and it is imperative that a child is made familiar with his or her surroundings.

In unfamiliar surroundings, pupils may become disorientated and thus lack confidence. Therefore a great deal of ground work will be needed to establish an understanding of the activity and the associated safety precautions.

Equipment

Often, just a slight alteration in the equipment used will make an activity accessible. Brightly coloured balls, mats, field markers and goals which contrast with the background will often enable students to utilise any remaining vision. In striking or ball games the size of ball, bat or both can be increased. The existing ball could also be replaced with one containing an auditory device.

Such balls can contain bells, ball bearings or emit beeping sounds for easy location. Buzzers or bells can also be inserted in or attached to goals or targets to give audible feedback.

Taking into account all of the above considerations, lack of vision seldom places any restrictions on a child's ability to participate in physical education. Therefore, there is really little excuse for excluding a child with a visual impairment from any P.E. lesson.

There are many activities suitable for visually impaired children which need little or no adaptation, but which may need specialist knowledge or venue. These activities include running, rowing, weight training, tandem riding or sailing.

Specific activities

Although it is often easier to integrate in key stages one and two because of the lower levels of skills required, it is also possible, with good planning and preparation, to integrate children into key stages three and four. Whatever the key stage, preparations should still revolve around the four fundamental areas previously discussed. The key to any successful lesson is to focus on what a child can do rather than what they cannot.

Gymnastics

Gymnastics is an area into which pupils with a visual impairments may be most easily and totally included, it is possible for pupils to work alone, in pairs or in small groups.

Physical skills such as balance, co-ordination and locomotion can be improved and extended. Body awareness, spatial awareness, timing and rhythm may also be developed and enhanced.

It should be noted however that a visual impairment may affect depth perception, spatial awareness and body awareness. Therefore, more explanation may be needed of what is required. The use of manual demonstrations and clear verbal instructions may help. Support or guidance may be needed for balancing activities.

Striking and fielding games

This group includes cricket, rounders, softball and baseball. Again, the same type of adaptations are necessary:

- Find appropriate fielding position taking into account safety and eye condition
- Use a sighted peer/staff member to direct and instruct
- When batting use a support stand
- Use a runner if and when required.

Swimming

Swimming is probably the most beneficial form of exercise as it an excellent way of promoting general cardiovascular fitness, presents opportunities to perform movements that may otherwise be very difficult and it can improve body awareness and knowledge of relationships of body parts. Swimming may also have a considerable impact on the social development of a child. Overcoming the fear of water may help the child overcome other fears related to social adjustment. Swimming is also one of the few sports where, although many visually impaired children may not master perfect swimming strokes, they can become fast, competent swimmers able to work alongside sighted children and compete against them. You may need to take the following things into consideration:

- It is essential that children are aware of the changing room layout, the route to the pool and the pool layout including steps
- It is also essential that pupils understand the emergency signal and emergency procedure for clearing the pool and are able to comply with both.
- Consideration of teaching position is very important - don't stand in front of a window and be aware of the glare .
- Swimming can be very tiring exercise, particularly to pupils who may not otherwise partake in much physical exercise, so be aware of a pupil's stamina.
- Use lane markers to help children swim in a straight line
- Remember to stop a child banging into the side of the pool by tapping them gently on the head with a float, stick with a ball on the end or other light implement.

Athletics

As most events are of an individual nature, this area, with minimal adjustment, is usually very open to children with special needs.

Running

Most children will be able to run unaided at their own pace, but some may find it helpful with a guide running at their side. Distance running is often preferable as it requires stamina rather than speed.

Throwing

Javelin, discus and shot are all events which can be great for children with a visual impairment. Children may need close supervision for safety purposes and repeated demonstration using kinaesthesia may be required.

Jumping

This includes long jump, triple jump, high jump and hurdles. Although many adaptations may be needed, visually impaired children should still be able to take part

Consider:

- Giving clear verbal instructions of what is required
- Giving close up demonstrations
- Children may need to do a standing jump rather than with a run up.
- Painting take off boards with a bright colour

Dance

Dance and creative movement can be very rewarding. They provide a supporting link with other learning areas including language, mathematics, humanities and environmental education. Integrating the physical side of learning with intellectual, imaginative and creative aspects can help children to benefit from a broad based approach to movement and creativity.

Dance can be motivating for pupils who do not enjoy the competitive element in some other aspects of physical education and therefore may help to develop interest and confidence. Body image and body skills can be enhanced by positive dance experiences.

Bear in mind that children with visual impairments may not be able to identify with certain gestures and may need guidance with levels and directions. Individual interpretation is essential.

Games

Children on the whole love games and those with a visual impairment are no exception. However, if they are to be enjoyed all, games should be modified at the learning stage so that they are within the visually impaired pupil's capabilities. The range of skills and depth of maturity required should match the readiness of the pupil. It must be accepted that by their very nature, games usually have complex rules and skills and require a certain level of expertise which pupils cannot always be expected to reach. A programme should lead a pupil through a carefully planned set of progressive experiences taking into account developmental rather than chronological age.

Games are usually placed into three categories—invasion, net/wall and striking/fielding games. By using thought and imagination, many simple activities which match pupil need and ability can be found. Pupils will often devise their own games and adapt them to their individual needs

Invasion games

This group contains the greatest variety of games including basketball, hockey, netball, soccer and rugby. It is often the most difficult area to adapt because of the number of pupils involved, the speed and the amount of possible contact. However inclusion is possible as long as the correct planning takes place.

- Arrange appropriate grouping, taking into account size of group and ability
- Reduce size of playing area and make the boundaries clear
- Adapt equipment - change ball size or colour, etc
- Simplify the rules

Net/wall games

This includes games such as badminton, tennis, volleyball and table tennis. For totally blind children, this can be an area which is very difficult to adapt but hurdles can be overcome. The principles for adaptation for both blind and partially sighted pupils are the same as for all games– reduce area, adapt equipment and rules

For example:

- Use coloured table tennis balls or large shuttle cocks
- Lower the height of the net or use another barrier such as a bench
- Increase size of ball
- Reduce density of ball e.g. use balloon ball to reduce speed
- Place barriers around table to help with continuous play

Outdoor and adventurous activities

This is a term used to cover educational activities concerned with living, moving and learning in the outdoor environment. There are many activities that are ideal for pupils with visual difficulties, which may or may not need some adaptation:

- Rope trails
- Canoeing
- Tandem riding
- Abseiling
- Sailing
- Skiing camping
- Ten pin bowling

In such activities, the emphasis is on enjoyable participation and personal satisfaction rather than on competition. Safety is an essential part of outdoor education and some activities should only be undertaken with correct supervision and adequately trained staff.

Finally

Physical education should not only promote physical activity but also healthy lifestyles. Aspects of health and fitness are covered in the general requirements for physical education in the National Curriculum for key stages 1-4. A personal health focus should be a part of every physical education lesson. Pupils need opportunities to discover their own strength, stamina and suppleness whilst participating in all areas of activity. They also need to be aware of the importance for physical activity and its effects upon the body.

All children regardless of gender or ability have the right to choose sporting and recreational activities. To be able to make this choice, they need to be given equal opportunities, positive encouragement and a broad range of activities from which to choose. The contribution of physical education to the health and well being of those with a visual impairment can be significant. Physical education can help close the gaps in enhance the lives of children. Sporting activities can develop physical fitness, balance, motor skills, body image, self esteem and confidence at the same time promoting integration with family and friends.

When teaching P.E. the easiest aspects to change are the rules and equipment. The most difficult aspects to change are attitudes which assume that because a child has a visual impairment, he or she lacks the ability to participate in sport. Therefore, as educators, we are not only working towards inclusion but also towards eliminating these negative attitudes.

More information

The visual impairment service is part of Dudley Disability Service. We are a team of qualified teachers of the visually impaired and specialist teaching assistants.

We provide advice and information to parents and teachers. We help teach and support children with a visual impairment of all ages and abilities. We also assess children's vision. In addition we support and advise on the use of specialist equipment and train in the use of low vision aids, provide Braille and enlarged or modified learning materials, provide training independence and mobility training and teach touch typing and specialist software. We will also liaise with other professionals such as social care, healthcare and RNIB.

For further information or advice, please contact us at:

The Mere

Lawnswood Road

Wordsley

Stourbridge

DY8 5PQ

Tel: 01384 818003

Fax: 01384 814241

Email - judy.lewis@dudley.gov.uk

This publication is available in large print, braille or audio. An easy read version is also available. To request a copy call 01384 813400 or email L2L@dudley.gov.uk