

## Cataracts

Here are some strategies to help schools meet the needs of children with cataracts.

### What is cataracts?

Cataracts occur when the lens of the eye (through a change of lens protein) becomes cloudy. In order for light to pass through the eye the lens has to be transparent. A person with cataracts is likely to have "misty" vision. Other symptoms can include affected colour vision and light sensitivity.

If a child has cataracts s/he is likely to have been born with this condition, or it may have been caused by injury. If the lenses are removed, the condition is known as **aphakia**. Without lenses the person is unable to make the necessary accommodations for focusing on objects. Glasses and/or contact lenses will be prescribed to compensate.

Glasses bring with them certain problems in that they are very thick, magnify (often up to 30%) and restrict the field of vision. The child may have two separate pairs of glasses - one for near and one for distance vision – or they may have one pair of bifocal glasses. Contact lenses are often the preferred. Once the eye is fully grown there is also the possibility of a lens implant.

### General Strategies

- Enlarged, well-spaced, bold worksheets with clearly contrasted backgrounds.
- **Dark** lined paper.
- Colour to be clear and bold.
- Controlled lighting conditions with the child positioned with the light behind them
- Awareness of how glasses may affect functioning: magnifying what child sees; reducing field of vision.
- If the child is aphakic, ensure that you approach them centrally so that they can see you.

### Position in The Room

When you are talking to the class or a group which includes a visually impaired child:

- Position yourself so that you can be seen easily, preferably against a contrasting background and away from glare. Try not to stand silhouetted against a window.
- Ensure child with VI sits close to the teaching focus but be aware of their lack of peripheral vision if they are aphakic

- When a child is working in a pair or a small group, they will need to be encouraged to turn to look at those who are sat to the side of them.

## **Writing**

- Writing implements need to give a clear dark line. 2B pencils or black felt tip pens are useful.
- Paper needs to be non-reflective.
- Any lines used, for instance underlays, should be clear and dark.
- Illustrations and diagrams need to be clear and uncluttered.
- Worksheets and photocopies need to be clear with good contrast between print and paper, again not on shiny paper.
- Teacher comments should be written in black pen large enough for the pupil to read.

## **Reading**

- Some children will need clear, large print books.
- Avoid books with poorly produced print illustrations.
- Try to avoid asking visually impaired children to share a book.
- If the child has difficulties with colour vision they may need colour illustrations and labels made using colours that they are able to distinguish between.

## **Social Skills and Mobility**

- An aphakic child may require input on managing the use of different glasses or bifocals
- Awareness of how glasses may affect appearance (possible teasing for magnified eyes and large glasses).
- During playtimes, ensure that the child is able to locate their friends.
- Be aware that if the child is aphakic, they may be unaware of what is happening in their peripheral view and this would impact their ability to participate in some small sided PE games.