

## Retinitis Pigmentosa

This is a degenerative condition affecting the light-sensitive cells in the retina, the layer at the back of the eye, that trigger nerve impulses via the optic nerve to the brain, where a visual image is formed. The term “pigmentosa” refers to the fact that under close medical inspection little clumps of black pigment can be detected over the interior of the eye.

The condition is first evident when the child finds themselves unable to see in the dark (night blindness). The main symptom is the gradual reduction of visual field which may lead to blindness later in life.

It is important for staff to be aware that the child’s vision may well deteriorate during their time at school. It is therefore necessary to note any changes in functioning. This may include increased clumsiness, problems with location, changes in head position whilst reading and startling when objects or people approach them from their peripheral view.

### General Strategies

- The child will need to be encouraged to actively look around them so that they do not miss any important visual information that it in their peripheral view.
- The child could be provided with digital access, so that the lesson materials can be easily and independently modified according to need.
- Good lighting conditions both in the classroom and around the school, are necessary.
- Any child with deteriorating vision may experience fear or uncertainty. Some form of pastoral contact, both with the child and the family may well be needed. In most cases deterioration is slow and there is some uncertainty as to its final form. It is therefore important to be in contact with the hospital and to be clear about the child’s perception of the condition.

### Position in The Room

- The teacher should position themselves so that they can be seen easily, ideally directly in front of the child’s view
- The teacher should position themselves preferably against a contrasting background and away from glare, using blackout blinds where possible.
- Try to establish eye contact with the visually impaired child, although sometimes this is very difficult. If necessary, encourage them to turn towards your voice.
- Ensure the child is sat at the back of the classroom or carpet area to access their maximum visual field.
- When well positioned the child should be able to access standard curriculum materials in class and examinations.

- Be aware of turning lights on and off in classrooms and other rooms as the child will need to be warned that this is happening so that their eyes can have time to adjust before they move around or begin a task.

## **Writing**

- The child should be able to access normal sized resources, using the window of vision in the central field.
- It would be helpful for them to learn to touch-type.
- Allow children to have their work at an angle and distance which is comfortable for them. Special stands for books are available.

## **Reading**

- The child should be provided with their own materials so that they can move them and place them in the optimum position.
- They will be unaware of what is in their peripheral view and so staff should be very mindful of alerting them and drawing their attention to information displayed on classroom walls.

## **Social Skills and Mobility**

- The child is likely to be very independent around familiar environments and under ambient lighting conditions.
- In darker, shadowy areas an at dusk /night, the child is likely to require support for their mobility from a paediatric mobility officer.
- When moving from lighter to darker areas, the child may still due to their eyes needing time to adjust to the change. For some children this may take some time.
- The child may struggle during the Autumn and Winter months due low light levels at certain times of the day and this would affect their mobility.
- The paediatric mobility officer is able to assess the child's needs and provide mobility and environmental support both in school and in the wider area.
- In PE sessions, the child will need to be given time to explore the equipment and area where the activity will take place before the session starts. At Secondary school. Consideration will need to be taken as to the PE activities that would be the most suitable for them to participate in safely.
- The child should be encouraged to become a good self-advocate, as they are the experts in understanding their own vision.
- In social situations the child may mis- interpret what is happening around them due to their visual field loss. The child should be encouraged to actively look either side of themselves to compensate for this.

## **ICT**

- The child should be able to access the interactive whiteboard providing they are sat far enough away from it to compensate for their peripheral loss of vision.
- Ideally, provide the child with their own digital access, using conference software.
- Encourage the child to touch-type.