

Glaucoma

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

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is when the optic nerve is damaged by high pressure in the eye. Eyes keep their shape because they are filled with fluid. If the flow of the fluid becomes restricted by a blockage between the iris and the cornea then the pressure in the eye will increase and this can cause damage to the optic nerve. The optic nerve sends the visual information to the brain to be interpreted. Glaucoma can be present from birth or acquired as the result of another visual impairment.

Glaucoma requires early intervention and frequent medical surveillance. Any changes in the child's visual functioning needs to be acted upon by contacting the relevant medical specialists.

Early damage to the optic nerve may not significantly impair sight but they may later notice a haziness of peripheral vision which gradually increases inwards. Sometimes the pressure causes the eyes to grow bigger known as buphthalmos. Children with bigger eyes are more likely to need spectacles and to develop a squint or lazy eye (amblyopia). Resolving the blockage and thus reducing the pressure in the eye can halt further damage to the eye.

Glaucoma is often accompanied by photophobia where a young person finds bright light and glare uncomfortable and the excess light entering the eye reduces sight.

General Strategies

- As there can be varying degrees of damage to the optic nerve, children with glaucoma may present differently in terms of their ability to access visual information and the additional support that they will require.
- Talk through work which is on the board or which is being demonstrated.
- Use precise language in order to give a clear verbal description wherever possible.
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for concrete learning through direct experience.
- Allow plenty of time for visually impaired child to handle and explore everyday objects and to talk through their experiences.
- Make sure they fully understand the concepts they are trying to learn.
- Allow more time for visually impaired child to complete tasks. It may sometimes be necessary to give them fewer tasks than their peers.
- If glasses are prescribed, they should be worn all the time including at playtimes and for P.E.

Position in The Room

- 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 that the child is seated centrally and not too close to the front of the classroom so that they can make good use of the central vision they have.
- Try to establish eye contact with visually impaired child, although sometimes this is very difficult. If necessary, encourage them to turn towards your voice.
- Ensure child sits centrally to the teaching focus and if sat on the carpet area, is sat a few rows back so that they can access the input but also be aware of their surroundings.
- Ensure that the child is positioned with the light behind them when working, the use of classroom blinds can help to reduce glare and help with photophobia.

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.
- Print rather than cursive script may be needed.
- Child's handwriting may be larger than normal.
- Teacher comments should be written in black pen large enough for the pupil to read.
- Depending on their level of vision, the child may use Braille as their method of recording written work. In this case, they will need a Perkins Braille to record their work.

Reading

- Some children will need clear, large print books. Some children will require all reading material to be presented in Braille.
- If a child is accessing Braille, then they will need access to tactile reading books and audio books. Check with you STLS VI teacher about where to source these.
- Avoid books with poorly produced print illustrations.
- Allow children to have the book at an angle and distance which is comfortable for them.
- The child will need their own copy of any reading materials due to their loss of peripheral vision.
- These children will need training in search and scan techniques as these skills will be more challenging depending on their degree of peripheral visual loss.

Social Skills and Mobility

- Make sure visually impaired child knows their way around the school and around the classroom.

- When outside, the child will need to wear sunglasses and/or a peaked cap.
- Some children may need additional support and mobility training from a paediatric mobility officer. This can be discussed and arranged with the STLS VI teacher
- Ensure that steps are highlighted with yellow edging to help the child to notice the change in floor levels.
- Anticipate new situations especially if they involve trips out of school, such as visits to museums or geography field work.
- Encourage confidence and social awareness by social skills training.
- Encourage visually impaired child to be as independent as possible in organising and taking care of their own belongings.
- Ensure PE is fully inclusive. Additional time will be needed for the child to explore apparatus and any equipment being used in the lesson so that they are aware of where everything is.
- Additional support will be needed for small sided PE games as the child will find it difficult to follow the action in the game and be aware of what is going around them.
- At playtimes, the child may need support to find their friends on the playground. A buddy system for them may also be helpful as it will be difficult for them if there are a lot of children running and moving around them.

ICT

- Ensure there is good contrast on the classroom whiteboard or consider sitting the child with VI at a separate monitor.
- Use high visibility stickers on a standard keyboard.
- Make use of accessibility options if required and speech reader software.
- Some children may benefit from the use of programs like Clicker which enable them to word process work and have it read back to them.