

STLS Sensory Service

Contrast Sensitivity

Here are some strategies to help schools meet the needs of children with contrast sensitivity. The needs of children and young people with contrast sensitivity can be met through Quality First Teaching and simple strategies used in the classroom. In the majority of cases these children and young people do not require specialist interventions from a Qualified Teacher for Vision Impairment. The information in the universal section of the Mainstream Core Standards for VI and the Best Practise Guidance for settings will also be useful.

What is contrast sensitivity?

Contrast sensitivity is the ability to see subtle differences in shading and patterns, for instances, being able to distinguish an object from its background such as the ability to discriminate steps covered with a patterned carpet. Some learners struggle to see objects that do not stand out clearly from their backgrounds, because they are a similar colour or intensity of tone.

General Strategies

- Use good ambient lighting conditions and additional task light in poor light conditions
- Ensure the child sits with their back to windows, away from direct sunlight and glare. Blinds can be used to reduce glare.
- Place objects against good well contrasting backgrounds. Alternatively, the use of a light board will allow objects to stand out.
- Use precise language in order to give a clear verbal description wherever possible.
- Produce information free from visual clutter.
- If information shared with the child contains poorly contrasting or visually complicated pictures, these may need to be explained to the child or for them to be given a written commentary of what is being shown in the picture.
- Ensure all text and worksheets have good contrast between the text colour and the background colour. Avoid yellow writing on white paper.
- Allow more time for the child to complete tasks or to process information.
- Walls, furniture and floors may blend into each other if the child has issues with contrast sensitivity. Make sure there is good contrast between the floor and furniture and floor and walls.
- For PE lessons, the use of brightly coloured markers will help the child to see the layout of the activity and brightly coloured balls and equipment will help them to access the lesson.
- Use of yellow tape on the edge of steps will support a child's mobility up and down stairs.

- Accessibility options on computers, laptops and iPads can be set so that the background and text colours are high contrast, e.g. white text on a black background, yellow text on a blue background.