

OUR VISION FOR
EQUAL
EDUCATION



OUR 4 KEY ASKS

As the charity which runs the Royal Blind School and Learning Hub, working to support excellence both in specialist and mainstream education for vision impaired pupils, Royal Blind is committed to a future where all our vision impaired children and young people receive the specialist support they need.

Our Vision For Equal Education includes four key actions for government and education authorities:

#1

A Scottish Government Action Plan to recruit and retain the specialist teachers we need for increasing numbers of vision impaired pupils

Pupil census figures show that over the past decade the number of vision impaired pupils has doubled. This means that nationally we require an increase in Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs), but in fact numbers have fallen, and some local authorities have no QTVI. An Action Plan should be established to ensure sufficient teachers are recruited to train as QTVIs and every vision impaired pupil has access to their specialist support.

#3

Effective transitions for vision impaired young people

More specialist support is required to help vision impaired pupils move into work or continue education after school. In 2015/16, 35.9% of pupils with vision impairment progressed to Further Education, but for 2016/17 this number fell to 32.2%. For pupils studying in a specialist school there should be more opportunities to spend an additional year in school to help ensure more effective transitions for these young people, and more flexible placements in mainstream and specialist schools.

#2

A new SQA training qualification in vision impairment for education support staff and others including those providing care and therapy

The experience of teaching and supporting vision impaired pupils is very different than for fully sighted children and young people. We believe education support staff working with pupils who are blind or partially sighted, and others including those providing care and therapy, should receive vision impairment awareness training. Royal Blind provides this training free through its Learning Hub based at the Royal Blind School. We believe an SQA training qualification in vision impairment awareness should be available to mainstream staff in schools, and staff should be given the time to engage in training.

#4

A fair and pupil-centred placement system for vision impaired young people

Royal Blind welcomes moves to reform the Additional Support Needs tribunal system but too often decisions made regarding placements in specialist schools for vision impaired pupils appear to be based mainly on budgetary considerations. The system for considering applications for placements should be reviewed to ensure decisions are driven by the needs of pupils.

“Specialist support is vital for pupils with vision impairment if they are to be empowered to succeed in education”



Mark O'Donnell, Chief Executive

Research has shown that up to 80% of learning takes place through our vision, which is why additional support for pupils who are blind and partially sighted is so important.

Our education system must respond to a growing need to support children and young people who are blind and partially sighted. The Scottish Government's school census figures show that the number of pupils with vision impairment has more than doubled, from 2,005 in 2010 to 4,331

in 2017. However, over the same period there has been a reduction in the number of specialist teachers for children and young people with vision impairment. We believe all vision impaired pupils need specialist support, whether that be in mainstream or a specialist setting like the Royal Blind School, and we need to work together in government, parliament, local authorities and the third sector to make this happen. That is why we hope you will share Our Vision For Equal Education.



“At the Royal Blind School, we are aspirational and ambitious for our pupils and are very proud of their achievements, great or small.”

Elaine Brackenridge, Head Teacher, The Royal Blind School

At the Royal Blind School, we have created an educational environment where barriers to learning are broken down and pupils are fully included.

The care and education provided is specifically tailored towards the individual needs of our pupils, whose educational needs range from the experiential level of learning to those who undertake advanced highers. Many of our pupils have additional support needs as well as vision impairment and benefit immensely from the small class sizes we provide. Although we support, facilitate and promote inclusion within a local

mainstream school where possible, we also believe in Getting It Right For Every Child and in more than a few cases, the mainstream environment is unable to meet all of the needs of pupils, even with the best efforts of staff. We want Scotland's education system to be more ambitious, delivering the highest quality of provision for pupils with vision impairment, whether they are in specialist or mainstream education. This is why we are making the case for a greater priority to be given to specialist vision impairment education in Scotland, and also seeking to play our role by providing support to staff throughout Scotland who work with vision impaired pupils.

OUR CAMPAIGN IN NUMBERS



RISING NUMBERS OF VISION IMPAIRED CHILDREN

4,331 vision impaired pupils in 2017

The Scottish Government's Pupil Census for 2017 shows there were 4,331 pupils with vision impairment.

This is more than double that recorded in the Pupil Census in 2010, which showed in that year there were 2,005 vision impaired pupils.¹

A REDUCTION IN SPECIALIST TEACHERS

65 qualified teachers working in all local authorities for 4,177 pupils.

A 2012 study by the Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC) reported there were 88 Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) working in 27 local authorities for 2,019 vision impaired pupils.

A second study by the SSC in 2016 found there were a total of 65 QTVIs working in all local authorities for 4,177 pupils.²

AN ATTAINMENT GAP FOR VISION IMPAIRED CHILDREN

88.8% of pupils in 2017 with vision impairment moved on to positive destinations

The figures for 2016/ 17 showed 88.8% of pupils with vision impairment progressed to higher education, training or employment, an increase on the previous year. However, there remains an attainment gap for these pupils in comparison with those without additional support needs, 94.9% of whom move on to positive destinations.

The same figures show a reduction in the number of vision impaired pupils progressing to Further Education compared with 2015/16, falling from 35.9% of pupils to 32.2%.³

SPECIALIST TEACHING FROM SPECIALIST TEACHERS

Up to **80%** of our learning is through our vision

This means it is vital for vision impaired pupils to benefit from learning approaches designed by specialist teachers with knowledge of delivering and designing a curriculum.

If we are to create a more level playing field for vision impaired children and young people, it is essential they all have adequate access to support from QTVIs.⁴



References

1. The Scottish Government's pupil census figures can be found at: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/dspupcensus
2. These are headcount figures, and the figures for the 2012 study are affected by a number of local authorities not responding. The reports by the Scottish Sensory Centre can be found at www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/research/papers.html
3. Figures on attainment for vision impaired pupils can be found at Table L1.5 at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/6856
4. Source: College of Optometrists in Vision Development www.covd.org/page/Learning

OUR CAMPAIGN IN ACTION

EARLY YEARS CASE STUDY: HELPING BO FLOURISH AND GROW AT SCHOOL

It is estimated that up to 80% of our learning is through our use of vision. In early years, much of this is 'incidental' learning such as noticing our surroundings and copying activities taking place in the world around us. For a child with vision impairment, this ability is greatly reduced.

At the Royal Blind School, pupils are given the opportunity to experience school on equal terms with their sighted peers in mainstream school. Seven-year-old Bo is one such pupil who has flourished with the support of his teachers and the wider staff community.

Bo's mother, Lucy, said: "One of the most noticeable ways Bo has developed since first attending the Royal Blind School is his confidence. When he first came to the Royal Blind School he was worried about being in the corridors without his teachers, he always wanted to hold their hands. Now, because the environment is tailored to his needs, and because all of the staff are able to work with the knowledge of his needs – from the teachers to the caretakers and dinner staff – he has grown in confidence in this secure environment and has been beginning to learn skills that he wouldn't have been confident to learn otherwise.

"I also think that the benefit of having somebody who can teach literacy and numeracy in your chosen medium, which for Bo is braille, with you all day every day, the same as any sighted child benefits from, is really important at such an early age."

“One of the most noticeable ways Bo has developed since first attending the Royal Blind School is his confidence.”



“

He is happy to go out and play with his friends again and he has stopped worrying about the future.

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CASE STUDY: HELPING BUILD CHRIS'S CONFIDENCE

In 2017 the Royal Blind School began to provide the vision impairment service for East Lothian Council, delivering specialist education and support to pupils with vision impairment across the local authority.

The East Lothian Vision Impairment Service (ELVIS) enables pupils to access learning through the use of braille, large print, specialist technology and adapted learning materials, such as tactile diagrams, whilst offering support in developing independence and social skills. ELVIS also assists pupils and staff at crucial times of transition.

Chris, aged 11, was one of the first pupils to be supported by the service.

Chris' mum Heather, said: "The difference in Chris in just a year has been amazing. It was recognised that there was a need for Chris to learn braille before starting high school and that time was a factor so everything was in place very quickly and he was up and running in no time. They provide support by adapting materials for Chris and

ensuring he is able to fully access his classes as well as his sighted classmates can.

"The year before ELVIS, Chris' sight had deteriorated quite quickly and he had no confidence whatsoever. He was constantly worrying about the future. Things had gotten so bad he was attending counselling.

"Now, it's just about a year later and Chris is reading braille which he had never done before. He has taken to it so quickly and seems to really enjoy reading. His confidence is back and he is like a different child. He is happy to go out and play with his friends again and he has stopped worrying about the future.

"His one-to-one support in school is great and if anything comes up that they think Chris might struggle with, his ELVIS teachers are able to suggest adaptations to class materials so he can keep up with his peers."



About Royal Blind

Royal Blind is Scotland's largest vision impairment organisation. We provide educational, care and transcription services for blind and partially sighted people of all ages. Our vision is to see a community in which blind and partially sighted people, including those who have other disabilities, are fully included and lead fulfilling lives.

We operate only in Scotland and care for, educate and employ blind and partially sighted people from across the country, with occasional referrals from the wider UK. Our sister charity is Scottish War Blinded, which provides free support for all veterans with sight loss, no matter if they lost their sight during or after service.

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