# Ensuring the Effective Management of Education Services for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment

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This statement should be read alongside RNIB’s other [policy position statements on children and young people.](https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaigning-policy-and-reports-hub-education/education-policy-statements)

This statement should be read in the context of the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the 2015 statutory guidance, ‘[SEND Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25): 0 to 25 years’, Additional Learning Needs Code, Additional Support for learning and The code of practice.

This statement is supported by VIEW, the professional association of the vision impairment workforce.

## What we think

In order for specialist services for children and young people with vision impairment (VI) to deliver high quality, tailored support they need to be managed by individuals with an understanding of VI. This is particularly important as VI is a low incidence, high impact disability where decisions about support often require finely balanced judgements, placing the immediate needs of individual learners in the wider context of their long-term development.

Children and young people with VI face unique challenges to learning which can only be addressed by specialist knowledge and understanding. Most mainstream teachers only come across one or two children and young people with VI throughout their career, if any. That means it is unlikely that most teachers would build up the expertise and understanding to support these children’s needs.

All children and young people with vision impairment require specialist support to address crucial needs in their cognitive development, communication, social and independence skills. The level of input needed will vary according to the severity of their vision impairment, the needs and skills of each individual child, the nature of their setting and a number of other variable individual factors.

Key professionals that provide specialist support for children and young people include Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs). We maintain that blind and partially sighted children and young people must receive specialist assessment and support from a QTVI who hold a mandatory qualification (MQ) in VI, in addition to qualified teacher status. VI team managers who are qualified to teach children and young people with VI possess the specialist knowledge, skills and experience needed to effectively supervise, support and develop the specialist skills of their team so the needs of the children and young people in their local area can be met as fully as possible.

## What’s the issue?

Historically the person with strategic management responsibility for the VI service was most likely to be a teacher with the mandatory qualification (MQ) in vision, hearing and/or multi-sensory impairment. These individuals are well placed to make the necessary judgements about the deployment and development of their staff.

However, in recent years the specialist status of the manager’s role has come under threat as a result of local authority restructures and budget cuts or freezes. In 2019, RNIB’s Freedom of Information survey of local authorities in England found that only three in four service managers held a specialist qualification in sensory impairment. This means that at least a quarter of managers with strategic responsibility for the provision of specialist educational support for children and young people with vision impairment lacked in-depth understanding of the developmental, educational and social impact of vision impairment in children. This is particularly concerning, considering the association of vision impairment and other types of SEND/ALN/ASN.

We know from research that children and young people with VI who are given the wrong type of support at critical times in their education, enter adulthood without having had sufficient opportunity to develop their own agency, voice and independence, which has implications for their future prospects and long term outcomes. This concern underpins the need and development of the specialist Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), which clarifies and outlines the elements of specialist skill development, interventions and best practice support that are considered to be essential for children and young people with vision impairment, to enable them to access an appropriate and equitable education ([www.rnib.org.uk/cfvi](http://www.rnib.org.uk/cfvi)).

## What should happen

In order to protect the rights of children and young people with vision impairment with equitable access to education, we strongly recommend that local authorities ensure:

1. The manager of VI services has a relevant specialist qualification to make judgements about the deployment and professional development of their staff in the best interests of the children and young people with VI.
2. The manager of the VI service has a good understanding of the size and characteristics of the population of children and young people with VI in their area, and the relevant agencies involved in their support.
3. The VI service delivers interventions and support for children and young people with VI which are shaped and informed by the CFVI.
4. In any cases where a manager of a VI service does not possess relevant specialist qualifications, there must be strategies in place to ensure that they gain sufficient understanding of the developmental implications of VI to make appropriate judgements and sound oversight to the service. It is important such strategies include VI awareness training and peer mentoring by other managers with relevant qualifications and experience.

RNIB and VIEW have published a separate policy statement on the critical role of the QTVI which is available at [Policy Statements | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/get-involved/support-a-campaign/campaign-resources/policy-statements/).

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people with vision impairment, so they can reach their full potential in adult life. Many of our policy priorities are reflected in the CFVI work which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

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