# Specialist provision for children and young people with vision impairment in special schools

**January 2023**

This statement should be read alongside RNIB’s other [policy position statements on children and young people 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’.

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

## What we think

Children with vision impairment and complex or additional needs, who attend special schools, have an equal right of access to specialist VI education support as children in mainstream schools.

Two in every 1,000 of children and young people up to the age of 25 in the UK have a vision impairment, at least 50 per cent of whom have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Children with learning disabilities, cerebral palsy and severe sensorineural deafness are at higher risk than children without these conditions of having vision impairment. There is a much higher prevalence (5.6 per cent) of vision impairment in the population of children and young people with learning disabilities. Children with learning disabilities are also more likely than other children to have severe short sight (myopia) or long sight (hyperopia).

Children and young people with vision impairment face unique challenges to learning which can only be addressed by specialist knowledge and understanding.

Children in all types of educational setting who have an identified or suspected vision impairment are entitled to assessment of their visual needs by a Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairments, (QTVI), or Multi-Sensory Impairments (QTMSI) and ongoing support for their visual special educational needs should be overseen by people with that level of specialist qualification.

## What’s the issue

Approximately 3 in 10 children with a known vision impairment are educated in special schools for pupils with learning or physical difficulties.

There are also likely to be substantial numbers of learners in special schools with unidentified vision impairment or severe refractive error (that is correctable) or who are not receiving specialist provision for their vision needs. [look at]

RNIB is aware that, as a result of cuts to public sector funding, some local authorities are reducing or withdrawing QTVI support from the education VI advisory service for pupils with vision impairment in special schools. We believe that this is unfair and discriminatory, and will adversely affect children’s capacity to learn and develop. A lack of training to help understand the impact of vision impairment on learning and failing to provide the right interventions to support access to the curriculum and development of social and independence skills can also have a negative effect on their wellbeing, behaviour and levels of frustration.

## Recommendations

RNIB believes that the regular input of QTVI services to special schools is essential. As well as securing the entitlement of children with identified vision impairment to a high level of specialist expertise, it will also help to address the issue of under-diagnosis of sight problems in populations of children with additional disabilities, in particular, children with learning disabilities. Staff training provided by the QTVI service will alert staff to the nature of vision impairment and raise overall levels of understanding about different visual impairments and how these might present.

We therefore maintain that:

* Any arrangements made by Local Authorities, schools and academies should support the continued intervention of specialist VI services in special schools.
* Placement in a special school should only result in a reduction in support by an outside specialist service if there is an equivalent standard of specialist VI expertise (by a qualified teacher) within the school.
* All children with vision impairment in special schools should receive regular functional vision assessments from a QTVI. This will complement clinical vision testing to provide a comprehensive understanding of the child’s visual ability.
* Children who attend a special school due to another primary disability, such as a learning disability, should be monitored for visual impairments that may not have been detected.

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people 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 [VI curriculum project](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/development-new-uk-specialist-vi-curriculum-framework) which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

For more information please contact the RNIB policy and campaigns team on 020 7391 2123 or campaigns@rnib.org.uk