

Unlocking education for all

Curriculum Framework for Children and Young
People with Vision Impairment in Wales



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Unlocking education for all

We too often hear stories from children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), their parents and carers and from those that support them about things going wrong. Getting the right support in place is too often a fraught experience for all. The impact of this on those individuals with ALN can be significant. More needs to be done.

It is vital that for low incidence disabilities, such as vision impairment (VI), there is a shared understanding of the needs of the child or young person (CYP) being supported. The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) provides much needed definition and shared language of the specialist skill development required for CYP with VI.

The CFVI will help children and young people with VI, and specialist educators along with education professionals in all sectors, parents and carers, to navigate the complexities of specialist support for VI education within the context of the broader life skills required. It will enable better partnership working and importantly puts the CYP at the centre of their pathway to adulthood. For VI specialists it provides a more consistent approach and for non-specialists it helps to demystify specialist skill development to enable more effective inclusive learning practices.



nasen works to ensure the workforce is fully equipped to meet the needs of learners with ALN. The CFVI will support professionals to deliver the best for the CYP they support. Used in the right way, the CFVI can transform lives; this is why we are calling for the CFVI to be formally recognised as a vital resource in supporting policy across the UK.

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Introducing the CFVI: A framework for unlocking education

Accessing education and support for children and young people (CYP) with vision impairment (VI) can be complex. Evidence shows that the current system is failing; a lack of support can prevent CYP from developing the skills needed to achieve their potential in adulthood.

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) for the first time offers a UK wide framework for specialist and non-specialist practitioners, CYP with VI and their families and carers to unlock and navigate necessary support and education.

The CFVI helps by addressing the many issues experienced by CYP with VI, including:

- The attainment gap between CYP with VI and the general population
- Poor employment outcomes, including high vulnerability of becoming long term NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Poor social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing
- Inconsistent provision of specialist support
- Lack of joined up working between specialist and non-specialist professionals.

The framework has been developed in consultation with professionals, CYP, parents and carers. The Delphi method was used, which involved repeatedly

returning to a panel of experts until consensus was achieved. It has been extremely well received within the vision impairment education sector, with 95 per cent either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the final framework [1].

The CFVI offers a transformative contribution to UK policies and practices in ensuring CYP with VI can navigate complex education systems and secure equitable access to the services to which they are entitled. Its implementation can lead to a more inclusive education.

To succeed, we are calling for the CFVI to be:

- Recognised and referenced in Additional Learning Needs (ALN) policies, including any new ALN legislation and revised codes
- Embedded in local authority service delivery frameworks
- Followed by all educational settings supporting children and young people with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists
- Embedded within quality standards for teachers of children and young people with vision impairment and habilitation specialists across the UK.

How the CFVI is implemented in each of the UK nations will vary, there are separate reports setting the evidence and asks for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Succeeding by working together

Vision impairment is a high need, low incidence disability and the support needed will differ greatly between individuals. For many CYP with VI, navigating the complexities of education is hugely burdensome. This does not need to be the case. Mainstream teachers and other professionals involved in education are likely to have little or no experience of supporting CYP with VI. Use of the CFVI can improve understanding to ensure that there is fair and equitable access to education, as well as the right support to maximise independence and prepare CYP with VI for adulthood.

Access to learning and learning to access

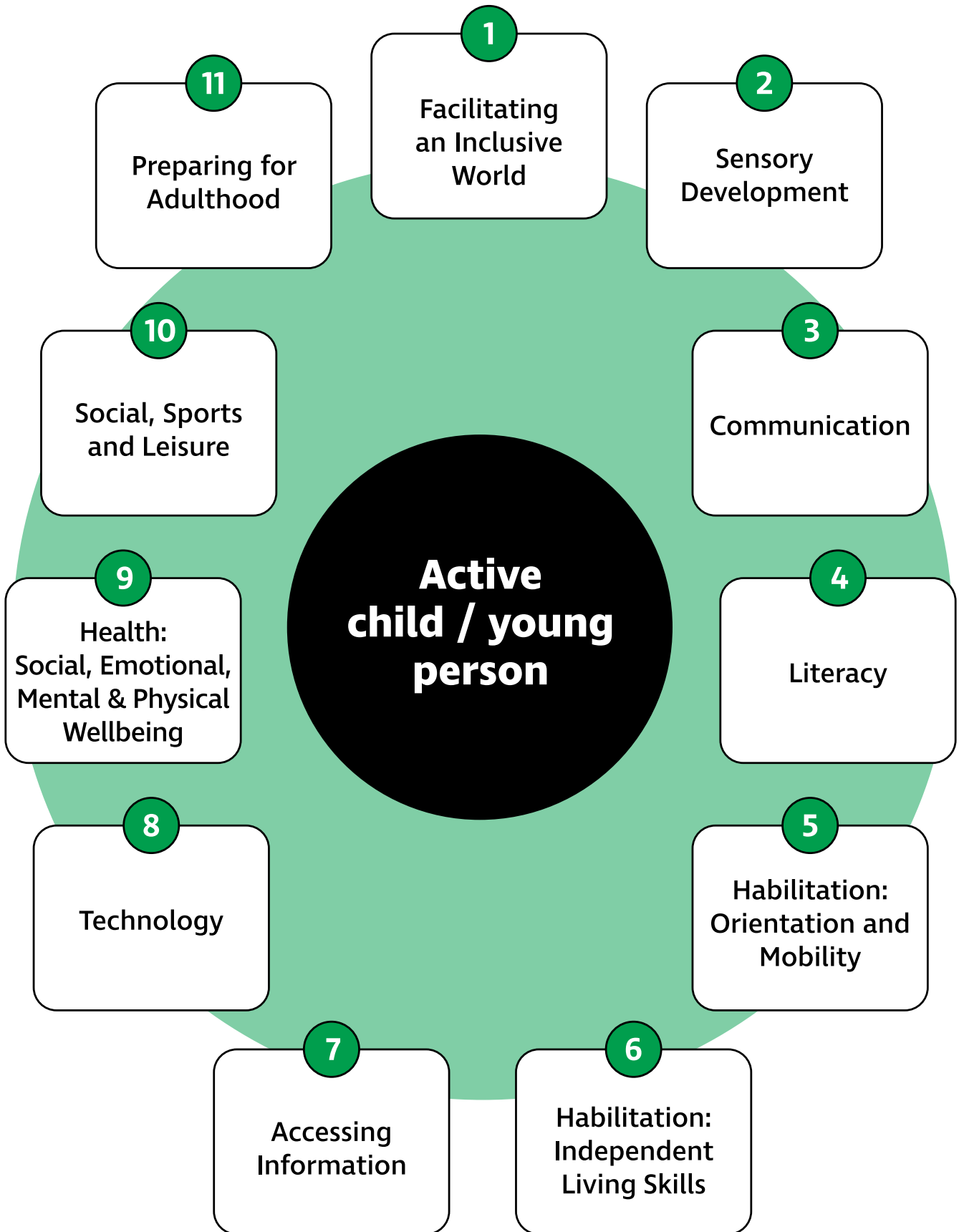
In order to get the most out of education, CYP with VI need specific support and guidance to access the curriculum [2]. The CFVI sets out 11 areas of learning and example outcomes. These take a holistic approach and consider the developmental, educational, social and wellbeing needs of CYP with VI. This includes the use of technology, for example the ability to touch type and read back using a screen reader for revision; accessing learning materials; habilitation, such as the ability to use mobility and orientation skills to move between lessons; literacy, for instance the development of braille literacy to access all core curriculum areas; and preparation for adulthood, such as career planning or transitions into assisted living placements. An overview of the CFVI is provided in Figure 1.

The framework helps CYP to develop a broad range of specialist skills, acquire the information and experiences needed in preparation for leaving education and supports social and emotional development.

Central to this approach is the dual access model, known as **'access to learning'** and **'learning to access'**. This is the acknowledgement that inclusive education is promoted by balancing universal inclusive practice with specialist skills-based interventions. This ensures CYP with VI have fair access to a shared curriculum and education system while developing the specialist skills to develop personal agency and increase independence. This philosophy is true for all CYP with VI – young or old, with or without additional and complex needs – and the CFVI promotes this by setting high expectations of education at all levels in all settings.



Figure 1: Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI)

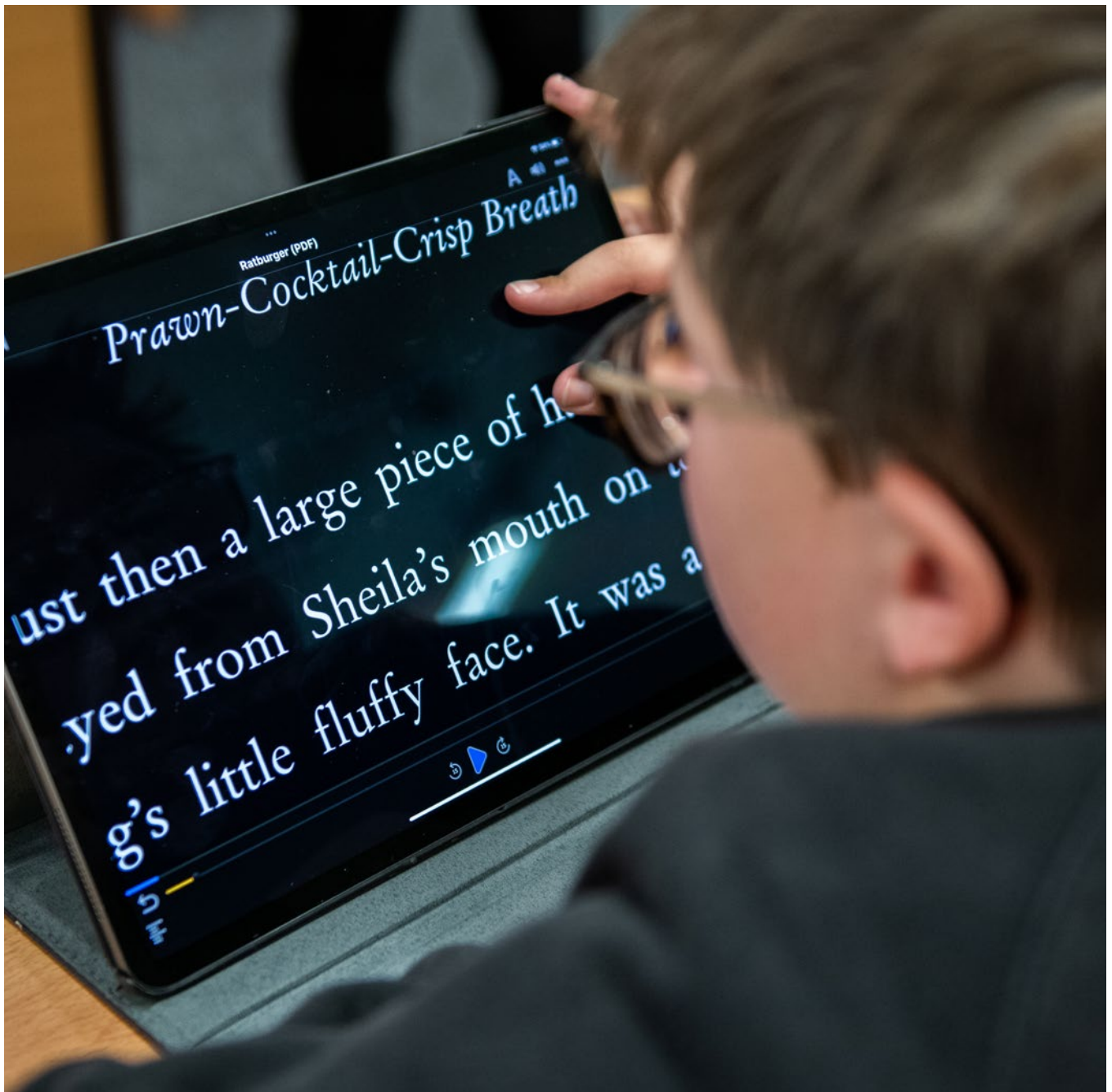


The value of specialist education

CYP with VI need to be taught a range of specialist skills, by specialist educators, that promote independent learning, mobility, everyday living and social communication. Teaching and support is provided by Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs), Registered Qualified Habilitation

Specialists (RQHSs) and specialist trained Teaching Assistants (TAs). Their role is to support the development of skills needed to live independently as adults, succeed and participate in education, enter employment, and to advise non-specialists and families on how best to facilitate this.

The CFVI provides a shared language and agreed approach for both specialist and non-specialist education professionals to collaborate and support CYP with VI.



Case study: Sarah Hughes, QTVI

Sarah Hughes is a qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI) and is Head of the SENCOM Vision Impairment Service which supports five local authorities across South East Wales. Sarah is also Chair of WAVIE (Welsh Association of Vision Impairment Educators).

“The curriculum framework is helpful to us in explaining to families, children and schools, and our own staff, how our roles all fit together so that each child has the opportunity to have this wraparound support that will make them ready for adult life.”



• The CFVI, for me, is a way of explaining to schools very easily what it is that we do and what it is that the child needs to gain in terms of skills and learning. Even when a child is first born, if they have a vision impairment, as soon as our services are involved, we're thinking about the child as an adult and what they need to do on that journey from childhood to adulthood, to be ready for that. As part of this, schools and local authorities will be developing individual development plans and one page profiles.

• It will be important for us to refer to the CFVI to be able to explain to schools what our part is within making sure that the child has all the opportunities for 'access to learning' and 'learning to access'. I love this principle, it summarises very well what it is that we're there for and why we're supporting in the way that we do.

• The values of the Curriculum for Wales can be mapped entirely to the CFVI. We're able to talk to schools about how the CFVI is particularly important for those children and young people with vision impairment and how it can be enhancing of the Curriculum for Wales.

A fragmented education

CYP with VI are not being given access to the specialist support they need to participate and thrive in education. Research consistently highlights the importance of specialist support to ensure that CYP with VI have the best opportunity to progress academically and to continue to live as independently as possible [3]. However, without access to the specialist support they need, we know many CYP are being let down and left behind.

The RNIB Cymru Freedom of Information (FOI) 2023 report highlights variation in practice and widespread geographical inequalities [4]. Across local authorities in Wales there is a variation in service structures, practices and budgets.

- The ratio of QTVIs to CYP on active caseload varies from 1:13 to 1:85; with high caseloads, the specialists needed to teach and support the development of specialist skills are under significant pressure in terms of time and resource
- The percentage of CYP on local authority (LA) VI service active caseloads accessing, or on a waiting list to access, habilitation support varies from below 9% to 48%, with the time from referral to an initial visit ranging from 1 week to approximately 12 months.

This patchwork of inconsistent support has the potential to leave some CYP without the support they need to access education.



Case study: A parent's experience

Hannah, parent to a young person registered Severely Sight Impaired attending a mainstream secondary school in Wales

"VI education has been very good for my son. If I hadn't been the type of parent to demand the best for him, it might have been different. The QTVI was great and all the work through primary school was modified."

At secondary school I wanted my son to have an iPad and Microsoft technology to mirror the classroom whiteboard. I wanted him to have the full classroom experience that his friends did. My council didn't allow this, saying security was an issue, so I pushed them to arrange an alternative method. He now uses Dolphin Connect and Learn and an iPad Pro. He does really well with these but gets fatigue sometimes. He's very good at speaking up for himself. I have an amazing relationship with the Teaching Assistant. She keeps me up to date with what is happening, and she knows how to support my son and the right balance to strike between encouraging independence and stepping in when his eyes are tired and he needs help.

Technology skills have helped my son with his independence. He's also got good social skills. He really enjoys cooking and he's learned a

lot of kitchen skills. He's also had mobility training. I've supported his independence a lot so he didn't need as many sessions as the Mobility Officer thought he would. I think because I understand the issues, I've tried to make him more independent from a young age. I think habilitation skills are vital for any young person with a vision impairment. I think it's important for VI education services to raise awareness among all school staff about how to support a child with vision impairment. Teachers need to know that the child is an individual and it's important to know what makes them happy and what can cause problems for them. I also think it is really important that QTVIs and educators teach our children how to access the curriculum in the way it will be when they're having their exams. Exam provision needs to be in place and practice papers should also be available.

My son is the only one in the school with VI so I understand why they aren't aware of VI issues. I think the Curriculum Framework gives more of a structure to the support a child with VI gets. It means the Teachers and Teaching Assistants can all sing from the same hymn sheet. It's good for parents to know about it as well because annual meetings are often emotional for us and it helps to have something in front of us we can focus on. It gives parents the knowledge of what they have to fight for and the young people too."

Locked out of post-16 education

The inconsistency in support is further exacerbated in post-16 education. The RNIB FOI report 2023 found an inconsistent approach to the provision of specialist support in further education institutions across local authorities. With no clear guidance as to how support from specialist staff should be provided, for many CYP with VI the support drops off when they leave school [4].



Locked out of the workplace

Where specialist professionals are not included in conversations relating to transition planning and career preparation, guidance received by CYP with VI is often not adequately considering their disability.

“I think careers advice is very basic. They tell all young people to do what they enjoy. I feel that there should be more specialist careers advice for young people with vision impairment.”

Hannah, parent

The CFVI can assist qualified specialist VI educators to raise awareness of the need for CYP with VI to receive tailored information and guidance to make decisions about their future as well as raising awareness of the need to be taught skills to access employment. Formal adoption of the CFVI can establish equitable access to services across Wales and the UK to support a collaborative way of working.

When it goes wrong

Whilst there is evidence demonstrating how specialist education can improve outcomes for CYP with VI, there is also consistent evidence highlighting what can go wrong when denied access to the support they need.

Attainment gap

There is a consistent and significant attainment gap between CYP with VI and their peers without additional learning needs. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results show a gap of greater than 26% for pupils achieving Level 2 (equivalent to 5 A* to C) including English/Welsh and maths, a difference which needs to be addressed [5].

Vulnerability to becoming long-term NEET

Statistics from the Welsh government show that CYP aged 16-18 with a disability in Wales are over twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET) than their non-disabled peers. This rises to over four times as likely for those aged 19-24 [6].

Several factors can risk a CYP with VI becoming NEET such as attaining lower levels of qualification, not being able to access education, limited opportunities for work experience and a lack of tailored careers guidance [7].

Limited independence

In some areas of Wales, a high proportion of CYP with VI are unable to access habilitation

support to enable them to develop the orientation, mobility and independent living skills that they need for both education and in young adulthood [4].

The impact on social inclusion can be significant. For example, young adults with VI often do not apply for jobs in unfamiliar locations because they lack the confidence to travel independently [8].

Wellbeing gap

CYP with VI report lower wellbeing and poorer mental health than their fully sighted peers. At age 17 CYP with VI were five times more likely to 'feel depressed all or most of the time' [9].

There are added pressures on CYP with VI, with them having to deal with inaccessible systems, needing to repeatedly advocate for necessary adjustments and feeling socially excluded [9].



Getting the funding right

To succeed, the CFVI needs a system that is able to respond to the needs of CYP with VI. As already highlighted, the system to support a specialist workforce is fragmented and for many local authorities there is an issue with capacity. Over the last three years, one consortium (providing VI education support services across five local authorities) and two other local authority VI services have had their budget cut at least once [4]. Together, these teams provide support for almost a third of CYP with VI in Wales.

As VI is a low incidence disability, economies of scale do not allow for all schools and FE settings to recruit their own specialist workforce. There needs to be centralised services that can support CYP with VI in their chosen education setting.

That is why there must be a protected centralised pot of money that local authorities can access to meet the needs of low incidence disability populations.

What needs to happen next

The implementation of the ALN system in Wales provides an opportunity for these issues to be addressed. We are calling on the Welsh Government to ensure that:

The CFVI is recognised and referenced in Additional Learning Needs policies, including any new ALN legislation and revised codes.

The inequities in education provision and support available for CYP with VI cannot continue. The CFVI shares the ambition of the ALN system to support all learners to reach their potential and provides the evidence base on how this can be achieved for CYP with VI.

The CFVI is embedded in local authority service commissioning and delivery frameworks.

It is not enough for professionals to opt into the use of the framework on a voluntary basis. To end continuation of geographical inequities, it must be adopted across all local authorities.

The CFVI is followed by all educational settings supporting children and young people with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists.

Specialist support must be available across all education settings, from nursery to further education institutions.

The CFVI is embedded within quality standards and professional training for teachers of children with vision impairment and habilitation specialists across the UK.

The clarity provided by the CFVI will resolve confusion over what support CYP with VI need and who is responsible or qualified to deliver this.

There is adequate centralised funding for local authorities to be able to support their local VI populations.

We need to ensure that there is an equity of provision across the country so that children, young people, their families and carers, and educational professionals can be supported by a specialist workforce.

Conclusion

CYP with VI should have equitable access to opportunities in life, however, all the evidence tells us that their education is currently failing to deliver this. The CFVI provides an opportunity to implement a consistent approach to the provision of specialist support throughout education. Formal adoption of the CFVI will enable the framework to have the greatest impact, allowing the potential of CYP with VI to be fully realised.

For further information

You can read more about the CFVI at: rnib.in/CFVI or email us at: CYPF@rnib.org.uk



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