

Castlecroft Primary School

Our policy for the provision of the education of the visually impaired

INTRODUCTION

Castlecroft Primary School was opened in 1952 and is a combined Infant and Junior school with a Nursery class attached. The school operates under the LMS in liaison with Wolverhampton City Council. In 1978 a Resource Base for Visually Impaired children was established here in conjunction with its secondary phase equivalent at our neighbouring Smestow School. We have provision for the education of a limited number of partially sighted and registered blind children who are all fully integrated within the school.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

We aim to provide all pupils with a broadly based, well-balanced curriculum that promotes spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development. We follow the National Curriculum for England and Wales, teaching the core subjects of English, Maths and Science; the foundation subjects of History, Geography, Music, art, ICT, Design and Technology, PE, PSHE; and Religious Education.

PRINCIPLES OF VI PROVISION

1. The integration of VI pupils with their sighted peers in a mainstream setting
2. The development of independent living skills
3. A flexible system of staff management that provides an effective level of pupil support as well as opportunities for enhanced inter-personnel support, information sharing and in-service training
4. A continuing review of technological support and development

SCHOOL ORGANISATION

There are three departments within school: Early Years (incorporating Nursery and Reception classes), Key Stage One (Years One and Two) and Key Stage Two (Years Three, Four, Five and Six). We are a one-form entry school. The Nursery class has separate morning and afternoon groups of children.

STAFFING FOR VI PROVISION

A qualified teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) and VI trained Teaching Assistants work together as the school's Support Staff for our VI pupils. The Teaching Assistants are trained in the education of the VI by LA and RNIB providers.

CURRICULUM PLANNING

The planning for each class is the responsibility of the class teachers who follow the guidelines set down in the school's curriculum policies and schemes of work. The VI Support Staff ensure that the necessary specialised equipment and materials are provided to enable the VI pupils to participate fully in lessons and access the whole school curriculum. Materials are modified and adapted as appropriate for the individual learner. A timetable of VI staff support is planned for each relevant class.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

School staff members run a number of after-school clubs, open to all pupils. When VI pupils express an interest in attending one of these clubs, we endeavour to make the participation possible, providing VI support where required and arranging transport back home. The school also encourages pupils to take part in other activities out of school such as swimming and local sports events. We also attend special VI events held during the school day at Aldersley Stadium, Westcroft School and other venues.

EDUCATIONAL VISITS

Visits out to places of educational interest are a large part of school life at Castlecroft. Class teachers organise their own visits schedules but will liaise with the VI Support Staff to ensure that there is a suitable level of staffing and assistance for VI pupils, and also to decide if any special arrangements need to be made at any particular venue. Safety factors are always a prime consideration on these visits. We also have a long-established tradition of offering the opportunity for residential visits to our children from local, national and international providers. These begin in Year 2 and culminate in a Year 6 visit to Normandy each May. This France visit involves a week of outdoor pursuits, embracing activities like archery, abseiling, rock climbing and kayaking.

ADDITIONAL CURRICULUM AREAS

VI pupils often need to undertake some work in areas that are additional to the requirements of the National Curriculum. These will include such things as mobility and orientation, typing and word-processing, independent daily living skills, listening and tactile activities, and training in the effective use of residual functional vision, including the use of low vision aids.

Occasionally, a pupil will need to use Braille as their main medium for writing and reading. Braille skills are taught alongside the sighted pupils' learning of print reading and writing, although it is usually necessary to include short sessions of tuition away from the classroom. Pupils learning Braille begin with the RNIB Braille for Infants scheme and then transfer to the school reading scheme which has its own Braille version.

Most of our VI pupils continue to work with printed texts but certain modifications are made to help provide better access to them. They will use raised reading and writing boards to aid posture and lighting, for example.

FUNCTIONAL VISION ASSESSMENTS

We use nationally recognised functional vision assessment tests to monitor the progress and changing needs of each pupil. These assessments are administered by staff from the LA Sensory Inclusion Team, in addition to the yearly vision and hearing tests carried out by the Schools' Medical Service, and form part of a rolling programme of assessment and review.

STATUTORY ASSESSMENTS & REVIEWS

Our VI pupils are generally admitted into school once the statutory assessment of their Special Educational Needs has begun. The school is usually asked to present educational advice which forms part of the final statement. Once a formal Statement of Special Education Needs has been agreed for the child, a yearly review is undertaken involving the child, their parents, teachers, support staff and other relevant professionals. At this review meeting, targets are identified to be achieved by the student for the next annual review.

LIAISON WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

As well as regular support from and contact with the Sensory Inclusion Team, a teacher of mobility works with our VI pupils on a weekly basis. This work also includes Cool Kids sessions and sighted-guide training for groups of older mainstream children.

There is also close co-operation with Educational Psychologists, with the staff at both Smestow and Penn Hall schools, and with staff from the Speech and Language Department and Hearing Impaired Services.

We are also fortunate to have the local services of the Beacon Centre for the Blind who offer support via their equipment loans and sponsored fund-raising. The regional services of the RNIB are available from their base in the centre of Birmingham. We have also had visits from representatives of the Guide Dogs for the Blind who run school assemblies. Various regional schools and resource bases for the VI also provide useful links and contacts.

STAFF TRAINING

VI courses run by the RNIB are a useful source of staff training and cover the whole spectrum of school needs and issues. Our VI staff also try to attend the annual Sight Village exhibitions in Birmingham to gain information on the latest available technology.

VISITORS AND STUDENT TRAINING

Castlecroft is often asked to host events for visitors interested in our VI provision, in particular for those Teaching Assistants who are training for an SEN qualification. Teachers who are training for specific VI or SEN qualifications will also spend time here on placement, come into school to gain information for dissertations and carry out teaching projects. Where possible we encourage such visits as they provide yet another opportunity for the exchange of information and skills.

PARENTS

There is regular contact with the parents of our VI pupils through the course of the school year in order to discuss forthcoming events, curriculum concerns and pastoral matters. The school involves parents in many varied events as a matter of course - assemblies, concerts, consultation evenings, educational visits, curriculum awareness meetings, sports days and so on - and the parents of the VI pupils are always part of these activities. The parents of some of our VI pupils are also able to communicate with teachers and support staff via a daily home-school message book. For each school term, we also try to arrange a VI Parents meeting so that parents, children and staff can meet together in an informal social situation.

RESOURCES

Many items of general primary school equipment are suitable for VI pupils and their sighted peers alike, but we also have a large amount of equipment specifically designed to assist in the VI pupil's access to a wide range of curriculum activities. These include a closed-circuit television system for magnifying images, high-speed colour photocopiers for the enlargement and enhancement of text and pictures, large-screen computer monitors which display a classroom's interactive work, reading and writing stands, talking calculators, tactile maps, materials for making raised diagrams and so on. We also have a large supply of Braille, Large Print, Tactile and Talking Books in our school library. The school's main reading scheme is also available in a Braille version and as an adapted and modified version, with enlarged text and simplified drawings.

TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The school has a programme of transition for all pupils in their final year of primary education. Most of our mainstream and VI pupils transfer to Smestow School, which operates a well-established series of induction days. In addition, the VI pupils visit Smestow as part of their Year 5 and Year 6 mobility lessons. Support staff from Smestow also visit our children during lesson times in their final year. A Transfer Review Meeting is held while the pupil is in Year 5 to provide plenty of time for planning this important period of transition.