# Securing the literacy entitlement of blind and partially sighted children and young people

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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

Literacy is the combination of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that every child needs to fulfil their potential. These skills are essential for children’s future employment prospects, as well as for their happiness, health and wellbeing and the wider contribution they can make to society. Literacy is also the key that unlocks access to the rest of the curriculum – without good literacy skills, children will not make progress across the whole of their education. Research demonstrates that vision impairment in children can adversely affect both their acquisition of literacy skills, and their subsequent speed and accuracy in literacy related activities.

RNIB believes that every child who is blind or partially sighted has the right to attain literacy to their highest potential. This is true for children with vision impairment as their only disability, and for those with additional disabilities. Formats that enable access to the written word include print, braille, spoken and/or digital audio and Moon (an alternative to braille which uses a system of raised shapes). The aim should be to provide children with as wide a range of literacy options as possible, not restrict them unnecessarily to dependence on single solutions. This means not just providing them with reading materials they can access now, but also training them in new skills to access a wider range of literacy opportunities in the future.

## What’s the issue

RNIB is concerned that the development of literacy skills in children and young people with vision impairment is too often left to chance. We know that the level of support and expertise currently available to learners who use braille in mainstream schools varies greatly, and that teachers often lack confidence in applying their literacy teaching skills to the medium of braille. In the case of partially sighted learners, many schools simply provide enlarged curriculum materials instead of assessing and addressing literacy needs on an individual basis.

There is often a lack of forward planning in the provision of curriculum materials in alternative formats, meaning that children and young people with VI receive the materials they need after their sighted peers. There is also too little planning to ensure that children develop new ways of accessing information independently as they grow older, particularly through the use of technology. With increasing pressure on school and local authority budgets, there is a real danger that the specialist support that these learners require to maximise their independent literacy skills may be reduced further in the future.

## Recommendations

RNIB maintains that the entitlement of all children with vision impairment to appropriate levels of literacy support must be maintained in order to secure their best possible educational outcomes. To achieve this we believe that:

* All children and young people with vision impairment should receive regular assessment of their literacy skills from a qualified teacher of children with vision impairment (QTVI) in order to ensure they are making good progress in relation to their peers, especially at times leading up to transition, and in response to any changes in their functional vision.
* Every blind and partially sighted learner should receive a regular low vision assessment, and appropriate provision and training in the use of low vision aids.
* Every learner should be regularly assessed in relation to assistive technology, taught age appropriate ICT skills to maximise their independent access to the written word and have access to most up to date assistive technology.
* Every learner should receive written materials in an accessible format at the same time as these materials are available to their sighted peers.
* Where appropriate, children should be provided with direct teaching by a QTVI to help them develop a conceptual framework for literacy and to teach them specific visual and/or tactile skills.
* Extensive input from a QTVI is most likely to be needed during the early years in order to provide a foundation for formal literacy skills, as well as in situations where a child is transferring from the use of one literacy medium to another.
* Ongoing input from a QTVI is also likely to be required to maintain and develop literacy skills to match the curriculum demands of different educational contexts throughout a child or young person’s education.

## 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 Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

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