

## Educational provision for blind and partially sighted pupils in England

### Introduction

In 2007 RNIB commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an online survey of local authority Visual Impairment services in England, Scotland and Wales. The aim was to find out how many blind and partially sighted pupils there are in England, Scotland and Wales and the educational provision and support provided for them. This research briefing gives the findings for England.

### Method

In December 2007 an online survey was distributed to all visual impairment services. This was designed to find out how many blind and partially sighted children and young people they supported, where they were being educated and the degree of help and support required for specific groups, such as those blind and partially sighted pupils with additional disabilities and/or special educational needs.

### Key messages from the research

A total of 100 Local Authority Visual Impairment (VI) services from England responded to the survey, although the level of detail and amount of information they provided differed.

- The survey results showed that 14,321 children and young people with visual impairments were supported by the VI services that responded to the survey. By extrapolating from the data, it is estimated that there are a total of 22,000 blind and partially sighted children and young people (aged 16 or younger) in England who require some form of specialist educational provision. This figure may be an underestimate, since it does not record children and young people under assessment and may not reflect the full extent of visual impairment amongst children in some special schools.

- Overall, 39 per cent of the identified 14,321 blind and partially sighted children were reported as having some degree of additional disability. This may in fact underestimate the level of additional disability, as some respondents did not provide information on disability status. It is likely that a more realistic estimate is that around 50 per cent of children have some degree of additional disability, as shown in previous RNIB surveys of VI services.
- The majority (97 per cent) of the children and young people with visual impairments appeared to be educated within their home education authority, although this varied depending on the level of pupils' disabilities. Of those educated outside their home authority, over two thirds had additional disabilities and/or special educational needs.
- A greater proportion of primary school aged pupils were educated in mainstream settings compared with those of secondary school age. Of those pupils educated within their home local authority, 72 per cent of primary school age children were in local or additionally resourced mainstream schools compared to 65 per cent of secondary school aged pupils.
- The survey results showed that only 4 per cent of pupils were in special schools designated for pupils who are blind or partially sighted.
- 65 local authority VI services also provided information on braille provision. All reported they had at least one pupil who used braille (which is a method of reading using raised dots by touch) for reading and writing amongst their school population, with a number of services highlighting their plans to extend braille to very young children and to those who had only recently become blind. Overall, around 3 per cent of blind and partially sighted pupils aged 5 to 16 used braille as their sole format for reading and writing and 1 per cent used braille alongside other formats such as large print.

## In summary

- Results from this survey of local authorities suggests there are a total of 22,000 blind and partially sighted children and young people in England who require some form of specialist educational provision.
- The majority of children and young people with visual impairments were educated within their home education authority. Of those educated outside, over two thirds had additional disabilities.
- A greater proportion of primary school aged pupils were educated in mainstream settings compared to those of secondary school age.
- Around 3 per cent of blind and partially sighted pupils, aged 5 to 16, used braille as their sole or main format for reading and writing.

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