

Support for School-Aged Children with Vision Impairments in Victoria



Department of
Education & Training



Department of Education & Training Regions



The information in this booklet was provided by staff of each organisation and its purpose is to offer a brief summary of the support services and specialist facilities available to school-aged students with vision impairments and their families in Victoria.

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Contents

Better Start for Children with Disability	3
Catholic Education System Melbourne	4
Department of Education and Training (DET)	6
Guide Dogs Victoria Children’s Mobility Service	9
Independent Schools Victoria	10
Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired	12
Vision Australia	14



Better Start for
Children with Disability

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Better Start for Children with Disability is an Australian Government initiative that aims to help make early intervention services and therapies more affordable and accessible.

Children who are aged under six years and have been diagnosed with one of the specific disabilities can benefit from early intervention funding of up to \$12,000 (up to a maximum of \$6,000 per financial year).

The funding can be used to pay for services and therapies that can include speech pathology, audiology, occupational therapy, orthoptics, optometry, physiotherapy and psychology

Families living in outer regional and remote areas may be eligible for a one off payment of \$2,000 to address the costs involved in accessing services.

Eligibility for vision impairment is a vision loss of less than or equal to 6/18 or equivalent field loss, in the better eye with corrections.

For further information about Better Start see:

<http://betterstart.net.au/what-is-better-start>



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The **Visiting Teacher** Service has been established by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne to provide consultation for school communities supporting students with sensory and physical impairments and those with significant health needs. Visiting Teachers often liaise with external agencies to provide consultancy advice regarding educational needs, mobility and access to school facilities, curriculum differentiation, and assistance with development of Personalised Learning Plans, consultancy to Program Support Groups and/or professional development for teachers.

Whilst every endeavour is made to provide consultancy support for eligible students, prioritisation is an ongoing process.

Eligibility criteria for visiting teacher service

In order to access services from the Visiting Teacher Service the following criteria must be established and relevant health information provided together with the referral. Parents must provide consent both for a service request and for the provision of all private and health information.

Vision Impairment

In order for a student to be eligible for this service, the visual condition must be defined as an actual vision impairment and not a learning difficulty involving visual perception.

For students to be deemed eligible for service, the degree of vision impairment required is as follows:

- a distance acuity less than 6/18 when measured with correction and both eyes open; **or**
- a visual field reduction to less than 20 degrees.

Eligibility for support will be determined by the findings outlined in an Ophthalmologist's report. The Ophthalmologist's report, which must be attached to the Referral Form, must have been written no more than six months prior to the referral date.

Students may subsequently be referred to the Educational Vision Assessment Clinic (EVAC) at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital to facilitate support from the Statewide Vision Resource Centre. The EVAC team includes a consultant Paediatric Ophthalmologist, an Educational Psychologist and the Education Officer for Vision Impairment.

In country regions Visiting Teacher support is negotiated through each region.

LITERACY, NUMERACY AND SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS: Students with Disabilities

Students, who have a bilateral vision loss and are legally blind i.e. acuity that is less than 6/60 with corrected vision or have a field loss of less than 10 degrees, are eligible to apply for additional funding to support their learning needs. For further information please refer to the funding guidelines through the link below.

www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/frameset.htm?page=resources

The Department of Education and Training (DET) is committed to improving the learning outcomes of all students, by acknowledging and catering for their diverse learning needs. A key element of this commitment is an emphasis on improving the learning outcomes for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, including strategies that ensure inclusive practices are in place in schools. For students who are blind or have low vision and attend government schools, there is a range of additional support available:

For children in DET schools who are legally blind:

- Statewide Vision Resource Centre
- Visiting Teacher support
- Materials in alternative formats
- Program for Students with Disabilities
- Accessible Buildings Program (Supplementary Programs)

For children in DET schools who are partially sighted:

- Statewide Vision Resource Centre
- Visiting Teacher support
- Materials in alternative formats
- Equipment Grants (Supplementary Programs)
- Accessible Buildings Program (Supplementary Programs)

Eligibility for Visiting Teacher support is established through attendance at the Education Vision Assessment Clinic (EVAC). The EVAC team includes a consultant Paediatric Ophthalmologist, an Educational Psychologist and Education Officers for Vision Impairment. Prior to attending EVAC, within the past twelve months, children need to have been assessed by their own ophthalmologist. Both clinical and functional assessments are offered to families and schools as part of the eligibility process. Eligibility facilitates access to the resources of the Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

Once eligibility has been established (and EVAC documentation sent to your region) your child's school will notify the Regional personnel. You will then be asked to sign a parent permission form to start Visiting Teacher support.

Statewide Vision Resource Centre (SVRC)

The Statewide Vision Resource Centre supports over 500 students with vision impairments (blind and low vision) in Victoria. Support is primarily for DET schools but some services are also available for Catholic and Independent schools.

The SVRC offers a range of services including:

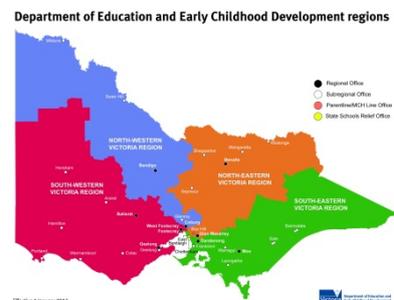
- Professional Learning: professional development days, workshops, master classes, consultancy, case conferencing

- The Bulletin: national and international fortnightly publication featuring upcoming events, program and news within the vision impairment community
- Production: production of materials in alternative formats including braille, electronic text, audio and large print
- Educational Programs:
 - Dot Power (pre-school to grade 3) termly intensive braille program
 - Support Skills (years 4 to 9)
 - Camps and activities offered each year to support VT programs
- Curriculum materials e.g. Ozzie Dots, a program to teach contracted braille to beginning braille readers
- Education Vision Assessment Clinic (EVAC) located at the Royal Eye and Ear Hospital. EVAC provides clinical and functional information to schools and visiting teachers.

For further information see: www.svrc.vic.edu.au

Visiting Teacher Support

DET has four regional teams that offer ongoing visiting teaching and support to children with a vision impairment. The aim/role of visiting teacher support can be summarized under the following broad headings:



- Support the child's school community to address the learning needs of vision impaired child
- Teach specific low vision and blind skills based on the expanded core curriculum (low vision and blind curriculum)
- Identify and accommodate the education implications of the students vision impairment i.e. introduction and efficient use of assistive technologies, environmental adaptations etc
- Provide documentation for school submission i.e. Programs for Students with Disabilities, Equipment Grants, reports for Student Support Group meetings and parents
- Provide Professional Development opportunities to the school community
- Co-ordinate/initiate referrals to appropriate supporting non-departmental agencies

Your region will provide you with a detailed summary of the service delivery you can look forward to from your visiting teacher. As your child's learning needs change so will the involvement of the visiting teacher.

Program for Students with Disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities is a targeted supplementary funding program for Victorian government schools. It provides resources to schools for a defined population of students with disabilities, with moderate to severe needs. Under the program, resources are provided directly to Victorian government schools to support the provision of school-based educational programs for eligible students with disabilities.

There are seven categories of disability that will be supported by additional funding. Children with vision impairments need to be within the legally blind range to access this funding. This funding may be used to provide access technology and/or additional learning support relating to the student's vision impairment as determined by the Student Support Group, of which parents are a key member.

You can expect that school leaders and teachers will comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and that the educational needs and goals of all students with disabilities, including those supported by the Program for Students with Disabilities, will be monitored and reviewed by a Student Support Group.

For further information about PSD see:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/pages/handbook.aspx

For further information about Student Support Groups, see:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/pages/studentsupportgroup.aspx

Equipment Grants

Equipment Grants are available to help Victorian government schools purchase major items of essential, specialized equipment for students with vision impairments who do not meet the eligibility requirements for the PSD.

For further information see:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/pages/programsupp.aspx

Accessible Buildings Program

The Department undertakes an annual program to provide facilities that will enable students, parents and teachers with injuries or disabilities to access mainstream schools. It provides funding for projects to:

- meet the needs of new students at a school
- meet the needs resulting from deterioration of a student's condition
- expand existing facilities to cater for the curriculum requirements of the student

Applications for this program may be submitted at any time throughout the year. This program is coordinated by the Department with the support of regional facilities personnel. Applications for works that require completion prior to Term 1 are requested to be submitted to regional offices by the second week of August of the preceding year.

For further information see:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/needs/Pages/programsupp.aspx

For further information regarding services available in DET schools please contact Deb Lewis at the Statewide Vision Resource Centre: (03) 9841 0242.



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The **Guide Dogs Victoria Children's Mobility Service** is a team of Orientation and Mobility Specialists, skilled to provide mobility training and support to children of all ages, who are blind or have low vision in Victoria. Orientation and Mobility training is offered to any child who is blind or vision impaired whose vision is impacting on their ability to navigate their environment safely. Our Orientation and Mobility Specialists work closely with families and schools to ensure that your child can move independently and safely within any environment.

Individual programs are provided in a variety of locations including home, school or within the local community. The service also provides many group mobility programs where a child is able to work with and learn from other children who are blind or have low vision. These programs are run on a regular basis in both metropolitan and regional venues across the state of Victoria.

Orientation and Mobility involves developing the following concepts and skills:

- **Sense and self** – includes spatial skills, body movements, use of residual vision and hearing, echolocation
- **Thinking & problem solving** – problem solving skills & thinking skills
- **Communication** – social skills and self-advocacy skills
- **Safety** – body protection skills, safe use of aids, awareness of different environments and stranger danger
- **Exploring** – initiating movement, spatial and positional concepts, directional concepts, self-orientation skills
- **Environments & access** – understanding of mobility in different environments and access issues
- **Route travel** – mobility skills such as squaring off, trailing, using clues & landmarks, reversing a route, if lost strategies
- **Traffic** – composition of a road, intersection types, safe crossing routines
- **Mapping** – mapping concepts, shape identification, mapping language, types of maps and cardinal directions
- **Mobility aids** – sighted guide, electronic aides, canes, GD & GPS

Referrals can be made directly to the Children's Mobility Service or through your Visiting Teacher.

To discuss our services please contact Laura Hunt on (03) 9854 4547 or visit our website: www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au.



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The Victorian State Government provides limited funds to independent schools for the provision of specialised services to support students with demonstrated needs. Independent schools are able to apply for funding so that they can engage specialists to provide a visiting teacher service for vision impaired students.

Parents need to provide consent to an application.

The role of the visiting teacher includes consultancy, direct teaching and liaison with relevant agencies and professionals. Frequency of visits depends on the student's educational needs related to the impairment/disability. Additional levels of funding are available for visiting teacher service for students learning braille.

Independent schools need to engage their own visiting teachers.

Eligibility for State Support Services

Students with a vision impairment within the partially sighted range as determined by the World Health Organisation criteria, i.e. visual acuity worse than 6/18 (with best available correction) and/or field loss greater than 20 degrees of arc.

Evidence Required

Report from the Education Vision Assessment Clinic or an ophthalmologist. It must be demonstrated that the vision impairment hinders the student's education. Documentation regarding the assessment and/or impairment must be no more than two years old at the time of application.

Commonwealth Government funding

Independent Schools who enrol students who are legally blind i.e. have

1. Visual acuity less than 6/60 with corrected vision

OR

2. Visual fields reduced to a measured arc of less than 10 degrees

Schools will include these students on the annual commonwealth census in order to access additional general recurrent funding. Commonwealth funding is no longer tied to individual students.

Evidence Required

Assessment / report from the Education Vision Assessment Clinic
OR

Assessment / report from an ophthalmologist

Students who are within the partially sighted and blind range and who have had this confirmed by EVAC can access resources, such as large print, electronic text and braille materials, through the Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

For further information contact Elspeth Adamson.



Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired

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Insight Specialist Primary School

Insight Specialist Primary School at Berwick provides Victoria's only specialist educational placement option for blind and vision impaired students. Insight is an Independent School with most funds provided by trusts and foundations and special government grants. The school has been purpose built to support the development of skills in all areas of the curriculum. Specialist features of the school include:

- High quality acoustics
- Adjustable lighting to cater for students with varying vision conditions
- North/south orientation of buildings to eliminate glare, and to support orientation
- Tactile markers, changing surface materials and textures, braille and large-print room signs to support independent mobility
- Independent living skills room, including a fully equipped kitchen
- Specially designed desks to enable good posture, independent storage and organization of materials and equipment
- Specialist art, science and physical education spaces

Staff

Insight Specialist Primary School is staffed by teachers trained to support students with vision impairments, with an excellent staff-to-student ratio. Small classes enable each student to receive the level of support required to fully access and participate in all areas of the dual curriculum, and to develop the ability and motivation to work independently.

Curriculum

Students at Insight participate in a **dual curriculum**: AusVELS and the Expanded Core Curriculum. All students participate in the AusVELS curriculum at a Year level appropriate standard, with individualized programs for Literacy and Mathematics. Each student has a Negotiated Individual Learning Plan, in which parents, teachers and therapists collaboratively determine the focus areas of the ECC to be taught. Students participate in all curriculum areas except LOTE (language other than English). This enables time to address ECC learning. Parents of students who use braille as their primary learning medium are encouraged and supported to learn

braille. Participation in Physical Education and Health is essential for students with vision impairments. Insight supports and teaches students to participate in mainstream physical activities (dance, soccer, skating, scooters and bikes, gymnastics, power walking and cross country, swimming, etc.) in addition to blind sports (goal ball, swish and blind cricket). These skills enable participation in accessible recreational activities for the students, their families and their sighted friends.

The **Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)** is taught in several ways:

- Integrated across all areas of the core curriculum
- Specific instruction in identified areas
- In the community to ensure relevant, contextual, experience-based learning

The **ECC** includes instruction in:

- Braille and alternate formats
- Orientation and Mobility
- Assistive technologies
- Training to maximise the use of functional vision
- Independent Living Skills, including recreation and leisure
- Social Skills
- Self-advocacy
- Career skills
- Transition skills

Enrolment

Students can enrol at Insight full time, or as a dual enrolment with their local mainstream school, for their entire Primary schooling or for a defined period (one or two years). Students may also attend Insight's Mobile Classroom programs, InsightOut, which run at selected partner schools around the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Specialist Primary School fees of \$9,000 are heavily subsidised by philanthropic support through the Insight Scholarship Fund.

School Bus

Insight Education Centre currently operates a bus, which travels along EastLink from the city to transport students to Berwick.



Vision Australia's Children's Services provides support to children who are blind or have low vision, and their families to enable them to have access to and fully participate in every part of life they choose.

We work in partnership with families of children from birth to school-leaving age by providing specialist supports that facilitate development, participation and independence. A Vision Australia key worker will work with your family to understand your strengths, priorities and goals for the future.

Our children's services team adopt a collaborative trans-disciplinary approach which means working with your family to access the full range of specialists. Families have access to Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Speech Pathologists, Early Childhood Specialist Teachers, Child & Family Counsellors, Orientation & Mobility Specialists, Adaptive Technology Consultants and Orthoptists.

We can support your family by providing assessment and advice in relation to your child's vision impairment and its impact on their development.

We can support your family to:

- Understand your child's vision condition.
- Advocate for your child's full participation in education, including transitions, literacy, numeracy, access to curriculum and technology.
- Manage the emotional impact of your child's vision impairment, for example enhancing coping skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- Understand your child's future, including preparing for their long term independence and getting ready for work.

We can help you to support your child to:

- Develop play, learning and communication skills.
- Learn to make friends and manage social relationships.
- Manage day-to-day life at home and participate in household routines.
- Develop movement skills and travel safely, for example outdoors or in unfamiliar environments.
- Participate in hobbies, games, sports, and community recreation.

We are able to provide services in the venue of your choice, be that in the home, our centres, in school or any community environment. We can provide both individual and group programs tailored to your goals.

To discuss services for your child and family please call 1300 847 466 and ask to speak to the State Practice Leader in Victoria.

Or visit our website: www.visionaustralia.org.au