



**George Abbot  
School  
VI Specialist Centre  
Handbook for  
Parents  
2020-21**

## Introduction

This handbook has been written to provide an overview for parents of students with a vision impairment, outlining how the VI Specialist Centre operates at George Abbot School.

## Mission Statement

We aim to provide a supportive learning environment and to promote the achievement and development of students who are visually impaired within an inclusive mainstream secondary school.

## Who is in the Specialist Centre?

- The Head of the Specialist Centre: Ms A Line
- TVI: Mrs I Jones (Part time)
- HLTA: Mrs U Messenger
- Full time Teaching Assistant: Dr L Gurgi
  
- The students are a mixture of large print users and brailleists.

## Aims and Objectives

To ensure:

- Our students can access the curriculum using modified work and appropriate technology.
- Our students receive a full and varied curriculum through liaison with all their subject teachers.
- Our students receive appropriate support.
- Our students develop as independent learners.
- A safe and secure environment in which each student can realise their potential.
- Our students have access to independent living and mobility skills.
- Our students are equipped to become fully participating members of society at the end of their school careers.
- Close liaison with parents and other appropriate agencies as partners in the pupils' education.

In order to achieve these objectives, all our students must access the mainstream curriculum. To facilitate this, we offer in-class support, appropriate technology, provision of low level vision aids and prepared modified materials, which can be either electronic or hard copies. At the same time, we appreciate, that many of our students need access to the 'alternative' or 'special' curriculum. This includes: keyboard skills for touch typing, mobility training and Braille when necessary. These are taught within the weekly timetable rather than treated as optional extras. We are also aware that students must not be over protected and they are therefore encouraged to develop independent living and learning skills.

As a department we offer training and presentations to inform staff and students about the needs of visually impaired people.

## How the Specialist Centre operates:

All students who are accepted in the VI Specialist Centre have an Education and Health Care Plan.

Before VI students come to the school there is extensive liaison with their parents, their primary school and with the peripatetic advisory teacher from the PSS (Physical and Sensory Service Surrey (Vision)) who has visited them at their primary school. All students with VI are invited to attend an induction session within the Specialist Centre in addition to the induction morning for all new students prior to their transfer to George Abbot.

In Year 7 we aim to support in most subject areas. This support slowly reduces as we work towards providing the students with the confidence, technology and skills to become increasingly independent as they progress through the school.

Most of the support is provided in lessons. However, it is necessary to withdraw students from lessons from time to time for the 'additional curriculum' for the following reasons:

### **1. Word-processing lessons**

Many VI students find handwriting tiring, and/or they cannot read their own work. For this reason, they all have laptops and time is allocated to teach them to touch type, so that they can keep pace with their work in lessons and use a suitable font size.

### **2. Extra help with basic literacy and numeracy**

If, in addition to their visual impairment, students have fallen behind with their learning either because of their disability or other factors, they may need to be given extra help with maths and literacy skills in withdrawal lessons in Key Stage 3.

### **External agencies**

Some students require input from external agencies. Mobility, life skills and physiotherapy are some of the areas covered in the Special Curriculum. These can be during school time but are often scheduled for after school hours.

### **Braille teaching**

Some of our students need to be taught Braille both for reading and writing.

### **When is the additional curriculum taught?**

Decisions as to what lessons students should be withdrawn from and for how long are made in consultation with parents, students and subject staff; they are reviewed regularly.

### **Centre Study Sessions**

All VI students taking GCSEs are offered the opportunity to take one less optional subject, the time being used for private/assisted study within the VI Specialist Centre.

### **Tutorials**

All students with a VI have a tutorial session with a member of staff in the Specialist Centre. This provides the opportunity to:

- Discuss their work.
- Discuss any problems that have arisen in lessons, especially those in which they are not supported.
- Check students' progress with their individual targets.
- Review and set new targets.
- Enable students/staff to discuss any other concerns.
- Discuss choices for GCSE/A level selection.
- Have assistance with completion of forms.
- Provide guidance and assistance with work experience placements if applicable.
- Give assistance with post 16 education including colleges and universities.

### **Homework**

Students with VI are expected to complete homework the same as any other student. We expect them to meet the same deadlines as other students and teaching staff to enforce the same sanctions. All work should be printed off and filed or stuck into their books where appropriate, or emailed by arrangement with the subject teacher, prior to the lessons.

## Homework Club

Homework club operates four lunchtimes a week and is run by Ms Line. Students can come for help with any aspect of their work and use the equipment available for them in the Specialist Centre.

## Supported Independent Learning

If a subject teacher is absent, students are set work and are sent to the hall to be supervised by a senior member of staff; these sessions are known as supported independent learning lessons. VI students are encouraged to go with the rest of their group provided with modified work and their laptops. However, should it be felt that they need additional support; they are allowed to come to the Specialist Centre to do the work, provided a member of staff is present.

## Annual Reviews

Each VI student in the VI Specialist Centre has an Education and Health Care Plan which is reviewed annually. All their teachers are legally required to submit comments and information to feed into the review. This is an opportunity for the student, parents, outside agencies, VI staff and Heads of Year to review progress over the past year and set new targets.

## Learning Plans

Each term a Learning Plan will be discussed with the student, parents and the Head of the VI Specialist Centre. This will be based on their Annual Reviews and their Progress Monitoring reports.

## Contact with parents

The Specialist Centre believes that a good working relationship between the centre, parents and the students is very important to the VI students' success. Contact can be in a variety of ways:

- Parental visits to George Abbot prior to students' transfer
- Phone calls and e-mails
- Letters
- Seeing parents at Annual Reviews, on Progress Monitoring days and when the need arises.

## Laptops and computers

All VI students with useful vision, use laptops (provided by the LEA). They learn to touch type and we encourage the use of their laptops in lessons and for homework. If students take equipment home their parents are required to sign a form accepting responsibility for ensuring it is returned in good condition.

We also have large screen computers in the VI Specialist Centre available for students use and various large screens throughout the school.

## What is partial vision?

A simple but practical definition of partial vision is sight that cannot be corrected by spectacles. Many of our students have some useful sight but it is very limited.

It may involve any one or more of the following:

- Myopia - short sight.
- Tunnel vision - good central vision but narrow field.
- Complete or partial loss of central vision with better peripheral vision.
- Cloudy or blurred vision.
- Loss of part of the visual field.
- Photophobia - sensitivity to bright light.

- Nystagmus - rapid eye movement making focusing difficult.
- Vision which may vary daily and deteriorate with ill health, fatigue and under stressful conditions.

Our students suffer from a very large spectrum, and often unique, range of medical conditions.

### Practical Effects of Partial Vision

We cannot know exactly what our students see, only they know, and those who suffer from a congenital eye defect will not know how the fully sighted see. They may say that they can see 'all right' but that is by their definition!

Here are some points you may like to consider regarding VI students.

- Students with VI will not benefit from incidental learning and this will be reflected in their general knowledge and vocabulary, both of which could be restricted.
- They may have poor hand/eye co-ordination
- They learn very little by imitation and in particular can have difficulty acquiring physical skills. Being unable to copy other people may lead to anti-social habits because of the inability to see how others behave and to see other people's reactions to them.
- The visually impaired student will be disadvantaged by not being able to see the teacher's facial expressions and body language.
- The teacher should always address the student by name when asking a question or an opinion because they will not see gestures.
- When a subject teacher is writing on the board it is imperative that they dictate the work at the same time. Many visually impaired students cannot see the board and find it very difficult, when copying, to look away and then re-focus on their work. They become very skilled at taking notes by dictation.
- A desk, or electronic, copy of board work and the smart board is essential for all students who cannot see the board.
- Staff should be aware that students with VI may tire more easily than others.

### Role of VI Staff

- Liaison with subject staff prior to lessons. This enables work to be modified for the lessons and for the students with a VI to participate fully in the lessons along with their peers.
- Preparation of materials, to the students' specific requirements. Each VI TA is responsible for adapting work for a number of curriculum subjects
- Supporting VI students in mainstream lessons
- Specific responsibilities allocated to them within the Department.
- Small group work, or individual withdrawal lessons to support specific learning.

### In class support

Some students will need VI TA support in lessons. They support students in a variety of tasks including:

- Copying/dictating work from the board and reading text.
- Providing verbal explanations of demonstrations, videos, diagrams etc.
- Assisting students with practical tasks and ensuring students' safety.
- Helping students with the use of equipment.
- Assisting with any other difficulties students may have.
- Monitoring students' ability to work independently.

### Outside agencies

The VI Specialist Centre has contact with the following outside agencies:

- Physical & Sensory Support Service.
- Qualified Habilitation Specialists for the visually impaired.
- Occupational therapists.
- Educational psychologist.
- Caseworker for the visually impaired based at Area Education Office.
- Other schools with VI Specialist Centres.
- Physiotherapists.
- Counselling services.
- Social services.
- Home school link worker.
- Speech & Language.

### External examination arrangements for the visually impaired

All students with VI taking external exams of ANY kind have special arrangements. These will be assessed and applied for by the VI Specialist Centre delegated member of staff.

Papers are then ordered to meet their needs, and the students will sit their exams in the Specialist Centre invigilated by the VI Team.

### Internal arrangements for examinations for students with VI

All students with VI must have modified papers for all internal exams and assessments.

Once the papers have been modified, our students would normally sit their exams in the Specialist Centre, or, in some circumstances, they can sit them along with their peers, but they must be allowed their extra time.

### Types of exam access for VI candidates

1. Extra time – between 25% and 100%.
2. Modified papers.
3. Use of a computer is permitted where this is the usual means of working in lessons in that particular subject.
4. Use of a magnifier or other specific technology.
5. A reader.
6. A scribe.
7. A practical assistant.

### School Visits

Many VI students will need to be accompanied by a member of staff from the VI Specialist Centre on school trips, both to ensure their safety and to make certain that they derive maximum benefit from the trip. Many of our students will find a new environment very challenging; we get used to seeing them around school and appearing to be very confident, but taken out of a known environment they are often much challenged.

### Taxis

The majority of VI students come to school by taxi as they either live a distance away from the school or they are unable to use public transport. Taxis can only be provided for students at the beginning and end of the school day. Taxi arrangements are made with the Taxi Company and the home. If students wish to stay for after school clubs or they have a detention the parents have the responsibility to make any transport arrangements.

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:

**Anita Line - Head of the VI Specialist Centre**