



SPEVI position statement on the role of the Specialist Teacher (Vision Impairment): Ensuring the best outcome for children with vision impairment

Compiled by the SPEVI VI-NDIS working group, February 2016

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Children with vision impairment deserve equity of access

Children with vision impairment are entitled to equity of access to all aspects of life as they choose. To achieve this they must be supported from the time that their vision impairment is diagnosed, as they travel on their educational journey, and throughout their life. Children with vision impairment need support and advocacy to achieve their goals in education and life. It is essential that professionals supporting them can guarantee reasonable adaptations, assistive technology, and accessible resources to facilitate their learning and development. Children with vision impairment are more often than not complex individuals, with multiple health issues and additional diagnoses. This makes it vital that professionals supporting these children are knowledgeable and willing to advocate for the rights of children to access all aspects of their community. These professionals must also play an active role in encouraging parents and carers to advocate for their children. Families need to understand their child's vision impairment and the impact it has on their child. They must become empowered to advocate on behalf of their child and, in partnership with professionals, to ensure informed choices are being made for their child's support.

Children with vision impairment deserve the best support

The best support for children with vision impairment can only be achieved when the impact of the vision impairment is realised across the child's life experience. This requires a coordinated and multidisciplinary assessment which entails gathering data (such as the child's particular needs in the home and in the community), observations made on initial visit (such as regarding self-care,

independence, social skills, functional skills, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, communication skills, and developmental level), along with the clinical diagnosis, low vision evaluation, and a functional vision assessment. As the child nears school-age, a learning media assessment, and an Orientation and Mobility (O & M) assessment can be initiated, to ensure the child's successful transition to formal education. These assessments need to be implemented, monitored and reviewed on a continuum throughout the child's life as the child's interests and needs change. It is a life-long process that will always require varying levels of support.

Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) provide the best educational support

Specialist teachers (Vision Impairment) are highly trained professionals who can support a child with vision impairment in educational, home and community settings, considering the adaptations to be made, and how programs can be differentiated to cater for the child in order to access the curriculum. Social skills, independent living, braille, assistive technology and orientation and mobility skills are all vital areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Wherever possible, these important key areas are implemented preschool and in school settings.

In Australia, Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) provide direct and consultative support across a diverse range of public and private educational sectors. Their professional activities include working closely with parents and carers, students, school leaders and teachers, medical personnel and other professionals. The specific skills of Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) ensure they are able to:

- Understand how children with vision impairment learn. This permits specialist teachers (Vision Impairment) to foster the physical, social and intellectual development of students with vision impairment
- Understand the academic and social needs of students with vision impairment and students with additional or complex needs
- Provide parents and carers with recommendations that are unbiased and based on a sound knowledge of the expanded core curriculum
- Support the transition of children with vision impairment through the early years into the school years, and between primary and high school, and assist in preparing them for higher education and adult life ahead
- Ensure strategies are in place to support the full participation of students with vision impairment across the curriculum and school community
- Modify their teaching to meet the specific needs of students across the full range of abilities including students who are culturally, socially and linguistically diverse
- Teach braille (as necessary) to young children (with expert knowledge of teaching strategies, braille resources, etc.) while also having the knowledge to teach older students who have experienced adventitious loss of vision. Specialist teachers (Vision Impairment) not only are trained in the Unified English Braille (UEB) literary code but also understand the theory of teaching braille and have the experience and knowledge to teach braille
- Collaborate with the class and subject teachers in making reasonable adjustments to the curriculum, instructional methods, educational materials and the learning environment to

ensure that students with vision impairment fully participate in school life and teaching and learning activities

- Work closely with Orientation and Mobility (O&M) teachers and instructors to ensure O&M skills, strategies and techniques are embedded within the child's everyday school and community experiences to promote the child's participation, self-confidence and independence. Please note: there is a small number of dual-qualified teachers who have specialised in vision impairment and O&M.

Finding a Specialist Teacher (Vision Impairment)

Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) are listed as Early Intervention service providers on the website of the Australian Government's Better Start for Children with Disability program. They will soon be included as service providers under the NDIS. Parents, carers and professionals are encouraged to contact The South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI Inc.). SPEVI Inc. is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region, so if you have questions regarding support for a child with a vision impairment, please contact SPEVI through the [SPEVI website \(www.spevi.net\)](http://www.spevi.net). Australia's state and territory education departments are encouraged to implement an Early Intervention referral system to Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment).

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