

SPEVI Principles and Practice

Guidelines for quality education
of learners with vision impairment

The Position of South Pacific Educators
in Vision Impairment Inc.
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Foreword

One of the great privileges of holding the office of SPEVI President is the opportunity it presents to work with education leaders and vision specialists in documenting what we believe to be the foundation of best practice in education of learners with vision impairment. The SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines presented here, represent SPEVI's position on the essential components of quality education services and programs for learners with vision impairment, including children and adult learners with blindness, low vision, deafblindness, or additional disabilities. The principles reflect SPEVI's vision and mission, and its aims as the major professional Association of educators in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Region whose specialty is in matters pertaining to education of learners with vision impairment.

The first edition, entitled Principles and Standards and published in 2004, was written by members of SPEVI's Leaders in Vision Education Services (see <http://www.spevi.net/about-us-2/principles-and-standards/>). This second edition reflects the changing nature of education and the increasing emphasis on rights-based approaches to education for learners with disabilities. In recent years we have seen a growing shift to inclusive education worldwide, and the development of national and international disability anti-discrimination legislation and policies. Of particular relevance to the field of education for learners with vision impairment are the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(2006, Article 24, Education), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015, Goal 4 Inclusive, equitable quality education for all and lifelong learning), and the Australian Government's Disability Standards for Education (2005) (see Reference List for publication details).

These Principles and Practice guidelines highlight the importance of a continuum of education services and programs across each individual's life span, commencing with early diagnosis and referral to education and allied health services, through to lifelong learning opportunities in adulthood. The guidelines emphasise the importance of providing disability-specific education courses, programs and support services and adjustments of curriculum, pedagogy and learning environments that are based upon each learner's assessed strengths, needs and aspirations.

The SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines are endorsed by its Committee of Management. On behalf of the Committee, I wish to acknowledge with thanks, the professionals in the field of vision education who contributed their knowledge and expertise (see list of Contributors). The Committee also acknowledges with thanks the support of Trudy Smith, Chair of the National Association of Australian Teachers of the Deaf (NAATD), in guiding the contributors through the development process.

Frances Gentle

President, South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment

Rationale

In accordance with Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD], every person has the right to education and lifelong learning on the basis of equal opportunity and without discrimination (United Nations, 2006). In realising this right for learners with vision impairment, it is vital that each learner has access to an education system that meets his or her essential and life-long educational needs, and equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to reach their optimum potential and contribute to their various communities.

These principles and practice guidelines for education of learners with vision impairment represent SPEVI's response to the CRPD principles and articles, in particular Article 24 that addresses education. The guidelines are aligned with SPEVI's Mission, which is to stimulate professional and public debate and action on vision impairment issues and change which affect, or have the potential to affect the daily lives of persons who are vision impaired, while emphasising concepts of inclusive, responsive educational communities and interdependence between learners and families within those communities where all people are valued (see <http://www.spevi.net/vision-mission-aims/>.)

Aims

The SPEVI principles and practice guidelines aim to:

- a. Present guiding principles that in the view of SPEVI underpin the provision of inclusive, equitable, quality education courses, programs and support services for all learners who are blind or have low vision, deafblindness, or additional disabilities. These principles offer a foundation for setting objectives, and establishing accountability measures within educational organisations and school systems.
- b. Present best practice guidelines against which service providers might develop and measure the comprehensiveness of service delivery and performance. Service providers include public and private education sector personnel, school principals, generalist and specialist teachers, organisations of persons with disabilities and disability advocacy groups, and parents/carers of learners with vision impairment.

What the SPEVI principles and practice guidelines mean for learners with vision impairment

Learners with vision impairment are infants, toddlers and youth who experience impairments of the eye and visual system that affect their ability to learn. They may be totally blind or they may have visual difficulties in such activities as seeing the print in a textbook, or on a white board, seeing all areas of the typical visual field, or seeing enough detail to interpret the objects in their environment. Learners with vision impairment have unique educational needs. Much of what we generally call “knowledge” is received and processed mainly through the sense of sight. Children with vision impairment, therefore, need to acquire knowledge in a variety of alternative ways. Although many school programs in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Region are providing the specialised instruction that learners with vision impairment need in addition to their academic instruction, there remains much room for improvement. Far too many learners with vision impairment leave school without having acquired the tools for further learning, economic survival and independence. Others lack the basic skills to successfully participate as equals in adult society.

The principles and practice guidelines for education of learners with vision impairment presented here are based on the propositions that:

- All learners who are blind or vision impaired, as well as those with additional disabilities or deafblindness, have the capacity for inclusion in society, at a time and to a degree that is appropriate for each individual, and is chosen by that individual.
- Assessment, educational planning, and placement decisions must be driven by the individual needs of each learner.
- Every learner who is blind or vision impaired must have access to the services of a qualified specialist vision teacher and an orientation and mobility instructor, for periods of time sufficient to meet their identified needs.
- Parents and educators form a special, vital, and necessary partnership.

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These Teacher Standards' Elaborations for Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) are endorsed by the SPEVI Committee of Management:

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Principles

Principles

Principle 1 Identification and Referral

- 1.1 Every family is entitled to appropriate and timely early identification, intervention and referral services.
- 1.2 Learners with suspected vision impairment must be immediately referred to a health professional for investigation.
- 1.3 If a diagnosis of vision impairment is made by a health professional, it is essential that the learner and his/her family are referred to appropriate specialist educational, health and/or rehabilitation services as early as possible.

Principle 2 Access to Quality Educational Options

- 2.1 As recognised in national disability anti-discrimination laws (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, 2005), learners with vision impairment have the right to access courses, programs and support services on the same basis as learners without disability, including the right to reasonable adjustments to the Curriculum, instructional approaches and the learning environment.
- 2.2 In accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948, Article 26), parents have the right to choose the kind of education to be provided for their children.
- 2.3 In accordance with United Nations conventions and policies (UNESCO, 2009; United Nations 2006), the principles of “inclusive education” and the “least restrictive environment” must underpin the provision of courses, programs and support services for learners with vision impairment by government and non-government education systems and schools.

Principle 3 Partnerships: Family and Professional Collaboration

- 3.1 Equitable access and participation in education for learners with vision impairment requires inclusive partnerships and collaboration between families, educators and allied professionals, as exemplified by mutual respect, cultural sensitivity and shared responsibility.
- 3.2 Disability anti-discrimination legislation, administration and organisational policies and processes must guarantee the right to equitable and inclusive education services for learners who are blind or have low vision, deafblindness or additional disabilities.

Principle 4 Assessment and Goal Setting

- 4.1 4.1 Appropriate ongoing assessment of learners with vision impairment should be conducted by professionals who have relevant training and experience, in collaboration with the learner and his or her family, and with sensitivity to the family's social, cultural and linguistic background.
- 4.2 Individual learners with vision impairment have unique strengths and needs that are associated with their eye condition. To ensure equitable access to courses, programs and support services, assessments should include the Curriculum (termed core Curriculum) and the disability-specific Expanded Core Curriculum (see Principle 7 and Glossary of Terms).
- 4.3 Assessment by professionals with expertise in vision impairment is an essential component of the development and annual review of documented individual plans and goal setting for learners with vision impairment.

Principle 5 Professional Training and Employment

- 5.1 Recruitment, training and retention of qualified and skilful Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) is essential to the delivery of equitable, high quality services and programs for the diverse population of learners with vision impairment and their families (United Nations, 2006, Article 24).
- 5.2 Universities and training authorities with suitably qualified academic staff should offer a range of initial, pre-service and in-service professional learning programs and accredited courses of study in the area of vision impairment for mainstream and specialist educators and allied professionals.
- 5.3 The position of the Specialist Teacher (Vision Impairment) is a highly diverse area of expertise. Critical to this expertise is pre-service and in-service professional learning that addresses SPEVI's Professional Standards Elaborations (2016). These Elaborations describe the minimum levels of Professional Knowledge, Practice and Engagement for Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) at the career stages of "Graduate", "Proficient", "Highly Accomplished" and "Lead" teacher.
- 5.4 Public and private-sector education systems and individual schools should promote and facilitate staff engagement with professional learning and evidence-based research in vision impairment, inclusive education and the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Principle 6 Access to Information

- 6.1 Access to information in accessible formats (braille, large print, audio and digital) for education, employment and leisure must be provided in a timely manner for learners with vision impairment, in accordance with disability anti-discrimination legislation and organisational guidelines (United Nations, 2006, Article 24).
- 6.2 The provision of information and instructional materials for learners with vision impairment must be based on assessment of learning media (visual, tactual and/or auditory) and literacy media (reading and writing formats) by professionals with expertise in vision impairment.
- 6.3 Learners with vision impairment must have access to assistive and mainstream technologies and optical aids that enable equitable access to learning and participation in educational, social and vocational environments on the same basis as their sighted peers.

Principle 7 Expanded Core Curriculum

- 7.1 Provision of the disability-specific Expanded Core Curriculum, in conjunction with reasonable adjustments to the Curriculum, instructional methods and learning environments, is essential for participation of learners with vision impairment in education and society on the same basis as their sighted peers.
- 7.2 Specialist teachers (vision impairment) and orientation and mobility instructors have a leading role in the planning, delivery and review of Expanded Core Curriculum programs for individual learners with vision impairment. These professionals work collaboratively with class and subject teachers, families and other professionals to ensure that individual plans and programs support learners to achieve their current and future aspirational goals.
- 7.3 Individual plans for learners with vision impairment will include one or more of the following Expanded Core Curriculum areas, as determined by regular assessment:
 - Compensatory access to information, communication and literacy
 - Sensory efficiency
 - Technology
 - Orientation and mobility
 - Physical abilities
 - Independent living
 - Social interaction
 - Recreation and leisure
 - Career education
 - Self-determination



Practice

Practice

Best practice guidelines in education for learners with vision impairment

Practice 1 Identification and Referral

- 1.1 In order to minimise the potential impact of vision impairment on overall development and learning, it is imperative that learners with suspected vision impairment are referred as soon as possible to health professionals for assessment.
- 1.2 Education, health and/or rehabilitation services for learners with vision impairment and their families are most effective when they commence shortly after diagnosis and referral by Referrals by health professionals.
- 1.3 Identification of vision impairment and referral includes diagnosis, prescription, vision report and regular review. For learners with vision impairment and additional disabilities or deafblindness, assessment by a range of health professionals may be required in order to minimise the compounding impact of disability on physical, social and cognitive development and learning.

Practice 2: Access to Quality Educational Options

- 2.1 Learners with vision impairment have diverse and often complex learning, social and physical needs and strengths. As set out in disability anti-discrimination legislation, they have the right to access courses, programs and services that ensure they are able to participate in education and lifelong learning on the same basis as learners without disability (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2016).
- 2.2 The right of parents to choose the kind of education to be given to their children is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, Article 26), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966, Article 13). Parents, families and carers should therefore be fully informed about the range of educational courses, programs and support services that are available for their child. Information regarding these services should be in languages and formats that are accessible and culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- 2.3 Inclusive schools provide for the needs of all members of the school community. Inclusive schools welcome and celebrate learner and family diversity, are safe and non-discriminatory, and enable personal participation and control by learners with disability, including learners with vision impairment (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2014).
- 2.4 The principle of “least restrictive environment” recognises that some environments and practices are intrinsically more restrictive than others (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2014). For learners with vision impairment and additional/multiple disabilities or deafblindness, regular class placement may not guarantee equitable academic, social and/or physical participation in education on the same basis as learners without disability. A range of educational settings, courses, programs and support services should be provided by education systems and school ensure equitable access and participation for learners with vision impairment.

- 2.5 The learning environment should be assessed by professionals with expertise in vision impairment to identify potential limitations or safety concerns that are associated with a learner's vision impairment. The outcomes and recommendations of these assessments should be implemented by education systems and individual schools in a timely manner to ensure learners with vision impairment are able to participate in education and training on the same basis as their sighted peers.

Practice 3: Partnerships: Family and Professional Collaboration

- 3.1 Education systems and schools should promote and support family-professional collaboration, and the participation of families and learners in setting and implementing shared goals for learners with vision impairment.
- 3.2 It is essential to recognise the vital knowledge that parents and carers hold in regard to their child's vision impairment and consequent academic and social strengths and needs. Child and family-centred practice will encourage shared family-professional responsibility for achieving optimal outcomes for learners with vision impairment.
- 3.3 To ensure that families are aware of the range of specialised services, information must be readily available in a language and format that is accessible and culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Practice 4: Assessment and Goal Setting

- 4.1 Educational goals should reflect the assessed strengths and needs of each learner in all areas of the curriculum to maximise learning, with consideration of the disability-specific needs associated with vision impairment and any other additional disabilities.
- 4.2 Assessment of learners with vision impairment in relation to the Expanded Core Curriculum should be conducted by professionals with expertise in vision impairment, in consultation and collaboration with families and other professionals.
- 4.3 Documented educational plans with negotiated goals should be collaboratively developed and reviewed twice annually by the learner's educational team. Teams generally include class and/or subject teachers, the learner with vision impairment, his/her parents or family members, specialist teacher (vision impairment), orientation and mobility instructor, and allied professionals.

Practice 5 Professional Training and Employment

- 5.1 Initial, pre-service and in-service training programs in vision impairment should be offered to class, subject and specialist teachers by universities and training authorities. A range of delivery modes should be offered, including face-to-face, eLearning and distance education, to meet the diverse professional needs of educators and allied professionals.
- 5.2 Tertiary institutions offering undergraduate teaching courses should include at least one unit of study in vision impairment, delivered by faculty members with appropriate qualifications and expertise.
- 5.3 Tertiary institutions that employ qualified faculty members in the area of vision impairment should prepare a sufficient number of specialist teachers (vision impairment) to meet the personnel needs of public and private-sector education systems and schools.
- 5.4 To ensure the provision of high quality individualised and timely services, public and private-sector education systems should determine reasonable and achievable caseloads for specialist teachers (vision impairment) on the basis of learner and family needs.
- 5.5 Public and private-sector education systems should support educators and allied professionals to identify and undertake professional learning and evidence-based research into the developmental, educational and social implications of vision impairment.

Practice 6 Access to Information

- 6.1 Public and private-sector education systems must ensure learners with vision impairment have access to textbooks and instructional materials in formats and time-frames that enable equitable access to information and learning on the same basis as their sighted peers. The time honoured maxim of “the right book, in the right medium, at the right time” still holds true in today’s classrooms. Delays in receiving texts and instructional materials in accessible formats can turn a potentially appropriate educational placement into an inappropriate one.
- 6.2 Literacy media (braille, large print, audio and digital) should be provided in accordance with disability anti-discrimination legislation, policies and procedures, with reference to accessibility guidelines prescribed by such organisations as the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities.
- 6.3 Collaboration is essential between educators, allied professionals and technology consultants in the assessment and provision of accessible instructional materials and technology for learners with vision impairment, including the provision of technology training and support for learners and their teachers.
- 6.4 Public and private-sector education systems must ensure that a process is set in place for funding the purchase, maintenance and upgrading of technology, optical aids and resources used by learners with vision impairment, and for staff training in their use and care.

Practice 7 Expanded Core Curriculum

7.1 In addition to the general (core) curriculum, provision of the Expanded Core Curriculum will maximise the academic, social, vocational and life skills of learners with vision impairment. Selection of the essential Expanded Core Curriculum areas for individual learners with vision impairment is contingent on their assessed strengths, needs and attributes.

7.2 The range of Expanded Core Curriculum areas for learners with vision impairment includes the following (Allman, Lewis & Spungin, 2014; SPEVI, 2004):

7.2.1 Compensatory access to information, communication and literacy:

- Concept development and spatial understanding
- Communication modes to access print information and to write or communicate
- Learning media: Visual, tactual and/or auditory
- Literacy media: Tools and formats for reading and writing, including braille, large print, audio and/or electronic
- Speaking and listening skills
- Study and organisational skills
- Use of adapted and specialised educational materials
- Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems

7.2.2 Sensory efficiency:

- Enhancement of functional vision, including fixation, orienting, tracking and visual discrimination
- Enhancement of auditory function, including localisation, aural discrimination and presentation, and sound pattern use
- Enhancement of tactile function and kinaesthetic movement, including tactile discrimination, scanning, manipulation and dexterity
- Training in the use of optical & non optical low vision aids
- Development of compensatory skills, including tools, adjustments, modifications and behaviours that maximise the learner's opportunity to access information and the academic, social and physical environment

7.2.3 Technology

- Use and care of appropriate assistive and mainstream technologies
- Information access, research, referencing and study skills using technology
- Use of technology to communicate, including AAC systems

7.2.4 Orientation and mobility

- Body awareness and environmental awareness
- Concept development, including body, environmental and spatial concepts
- Mobility skills, including safe, independent, confident and socially acceptable movement
- Orientation skills, including knowing routes and understanding layouts of the physical environment
- Independent travel, including decision-making and route planning skills

- Creation and use of accessible maps, transport timetables, etc. in braille, large print, audio, or digital formats
- Interpersonal skills, including requesting directions and soliciting information

7.2.5 Physical abilities:

- Postural control and balance
- Fine and gross motor abilities
- Physical strength and endurance

7.2.6 Independent living:

- Self-care, including personal hygiene and grooming, dressing, clothing care, household management and cooking
- Self-advocacy, organisational and decision-making skills
- Time and money management
- Awareness of, and access to, community resources and activities
- Planning for transition to adulthood

7.2.7 Social interaction:

- Age-appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour, including social etiquette, effective communication and conversation skills, appropriate body language, and self-monitoring and interpretation of social behaviour
- Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-advocacy
- Development and maintenance of healthy and respectful relationships and friendships

7.2.8 Recreation and leisure:

- Play and physical activity
- Independence in selecting, trialling and engaging in a variety of recreation and leisure activities, including health, fitness, team and spectator sports and hobbies
- Development of life-long recreation and leisure skills

7.2.9 Career education:

- Awareness of career options and personal career strengths and interests
- Exploration of careers and employment support agencies and services
- Career placement, including preparing resumes and job applications, interview skills, participation in work, and development of such work behaviours as punctuality and staying on task
- Connecting with vocational role models and mentors

7.2.10 Self-determination:

- Self-knowledge and ability to engage in self-regulated and self-directed behaviour
- Awareness of individual rights and responsibilities, self-advocacy, empowerment, assertiveness and resilience
- Capacity to make informed choices
- Decision-making, problem-solving and goal-setting skills



About SPEVI

What is SPEVI?

SPEVI is the major professional association for specialist educators of learners with vision impairment (VI) in Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. SPEVI acts as the professional body in matters pertaining to education of children and young people who are blind, have low vision, deafblindness, or additional disabilities (see www.spevi.net). SPEVI membership includes educators, administrators, academics, parents and carers, eye health professionals and therapists, orientation and mobility instructors, and technology developers and consultants. Membership includes some of the most qualified and experienced professionals in the field of vision impairment in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region.

SPEVI's **Vision** is to promote educational systems in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific in which diversity is valued and disability is not viewed as a characteristic by which to judge a person's worth. SPEVI's **Mission** is to stimulate professional and public debate and action on vision impairment issues and change which affect, or have the potential to affect the daily lives of persons who are vision impaired, while emphasising concepts of inclusive, responsive educational communities and interdependence between learners and families within those communities where all people are valued.

SPEVI's **Aims** are:

- To be recognised as the professional body of educators whose speciality is in matters pertaining to the education of persons with vision impairment in Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Countries.
- To advocate on behalf of members, persons with vision impairment and parents/carers for equitable education access and participation, in accordance with international and national disability anti-discrimination legislation.
- To encourage the highest standards in the educators of persons with vision impairment by promoting research and professional training for general and specialist teachers.
- To promote and facilitate the interchange of information and collaboration among educators, professionals, parent groups and the broader community concerning education and equal opportunity for persons with vision impairment.
- To encourage the use of appropriate mainstream and assistive technologies, resources and optical and non-optical aids, in the education of persons with vision impairment, and to promote teacher education programs in the use and care of existing and new techniques and technology.

Glossary of Terms

Alternative formats

The term “alternative formats” as used in the SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines, describes the various ways of producing information, besides regular print, that enable people with vision impairment or other print disabilities to access information. The range of alternative formats includes audio, braille, electronic, and clear large print. Clear print refers to an approach to print design that creates legible, uncluttered documents that are easier to read (Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities, 2011). Learners with vision impairment may prefer different formats for different tasks or activities, learning environments, or time of the day, and changes over time in format preferences may be due to visual changes associated with deteriorating or unstable eye conditions (Inclusive Design Research Centre, OCAD University, 2013).

Core Curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum

The term “core curriculum” as used in the SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines, defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that all learners should have acquired by the completion of their secondary school education (Statewide Vision Resource Centre [SVRC], 2015). The core curriculum is generally related to the school’s academic subjects. The term “expanded core curriculum” is used in the Standards to define the essential additional disability-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes for learners who are blind, have low vision, deafblindness, or additional disabilities. Each learner with vision impairment is unique, and so are the additional areas they require in order to achieve success in their educational setting. Experiences and concepts casually and incidentally learned by sighted learners, for example, may need to be systematically and sequentially taught to learners with vision impairment.

Allman, Lewis and Spungin (2014) and SPEVI (2004), identify the following ten areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum for learners with vision impairment: (i)

Inclusion

The term “inclusion” as used in the SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines, refers to the belief that schools should provide for the needs of all learners in their community, whatever the level of their ability, disability, educational need, or other form of diversity (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2014).

Compensatory access to information, communication and literacy; (ii) sensory efficiency, including visual perceptual skills and maximising use of remaining vision; (iii) technology; (iv) orientation and mobility; (v) physical abilities; (vi) independent living; (vii) social interaction; (viii) recreation and leisure; (ix) career education; and (x) self-determination.

Vision impairment

The term “vision impairment” as used in the SPEVI Principles and Practice guidelines, refers to learners who are blind, have low vision, deafblindness or additional disabilities. The term “vision impairment” (or visual impairment), refers to any degree of vision loss that affects an individual's ability to perform the tasks of daily life (Corn & Erin, 2010). The term vision impairment generally refers to vision loss that is not correctable by surgery, medication, or the prescription of spectacles or other optical devices. The most common forms of vision impairment affect the sharpness or clarity of vision (termed visual acuity), or the extent of vision (termed visual fields). The World Health Organisation (2015) provides extensive information about the classification system of mild, moderate and severe vision impairment and blindness.

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