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A message to School SENCOs from the Vision Impairment Team during the Covid-19 pandemic

This message is for mainstream school SENCOs who have on roll a child / children with vision impairment and who were being supported by Sue Harvey, Jane Shipway or Alison Doyle-Stevenson prior to lockdown / school closure.

We are continuing to work from home and are available by phone or email as usual if you need support from us. Resource Officer Adrian Farnsworth is also working from home but has no access to his base at Markeaton Primary School so isn't currently able to provide any modified materials or large print books.

Home learning

- As we're sure you are aware, parents with children with SEND are likely to have even greater concern for their child's health and for the health of other family members during the current pandemic. Thank you that many of you have been contacting families to find out how they are coping and how they are finding the level and type of work being provided by teachers. Please continue to review with parents / carers and contact us for support and information if you encounter VI issues.
- We know that some staff are ill / in isolation and some school buildings are fully closed, so often work may be provided by a teacher who isn't the child's usual teacher and who may not know them or their VI needs. For children with VI many online resources will not be easily / fully accessible. When providing resources for home learning, please consider both the visual demands of working with online resources and the visual content of resources you are providing – colour contrast, layout and font style / size. Web pages can be zoomed in to provide a degree of enlargement but this doesn't eliminate visual clutter or poor colour contrast. Similarly, watching (and following) video content is tiring and often not easily modified. Some families will only have access to online content using a mobile phone, which is difficult for children with VI to access due to the small screen size.



Perhaps consider providing more paper based materials (in the child's usual format) and practical tasks where possible. (We are aware this may be difficult if schools are completely closed or if parents don't have access to a printer.)

- Many children with VI are delayed in their social development and self-help skills. More time at home might be a great opportunity for them to develop independence in self-help and daily living skills such as dressing, self-care, food preparation, managing money and mobility. If providing appropriate academic work is difficult, perhaps encourage parents to spend time teaching some of these skills. Developing social skills such as turn taking, holding social conversations or using technology to connect with friends might also be a good use of home learning time. (There are some suggestions in our parents' letter also available on the SIP.)
- If your school has joined RNIB Bookshare, you can create a member account for a child with VI from within your school account which will give the child (or parent for younger children) access to materials from their home computer if they have one (see Resources for children with VI).

STePS electronic equipment

- Some children with VI have STePS laptops, tablets or KOBO e-readers for use in school. Generally these are provided for access to education and so are only for use in school but in the current situation there is scope for flexibility as outlined below. Please contact us if you would like to make arrangement for a piece of equipment to be used at home. Please do not send any STePS equipment home without consulting us first.
- **KOBO e-readers:** These should be managed as they are usually – if the child usually takes the KOBO home as a substitute for a home / school reading book then this can continue as usual. If it has been agreed that the KOBO doesn't usually go home then it should remain in school.
- **Tablets:** These are expensive pieces of equipment and are generally used for access to books and for taking photos / video recording to enable access to the board or other classroom resources. For primary school pupils, materials can be provided in paper format so there isn't a strong case for taking the tablet home. For secondary school students who have them, using at home for access to text books might be helpful. If we agree to allow a tablet to go home, there will be strict limitations on its use including no internet access.
- **Laptops:** In primary schools these are mainly used for board access and so aren't needed at home. Many children also use them to learn touch typing. Depending on the stage the child has reached in learning this skill, it may be appropriate to take the laptop home to continue practising. In secondary schools some students carry out the majority of their work on the laptop including word processing and accessing powerpoint presentations and other learning materials.

For these students having the laptop at home may be helpful if materials are already loaded onto the machine, but again internet access would not be permitted so it could not be used to generally access online resources or new material. (This is because our laptops are integrated into school networks which provides them with security and filters for safe browsing. The laptops don't have any of this when used independently of the network, meaning both the machine and the child would be vulnerable if used at home.)

Transitions

- None of us know yet when schools will re-open or how the closure will affect arrangements for transitions. Children and young people with VI generally require additional support for transitions and we will aim to still provide this when schools re-open. Please be aware that this will be our main priority when it happens, which may mean a temporary reduction in support for other children.
- Now that both National Offer days have passed, we will be contacting SENCOs where we are aware of a child with VI due to enter your school in September.
- If possible we will arrange meetings and additional visits when schools re-open prior to the child starting. If this isn't possible, due to a prolonged period of closure, we will at the very least provide you with written information about the child's VI needs and will be available to discuss this with staff by phone.
- Usually we provide mobility support / training for children during transition, particularly for those starting secondary school and travelling independently for the first time. This is provided in partnership with Guide Dogs. Currently their staff are furloughed and are not able to provide any services. When this changes we will contact SENCOs to arrange support but the reduced time available may mean that children have to be prioritised and not all children will receive support.

Please do contact your usual VI teacher if you would like any support regarding your children with vision impairment.

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