



Case Study: Visual Impairment

Wayne is a sixteen year old boy whose visual impairment was diagnosed when he was two years old. His parents noticed that he was fascinated by bright lights and became uncertain and fearful when entering the house after being in the sun or in any environment where the lighting levels were low. Wayne was slow to learn to walk. However, he reached all other developmental milestones at the appropriate age. He was eventually diagnosed as having retinitis pigmentosa at Moorfields Eye hospital at three years of age. The implications of this deteriorating condition are myopia (short sightedness), tunnel vision and night blindness (difficulty focusing in dim lighting conditions). Wayne's parents report that they did not receive any specialist advice following the diagnosis. Wayne was an alert and happy boy whose language development was progressing well. Wayne enjoyed being read to and loved to listen to songs and poetry. Wayne first attended a mainstream nursery school where staff noticed that he was reluctant to run around the playground like the other children, that he did not move around the nursery and engage in the full range of activities and that he had specific difficulties such as not being able to discern the white soap on the wash basin.

At five years of age Wayne transferred to the local mainstream primary school. Wayne was a bright and able pupil who was very industrious enjoyed academic work and generally excelled in school. He did not, however, enjoy PE team games such as football preferring to read in the library. The only concerns expressed by his teachers were that his handwriting was very immature. Wayne always took responsibility for ensuring that he chose a seat towards the front of the class and although he found school very tiring he was extremely keen to succeed and as he became older spent an increasing amount of time in the evenings doing his homework. Wayne had a close group of friends as his parents always encouraged Wayne to invite friends home to play after school. Wayne was always far less keen to visit the homes of his friends however preferring to be on his own familiar territory. In the following account Wayne describes his transition to secondary school which was an anxious time for him.

'When I was in Year 7 and started secondary school I was slightly scared because I didn't know what it was going to be like and I didn't know my way around. On the first day my friend called for me and we walked to school together. I was pleased about that. I found it hard learning my way around my new school but gradually I got used to it. My friend helped me to know where everything I needed was in the school. I knew my teachers knew about my sight problem but they didn't embarrass me about it. I told them I didn't need anything to be different in school and when I couldn't see the board my teachers asked me to come up and be the scribe and write down what they were saying.

Group work can help promote social interactions. However, adaptations and modifications must be in place to ensure equal access.

Provide incidental opportunities for the child to interact with others through, for example, how children are seated in the classroom. They should be positioned with easy access to others and not divided by the TA or equipment.

Although ultimately children need to learn to solve conflict situations and practice negotiating skills by themselves, too much intervention can prevent development. It is important that adults do not get in the way of children's interactions and ensure they have plenty of incidental opportunities to practice their social skills. It can be helpful to provide opportunities for the child to interact with peers who are socially competent and are good role-models (Roe, 2007).

Peer Support

It is important to ensure that the peer group understand the pupil's eye condition and take positive steps to include the child in group work and social activities. A systematic approach to promoting social interactions and friendships should be established through structured interventions. Pupils may need to be specifically taught key friendship skills such as turn-taking and joining in through an intervention such as 'How to Make Friends' (MacConville, 2008). For some pupils running a peer support programme such as Circle of Friends (www.inclusive-solutions.com/circlesoffriends.asp) or 'Talk Time' (MacConville and Rae, 2006) can ensure the child's successful social inclusion in school. The RNIB has a useful download on its website 'Accessible playground games for children who are visually impaired, sighted or blind' (www.rnib.org.uk).

Teaching Strategies

- Read or verbalise when working from the board during whole-class teaching.
- Refer to all children by name during class discussions to ensure that the child is aware of who is speaking and can follow the discussion.
- Allow the pupil additional time to formulate responses and complete tasks.
- Ensure that the pupil establishes a study buddy and network of friends within the class. Set up group work sensitively, the child should be placed in a group with peers of similar ability.
- Be clear and specific in your instructions.
- Prepare clear, well contrasted and well laid out materials for the whole class (many pupils with visual impairment can access these).
- Teach with real objects whenever possible as line drawings, photos and cartoons can be difficult for the child to interpret. Do not assume the child understands them and describe them (orally or in writing) depending on the task.
- Build in opportunities for short breaks from looking.
- Ensure LVAs are used appropriately by the child and that they promote independent working.
- Monitor how effectively LVAs supports the pupil's learning.
- Seek regular feedback from the pupil, for example, how is it going, is there anything you would like to change?

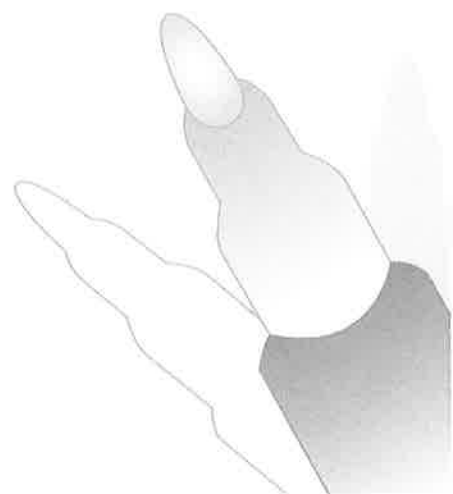


Case Study: Visual Impairment (Cont)

A few of the teachers, especially in the English department, went out of their way to help me a lot by talking to me and encouraging me with my work. They knew I was left out a bit in school because I didn't join in with any of the team games at break times or after school. They knew I enjoyed English and they said my mum must have fed me on poetry when I was a baby. My teachers encouraged me to write for the school magazine. I was proud when my articles were published.

The playground was always difficult for me because in primary school we didn't have a uniform so I used to remember what colour jumpers my friends were wearing and then look out for those colours again at playtime. In secondary school everybody has got the same dark green blazer so I can't find anybody from their clothes. I can't see faces from afar so I always have to arrange to meet up with my friends at a certain place. Another problem is at lunchtime because I can't read the board which tells you what the meal choices for the day are. I don't want to embarrass myself so I just point to what is in front of me when I get to the counter.

At home my main interest is computers. I want to work in computers when I grow up but first I want to go to university. I do all my homework on my computer.'





Activity: Visual Impairment

Identify the triggers for concern that occur in this case study:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

List the actions that could be taken to address each difficulty identified in order to reduce the negative impact of visual impairment on Wayne's development:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

