HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL	**Halton SEN Service** **Vision Impairment (0-25)**

Environmental Audit for schools with children who have a vision impairment – general guidance

Schools' duties around accessibility for disabled pupils:

"4.29 Schools must implement ***accessibility plans*** *which are aimed at…improving the physical environment of schools to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services provided"*

[Department for Education, 2014]

General guidance:
Things to consider / review in your nursery / school / college environment

Playgrounds/field:
- A large, featureless, unstructured open space is difficult to navigate around. Adding structure and different tactile floor surfaces will aid mobility & orientation & help the children feel more secure.
- Boundary walls & fences should be well maintained in a highly visible colour & free from touch hazards.

External doors & entrances:
- External doors & entrances should be clearly signed & have tactile flooring to identify them.
- Security devices & entry phone systems should be well signed and easily accessible.
- Thresholds should be as level as possible to avoid creating a tripping hazard. Marking them with bright / contrasting coloured paint or hazard tape will help them to be easier to see.

Stairs, steps & ramps:
- Stairs, steps & ramps should have handrails on both sides that where possible should extend beyond the top & bottom.
- The presence of stairs & steps should be clearly indicated at both top & bottom with tactile flooring and should have highlighted edges on both treads & risers.

Windows/shutters:
- Outwardly opening windows should not be left open if at head height.
- Open shutters must always be secured.

Signage:

- All signs should be in a uniform position and at eye level whenever possible. Sign information needs to be in a uniform format throughout the school however the signs themselves could be made symbolic and used as orientation aids i.e. square signs – information, round signs – directional, triangular signs – stop & think.
- Signs should be highly visible and in good contrast to the surfaces on which they are mounted.

Doors/doorways:

- Doors should be fitted with vision panels in both upper & lower sections.
- Door closing mechanisms should allow time for a slowly moving person to pass through & should be kept in good order.
- The pressure needed to open a door should be kept to a minimum.
- The approach to any door should be kept free of obstructions.
- Doors should never open outwards onto a corridor.
- The approach to a main entrance or exit door should be identified by a change in floor surface.
- Door thresholds should be flush with the floor wherever possible, to avoid a tripping hazard.
- Doorways & doors should be made visible by good colour contrast, door handles should contrast with the background.
- Edges of doors should be painted in a distinctive colour.

Floors:

- A floor inset of a different texture can denote location e.g. proximity to doors, steps, change of area within a room.
- All flooring should be non-slip, even when wet.
- Matting should be set into the floor whenever possible.
- If floor-top mats are unavoidable they should have heavy rubber edges that prevent the mat edges from curling or lifting.
- Anything spilt onto a floor, especially liquids or sand, should be cleared immediately.
- Floors should contrast with walls, door frames, skirting boards and furniture. Different coloured floors can be used in different areas of the school to provide location clues. Floor coverings should be plain so that background items can be clearly seen. Floors should not have shiny, polished surfaces as these reflect light & cause glare.

Furniture/fixtures/fittings:

- These should be well maintained and any damaged, broken or potentially unsafe items or objects moved out of reach.
- Furniture should, as far as possible, remain in the same position as once moved it presents a particular danger.
- Cupboards, drawers etc. that are accessed by children should have Braille/tactile symbol labelling.
- Sharp corners & protrusions should have impact protection.
- Work surfaces should be kept free of clutter.

- Cupboard doors and drawers should never be left open.
- Furniture should be in contrasting colours to the floor and walls. All work surfaces should contrast with the floor below. Work surfaces should be matt to avoid reflection & glare. All storage should be labelled in large print.

Lighting & Shade:

- All areas should be well illuminated by sources of natural and / or artificial light.
- Sunlight and some types of artificial light can produce reflected glare which can limit a children's effective use of vision. Lighting levels should be controllable using blinds, curtains, task lights or dimmer switches.
- All lighting should be silent as background sound from lights may be distracting for children.
- Matt laminate should be used for displays and work-cards in order to avoid glare.

Reference

Department for Education (2014) *The Equality Act 2010 and Schools: departmental advice for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities*
Available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf