

Hearing and Visual Needs

Overview Description

This chapter will discuss hearing loss and visual needs or impairments and describe what education settings and other adults supporting a child/young person's education can do to help.

Manchester Sensory Support Service (MSSS) works free of charge to support children and young people with Visual Impairment, Hearing Needs, and Multi-Sensory Impairment, from aged 0 to the time they leave school. They provide assessment, training and advice to settings and families to help them be inclusive and meet the needs of this cohort.



MSSS also offers a traded service to FE and sixth-form colleges.

Young people aged 18 and above, can access support via Manchester's Adult Sensory Team.

Hearing needs

There are three main types of hearing loss are as follows (taken from <https://www.healthyhearing.com/help/hearing-loss/types>)

- **Sensorineural hearing loss**, which means there is a problem occurring in either the inner ear or the auditory nerve, which delivers sound to the brain.
- **Conductive hearing loss**, which means sound is not reaching the inner ear, usually due to an obstruction, such as wax or congestion behind the eardrum or trauma
- **Mixed hearing loss** means the hearing loss is being caused by a combination of the two.

Whilst hearing loss is often identified when children are babies through the new born hearing screening process, hearing loss can also occur during childhood following an illness or an accident or chemotherapy or due to a conductive loss, such as glue ear. It is important for professions to look out for indicators of a hearing loss, especially during the early years and primary settings.

What might you notice in the classroom

You may notice the following behaviours for children and young people with a hearing loss:

- Not responding when their name is called
- Problems with concentration, excessive tiredness and frustration with work that starts to affect their behaviour, particularly at the end of the day
- Watching your lips intently as you speak
- Speaking too loudly or too quietly
- Watching others do something before attempting it themselves
- Becoming increasingly withdrawn from others in the classroom
- Delayed speech and communication development
- Mishearing or mispronouncing words
- Not being able to hear what's being said if there is background noise
- Making minimal contributions to classroom discussion
- Difficulty with reading and phonics

A child with a hearing need does not necessarily require constant additional help, but rather a mindful and sensitive approach to teaching the whole class.

Further guidance on strategies and reasonable adjustments for deaf children in nurseries can be found at [Manchester Ordinarily Available Provision for Early Years](#) and for primary schools [Manchester Primary Ordinarily Available Provision](#)

It is important to discuss any concerns with parents/carers and suggest their child has a hearing test via a referral from the GP.

Vision

Children and young people are classed as visually impaired when their level of vision, identified by a medical professional, is having an impact on their learning, independence and social inclusion. These children may be prescribed glasses or not depending on if they also have a refraction error in addition to their underlying condition.

Where there are any concerns that a child may have a visual impairment discuss with the parent whether the child has a known visual impairment or has attended any recent appointments with an optician/ orthoptist or GP for vision. If not, support parents to request an orthoptic appointment at their local health centre through the school nurse, GP or through Children's Community Orthoptic Service. If a visual impairment has been identified, you should seek parental consent to contact Manchester Sensory Support Service (MSSS) for advice and support immediately. Part of the anticipatory duty for SEND provision will require all settings to reflect on and provide an environment, teaching and resources that are inclusive of CYP with visual impairments. It is considered that good practice for the inclusion of CYP with VI will actually benefit and be good practice for all.

If a young person is identified as having a visual impairment advice and/or a level of support will be agreed with MSSS.

Vision plays a key role in children's play, the development of language, social skills, and all aspects of learning.

Visual impairments can be present from birth (congenital) or later in life (adventitious). Some common types of visual impairment are as follows <https://www.nib.org.uk/your-eyes/eye-conditions-az/>

Depending on the condition the following may be experienced

- **Loss of Central Vision** - The loss of central vision creates a blur or blindspot, but side (peripheral) vision remains intact. This makes it difficult to read, recognize faces and distinguish most details in the distance. Mobility, however, is usually unaffected because side vision remains intact.
- **Loss of visual field** - Loss of visual field is inability to distinguish anything to one side or both sides or anything directly above and/or below eye level. Central vision remains, however, making it possible to see directly ahead. Typically, loss of visual field may affect mobility and if severe, can slow reading speed as a result of seeing only a few words at a time. This is sometimes referred to as "tunnel vision."
- **Blurred Vision** - Blurred vision causes both near and far to appear to be out of focus, even with the best conventional spectacle correction possible.
- **Contrast sensitivity** - is the ability to distinguish between an object and the background behind it. It's an important aspect of your visual function, especially in low-light situations. For instance, foggy and high-glare situations require good contrast sensitivity for clear vision.
- **Extreme Light Sensitivity** - Extreme light sensitivity exists when standard levels of illumination overwhelm the visual system, producing a washed out image and/or glare disability. People with extreme light sensitivity may actually suffer pain or discomfort from relatively normal levels of illumination.
- **Night Blindness** - Night blindness results in inability to see outside at night under starlight or moonlight or in dimly lighted interior areas such as movie theatres or restaurants.

What you might notice in the classroom for children with a vision impairment?

You may notice the following behaviours for children and young people with a visual impairment:

- Constant squinting when reading or focusing
- Having trouble reading (or learning to read) and participating in class
- Holding books close to face when reading
- Sitting close to the television or blackboard
- Not being able to see objects at a distance, like on a whiteboard or blackboard
- Frequent falls and bumps and caution in unfamiliar environments
- Not being able to focus on objects, follow or find them,
- An unusual appearance of eyes may squint often and rub their eyes a lot, have chronic eye redness or sensitivity to light

A specialist curriculum has been created by RNIB which outlines the **skills development and best practice required in order to promote equity, inclusion and personal agency**. See the link below [Curriculum Framework for VI](#).

General strategies for a student with a hearing-loss or visual-impairment

It's vital that children with hearing- or visual- impairments are given the right support early. If you have a child with a hearing- or visual- impairment in your class, teaching in a way that fully supports them may seem a daunting prospect, but there is plenty of support and many ideas available.

- Consider and use specialist equipment and the use of assistive technology as advised by MSSS.
- An adapted curriculum may be required
- Work closely with MSSS to receive support to develop and adapt your teaching and learning
- Adapt teaching following advice from teachers from MSSS
- Speak to parents, what works for their child at home?
- Foster a sense of school belonging and develop inclusive practices across the school day
- Encourage self- advocacy and independence

What to do?

Good practice also indicates that such concerns need to be communicated with the school's SENDCo who can help support you to develop any reasonable adjustments.

Further guidance on strategies and reasonable adjustments for children with hearing or vision needs in nurseries can be found at [Manchester Ordinarily Available Provision for Early Years](#) and for those in primary schools at [Manchester Primary Ordinarily Available Provision](#)

If you have any concern about a student's hearing or vision, please advise their parents/carers to contact their GP first to have their child's hearing/vision tested.

If hearing needs are identified by an audiologist, they will make a referral, with parent's consent, to Manchester Sensory Support Service, who will then contact parents and the setting and offer advice and support as appropriate.

Vision needs may be referred to the service through health services, but if you have concerns or have information that the child has a vision impairment you should contact the Manchester Sensory Support Service

Contact details for sensory support

For children and young people aged 0-18: Manchester Sensory Support Service
MSSS works with children and young people aged from 0 to 18 in schools or further education colleges. They support children and young people with Visual Impairment, Hearing Needs and Multi-Sensory Impairment.

Who to contact: Email: Admin@msss.co.uk **or Phone:** 07903 192731

For young people aged 18 and over: Manchester City Council Sensory Team

The Sensory Team is a specialist team within social services, providing support for people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, visually impaired (whether partially sighted or blind), or who have a combined sensory loss. The service offers: equipment assessments for either hearing loss or sight loss (or dual sensory loss); visual impairment rehabilitation assessments, mobility and/or daily living skills training for visually impaired people; and general advice for welfare rights and benefits entitlements, and advice, advocacy or signposting in relation to other issues that people with sensory impairments may need support with.

Who to contact: Sensory Duty Officer Tel: 0161 219 2658
Email: sensory.team@manchester.gov.uk

For referrals: Telephone: 0161 234 5001 **or Textphone relay service:** 18002 0161 234 500 **or Textphone direct:** 0161 274 4655 (select option 5 to make referral)
Email: mcsreply@manchester.gov.uk

British Sign Language [BSL] users can make a referral in BSL directly through the directory in the SignVideo app, or by going to Manchester City Council social care webpage

(https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/100010/social_services/3584/get_help_support_or_social_care) and clicking on links for SignVideo. Or via this SignVideo link: Contact MCC Social Care in BSL

[https://main.signvideo.me/app/8/10050?exitURL=https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/info/200116/websites/4926/sign_video_interpretation_service]

Recommended books:

The Book Trust provide a helpful list of books and links to explore books for visually impaired students: [Visually impaired children | BookTrust](#)

The National Deaf Children's Society have a range of books for all ages with a deaf character or focus on hearing-impairments: [Books with deaf characters | Reviews \(ndcs.org.uk\)](#). They also have a booklet for teaching staff on supporting mild hearing-impairments in the classroom: [Mild hearing loss \(ndcs.org.uk\)](#)

Useful links:

- National Deaf Children's Society: <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/being-deaf-friendly/information-for-professionals/primary-education/>
- NHS hearing loss — <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hearing-loss/symptoms/>
- Royal National Institute of Blind People: <https://www.rnib.org.uk>
- British Sign website — <https://www.british-sign.co.uk/>
- The Makaton Charity — <https://www.makaton.org/>
- British Deaf Association: <https://bda.org.uk>
- Signhealth (the deafhealth charity): <https://signhealth.org.uk>
- AbilityNet: <https://abilitynet.org.uk>
- Sight Advice FAQ: <https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/children-young-people-families/early-years-school/education-support>
- Partially Sighted Society: <https://www.partsight.org.uk>
- Look UK: <https://www.look-uk.org>
- Local Offer webpage for The Sensory Team at Manchester City Council: <https://hsm.manchester.gov.uk/kb5/manchester/directory/service.page?id=pkeIYN66VuU>
- Local Offer webpage for Manchester's Sensory Support Service: <https://hsm.manchester.gov.uk/kb5/manchester/directory/service.page?id=1FqNuX8fEq8>