

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS  
FOR THE EDUCATION  
OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS,  
INCLUDING THOSE  
WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

THE POSITION OF THE  
SOUTH PACIFIC EDUCATORS IN VISION IMPAIRMENT  
(SPEVI)

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## FOREWARD

This booklet has been prepared by members of the Heads of Educational Services (HOES), a special interest group of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI). SPEVI is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific area. The principles and standards presented here reflect SPEVI's position on the essential components of a service system for Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific Island students who are blind or vision impaired.

HOES membership is comprised of agency administrators, school principals, senior officers of state education departments and university lecturers. Members meet annually to examine mutual policy and program direction issues and concerns in the continued provision of quality educational support to students who are blind or vision impaired. HOES membership includes some of the most qualified and experienced educators and service providers in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. Many HOES members have professional reputations that are recognised nationally and internationally.

The booklet HOES members have produced presents:

- National principles that in their view must guide the education and related services provision for all learners who are blind or vision impaired
- Standards against which service providers might measure the comprehensiveness of service performance

The Principles and Standards have been derived from observations of the best practice in our region. They are intended to do at least three things.

First to provide clear, unambiguous messages to educational policy-makers, managers, teachers, parents and families, about the direction that should be taken in improving services and supports.

Second, to provide similarly clear, unambiguous messages to specialised service provider agencies working with children and youth who are blind or vision impaired; and

Third, to provide a foundation for setting objectives and accountability measures within such organisations and school systems.

Leanne Smith  
President

# **Principles for educational and related services for all learners who are blind or have vision impairments**

## **Rationale**

Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific region educators have a firm commitment to the right of every young person to have access to an education system that meets his or her fundamental educational needs. In order that all learners (young children and students) who are blind or have vision impairments, including those with additional disabilities, have the opportunity to reach their optimum potential and contribute to their various communities, it is vital that service providers adhere to the following guiding principles. All of these principles apply to infants, toddlers, children and youth who are vision impaired, including those with multiple disabilities:

### **I. Referral**

After identification of suspected vision impairments, children/students and their families must be referred immediately to appropriate service providers.

### **2. Family and Professional Partnerships**

Full participation, support and equal partnership shall underpin the provision of all services.

### **3. Professional Collaboration**

Service providers shall consult and collaborate in order to provide for optimum outcomes.

### **4. Assessment**

Appropriate ongoing assessment shall be conducted by professionals who have relevant training and experience

- with sensitivity to individual needs
- in collaboration with families and the student.

### **5. Service Provision**

The ***right to choose*** from a range of services is a fundamental issue of equity.

## **6. Service Delivery**

A **full range** of quality services shall be available to meet the needs of individual students and their families.

## **7. Professional and Staff Training and Development**

A range of specialised training options for staff (accredited programs of study and continuing professional development) shall be available in varied modes of delivery by professionals with qualifications and expertise in the field of vision impairment.

Educational services and agencies must be committed to the employment of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

## **8. Expanded Core Curriculum**

In addition to generic curricula, expanded core curricular areas for education, preparation for employment and leisure are an essential element of individualised service provision.

## **9. Access to information**

In accordance with equity principles, access to resources and information in appropriate formats for education, employment and leisure shall be provided to all students in a timely manner.

## **STANDARDS FOR THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS (INCLUDING THOSE WITH ADDITIONAL IMPAIRMENTS)**

This statement reflects the views of members of Heads of Educational Services and outlines minimum standards relating to the education of students with vision impairments.

### **PREAMBLE**

- Students with vision impairments have unique educational needs that are a result of their inability or limited ability to observe the environment and respond accordingly.
- Students with vision impairments are increasingly presenting with additional disabilities. The curriculum access needs of these students are highly complex and interrelated and must be considered on an individual basis.
- A range of program and educational options must be made available to students with vision impairments and their families, and reviewed on a regular basis and in consultation with consumers.
- Students should be taught an expanded core curriculum by teachers with qualifications in vision impairment and expertise in the relevant disability-specific curriculum area.
- Education for students with vision impairments consists of those structured and unstructured experiences provided to children, adolescents and people from age of diagnosis (which might be as early as birth).

### **EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

Goals for students with vision impairments are the same as those for all other Students, as reflected by the 1989 Hobart Declaration, and are incorporated in the nationally accepted Key Learning Areas.

Goals should relate to a variety of areas, including:

- effective communication
- social competence
- preparation for employment and life after school
- personal independence

Goals must reflect a holistic outcomes-based approach to education.

## **CURRICULUM**

In order to access the curriculum, general principles for students with vision impairments should include the following:

- adapting existing curriculum without changing content or objectives, using different teaching strategies
- adapting content of curriculum as well as changing strategies
- delivering a disability specific expanded core curriculum

Expanded curriculum areas that are disability specific may include the following:

### **Communication modes**

- braille reading and writing, numerous braille codes, eg science, foreign languages, braille maths, braille music
- tactile skills
- concept development
- handwriting
- augmentative communication
- keyboard typing skills and competent use of assistive technology
- listening skills and the use of audio equipment

### **Visual Skills Training**

- enhancement of functional vision
- visual perceptual skills
- training in the use of low vision aids -optical & non optical
- development of compensatory skills

### **Physical Abilities**

- postural control and balance
- fine and gross motor abilities
- locomotor abilities
- physical strength and endurance

### **Orientation and Mobility**

- body awareness and environmental awareness
- spatial understanding
- safe, independent, confident, socially acceptable movement
- independent travel

## **Social Skills**

- reasons for interacting
- desire to interact
- socially acceptable behaviour
- self-esteem, self-confidence, self-advocacy

## **Life Skills**

- self-care
- organisational skills
- time management
- decision making
- pre-vocational and career skills
- advocacy
- awareness of and access to community resources
- appropriate home-based leisure activities

## **Use of Resources and Technology**

- use of appropriate assistive technologies
- research, referencing and study skills

## **REFERRAL**

- Students with vision impairments and their families will be referred to an appropriate education provider within 30 days of diagnosis of a vision impairment.

## **ASSESSMENT**

- Educational assessment of students will be conducted by personnel having expertise in the education of students with vision impairments in consultation and collaboration with parents and care-givers.
- The educational needs (curriculum and resource) of each student with vision impairments will be addressed on an individual basis considering age, individual development, extent/nature of vision loss and circumstances.

## **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

- Collaboration and networking will occur between service providers to ensure that professionals, parents, care-givers and students, where appropriate, can be fully informed about current practices and services.
- Instructional materials will be available to students with vision impairments with consideration to their preferred format, in the appropriate media and at the same time as or prior to, their sighted peers.
- Service providers will determine case loads based on the needs of students to ensure that the provision of services is appropriate and timely.

- Information access will be provided in the appropriate medium, i.e. braille, large print, tactile graphics, electronic text and/or audio, according to assessed individual need.
- Access will be provided to appropriate technology, i.e. braille writers, electronic braille note-takers and/or computer-related adaptive technology.
- The development, provision and supply of materials will be in accord with the nationally agreed standards adopted by the Round Table on Access to Information for People with Print Disabilities.
- Access must be provided to support services including educational psychology, respite care, palliative care and peer support.
- Networking between consumers, service providers and educators must be encouraged and supported.

### **PARENT, CAREGIVER and STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

- Information to parents and family members will be provided in the appropriate alternative format and in a culturally appropriate manner.
- Policies and procedures will be implemented by service providers to ensure the rights of all students and their parents to full participation and partnership in the education process.
- Parents, caregivers and students (where appropriate), will be informed about placement and program considerations by trained and experienced teachers of students with vision impairments.

### **TEACHER TRAINING**

- Size of enrolment in tertiary education classes should not be the determining factor when offering courses specific to vision impairment.
- Nominated tertiary institutions (those with a minimum of one qualified full time faculty member in the area of vision impairment) should prepare a sufficient number of educators of students with vision impairments to meet personnel needs throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region.
- Studies must be available in flexible delivery mode, for example, by distance education, to meet the needs of all educators, including, teachers, teacher aides, transcribers and specialist agency staff.
- Minimal standards for the training of teachers of students with vision impairments, as presented in this section of the document, will be used by tertiary institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region.



- A course to prepare teachers to work with students with vision impairments and those with additional disabilities must include the following areas as core components
- Literacy and numeracy
- social issues
- communication
- technology
- independence (including orientation and mobility)
- organisation
- assistive and adaptive technology
- functional vision assessment
- transition and individual programming
- recreational skills
- pre-employment skills.
- A generic special education component will be included in all undergraduate initial teacher training, with at least one unit of study given by a person with expertise in the area of vision impairment.
- Recruitment of experienced teachers to work with students with vision impairments will be actively undertaken by educational service providers.
- Opportunities should be provided for experienced classroom teachers and aides to undertake additional training to work with students with vision impairments.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Ongoing professional development will be required for all teachers, aides and orientation and mobility instructors, as well as transcribers and related support personnel.

## **GOALS TO MEET INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

- Goals will reflect the assessed needs of each person in all areas of the curriculum to maximise learning, taking into account the disability-specific needs associated with vision impairments and any other additional disabilities.
- Goals will be developed from a negotiated, agreed-upon program (Individualised Educational Program or Individualised Transition Program) that meets the specific educational needs of a student with vision impairments. This plan will be reviewed twice annually.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

- Students with vision impairments will have access to and be trained in the use of assistive technology based on individual needs.
- Funds must be provided for purchasing, maintaining and upgrading of specialised resources.

- Educators must maintain a current knowledge of developments in technologies.
- Educators must work with developers of software and hardware from the design level to ensure that students with vision impairments have equal access to information.