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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

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with Mary Dallas

A project funded by Scottish Executive Education Department, Special Educational

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Marianna Buultjens & Joan Stead  
(April 2002)

### Glossary

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Glossary

Some terms and initials used in this report may be unfamiliar. The following is a glossary of those most frequently used:

CPD Continuing Professional Development

FAB Friends Against Bullying

INSET In-Service Training for Teachers

PAT Planned Activity Time

RNIB Royal National Institute of the Blind

SEN Assistant Special Educational Needs Assistant (usually allocated to support a particular pupil)

TVI Teacher of the visually impaired

VI Visually impaired

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Executive Summary

The Government recognises that ensuring all children develop good levels of social competency in their school years has the potential to be a very powerful strategy for promoting lifelong social inclusion. The aims of the project were: to identify the range of school based strategies and initiatives that promote social inclusion for pupils who have a visual impairment; to describe the experiences of social inclusion/exclusion for pupils with visual impairment in mainstream primary and secondary schools in Scotland. We also undertook to produce draft guidelines and identify support materials to facilitate social inclusion (see Appendix IV & V). It is intended that the guidelines be further developed during a seminar to be organised by the Scottish Sensory Centre in June 2002.

We interviewed pupils (17), parents (16), and teachers (24), and sent a short postal questionnaire to all 32 Scottish Local Authorities (29 questionnaires returned).

### Three issues stand out from the interviews with the pupils:

- the importance of knowledgeable and available support from teachers. Although pupils did not readily talk about staff providing direct emotional support there were several comments about the importance of knowing that staff, who understood you, were around if you needed them. It was implicit in many statements that this understanding should be related to the pupils' visual impairment and the particular issues that stemmed from this.

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Questionnaire

- the importance of friends both for self-esteem and protection from bullying; Friends could provide support and contribute to self esteem in many ways, but it was explicitly recognised by a number of those interviewed that having friends also offered them some kudos and protection against being bullied. Bullying and/or name-calling was (or had been) an issue for almost half of the pupils interviewed. Although the reasons for bullying are complex, several of those interviewed felt it was directly related to their visual impairment.
- the need for better communication between teachers to promote inclusion in the classroom. Some schools had information booklets and formalised meetings to provide staff with information about the needs of some pupils. But, this was not always successful and sometimes basic information about a pupil's visual impairment was not passed on to class teachers, or had been forgotten.

### **Issues raised by parents:**

- The importance of knowledgeable and supportive staff. For many parents it was important to be able to trust staff to be 'up-to-date' about learning aids and techniques that would support their child in school.
  - Sensitive support. Parents were aware of the difficult line that teachers and support staff had to tread in order to provide support that allowed their child to fully engage with the curriculum, in a way that was not stigmatising.
  - Friendships and social inclusion were recognised by parents as an important part of school life, and they appreciated schools that offered more than practical help and support to their children.
- Issues raised by teachers.
- An inclusive ethos in a school was a valuable support for many teachers in their attempts to fully include pupils in all aspects of school life.
  - Support teachers in the classroom could restrict teacher-pupil relationships forming in the usual way.
  - School development plans, staff development and the role of the senior management were important in promoting the full implementation of inclusive policies. Many teachers felt more able to support pupils with a visual impairment if there were

inclusive structures in place (in the school and in the authority), and effective communication and exchange of information between staff and parents.

[Questionnaire](#)

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Questionnaire

The postal questionnaire was constructed in such a way as to encourage those who completed it to share with us any examples of good practice, initiatives or guidelines which they were aware of in schools which would promote the social inclusion and social competence of pupils with a visual impairment. We asked questions such as what strategies were used in schools to promote social inclusion and how social inclusion was monitored in order to provide a context for discussing the views and experiences of those we had interviewed. Twenty-nine questionnaires were returned.

- All 29 councils who replied offer peripatetic services to schools with pupils with visual impairment.
- A range of strategies are used to promote social inclusion of all pupils, including pupils with visual impairment. A range of professionals, agencies, including voluntary organisations, support the councils' education departments in contributing to the social inclusion and social skills training of pupils with visual impairment.
- Most councils monitor their inclusion/social inclusion policies, with senior management within education departments being responsible for this.
- Social skills awareness training is available for pupils with visual impairment, their peers and school staff in the majority of authorities. This training is provided mainly by TVIs along with school staff.
- Involvement of pupils in meetings and/or decisions that affect them, did not always appear to be routine procedure.

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Discussion



Discussion



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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Discussion

There was an overall consensus by all those interviewed over what would promote social inclusion for pupils with a visual impairment. In slightly different ways, and with slightly different emphasis pupils, parents and teachers all talked about the importance of teaching staff being knowledgeable about visual impairment; the importance of support being available and unobtrusive; the importance of communication (between teachers, between pupils and teachers, and between teachers and parents); the importance of friendships and positive social interactions in school; and, the importance of involving pupils in decisions that affect them. The experiences of those we interviewed clearly illustrate how important the above are in the daily lives of those concerned. The pupils in particular, eloquently and perceptively described what helps to make them feel included in school, and equally, what it feels like when they are not.

The Scottish Executive are proactively encouraging schools to develop a positive ethos which will promote the inclusion of all pupils, socially and academically, in their school and in their community. The policies are in place and the recent evaluation by the HM Inspectors (2000) notes the progress made and gives a clear indication of what still needs to be done.

This report has highlighted the particular position of those with a visual impairment in mainstream schools and gives a clear message that inclusion can and does work, but that all authorities and schools should be

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Recommendations

further encouraged to fully embrace inclusive policies and practices. In particular attention should be given to staff development and the promotion of a positive ethos.

Recommendations

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Recommendations

#### Recommendations for HM Inspectorate of Education

Include issues of social inclusion, specifically those regarding pupils with visual impairment, in inspections of councils, schools, and peripatetic sensory services.

#### Recommendations for Scottish Executive Education Department

To bear in mind the recommendations listed below when allocating funding.

#### Recommendations for councils

- To provide enhanced support for pupils with a visual impairment for the development of social skills
- Social inclusion policies to be promoted and monitored in context of pupils with visual impairment.
- Funding to be made available for time for TVI/class teacher/subject teacher communication.
- Council policies and staff development on social inclusion issues to be monitored and evaluated.
- Promote council policy on listening to children.
- Encourage and fund opportunities for pupils with a visual impairment to:
  - 1 Attend after school activities and clubs
  - 2 Meet others with a visual impairment both locally and nationally
- Foster collaboration with voluntary organisations in supporting:

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Chapter 1

- 1 Social inclusion
- 2 Social skills training
- 3 Mobility training
- Consult with children and young people on design of children- friendly playgrounds

### **Recommendations for schools**

- To provide enhanced support for pupils with a visual impairment for the development of social skills
- Time-tabling for TVI/class/subject teacher communication
- Review communication with parents
- Ongoing Staff development/awareness training on VI issues
- Review strategies for promoting social inclusion
- Ongoing awareness raising with peers on VI issues
- Review procedures for listening to children with a visual impairment
- Consult with children and young people on design of children -friendly playgrounds

Marianna Buultjens and Joan Stead, with Mary Dallas.  
April 2002

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 1 Introduction

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### Background to study

Over the past twenty years in which children with visual impairment have been included in their local schools in increasing numbers, the practicalities and legalities of ensuring access to the curriculum have often taken precedence to, and sometimes obscured the issue of, social inclusion. Despite multi-agency working, parental involvement and the generous, or not so generous, provision of resources, much was still left to the children themselves to make their way socially. It was not uncommon to see comments in reports citing the child's personality as being a major factor in, if not responsible, for, successful or problematic instances of integration. Schools were sometimes described as 'welcoming' or 'supportive' but what of those schools which were not? Until the introduction of the concept of inclusion, which implies that schools and society itself have a duty to change, it was accepted that children would have to 'fit in'. In recent years self-evaluation by schools and services has become part of normal practice and they are now more open to scrutiny and questioning.

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Chapter 2

During the past ten years there has been increasing interest expressed by teachers of children with visual impairment (TVI's) in social skills training relating particularly to the needs of these children. In addition, questions of how to support successful social inclusion arise more frequently. There has been a dearth of literature on this topic which focuses on the needs of this group of children and teachers. In 2000/1 RNIB published the outcome of a project which asked the views of a thousand children and young people with visual impairment throughout the UK. One section of the report is devoted to the social life and leisure activities of these young people. In one way it is a cheerful document, confirming how they are just as interested in having fun as any other young people. On the other hand, we are made aware of how it is often so difficult for them to achieve this, and that they face obstacles that other young people don't have to face.

## **Literature review**

Two publications underpin this study. The first publication is a recent report from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) entitled *Shaping The Future* (2000/1). This was a huge undertaking with over 1,000 blind and partially sighted 5 to 25 year olds (or their parents) being asked what could be done to improve the lives of blind and partially sighted children and young people generally. The report is in 5 volumes covering educational experiences, social life and leisure activities, health and well-being. One of the key points made in the report is:

In the drive towards inclusive education, the Government and education providers must accept that inclusion is as much about the ethos and social life of schools, colleges and universities as it is about access to the curriculum. (RNIB 2001a: 10)

The second publication is *American* (Sacks *et al*: 1992), in which one of the authors writes:

I vividly remember observing the isolation and emotional pain that many blind and visually impaired children experienced in regular public school classrooms. These students lacked the social skills to start and carry on conversations, to play games effectively, and to join and feel part of a group ... the acquisition of competent social skills in a sighted environment is an ongoing process: these

skills are not easily learned and must be fine-tuned throughout one's life. (Sacks *et al* 1992: xi)

However, as Carey, in an editorial in the *British Journal of Visual Impairment* (2001), bluntly states:

There is a stack of literature of how children are disadvantaged if they cannot see or send body language efficiently but a depressingly small amount on what is to be done about it. (Carey 2001)

This review reflects the 'depressingly small amount' of literature which discusses the importance of developing social skills for those who are blind or visually impaired and suggests ways of doing something about it (the exceptions to this are Sachs *et al* 1992, Stockley 1994, and Brandenburg 1995 - discussed below). Overall, it appears that the Scottish literature on the education of disabled children is mainly informed by psychological and technical approaches (Riddell & Banks 2001), which largely mirrors the situation throughout the UK. There is considerable literature concentrating on curricular inclusion in school, but there is very little directly relating to the social inclusion of children and young people who may be blind or visually impaired in mainstream schools. There is, however, an increasing awareness that physically including someone in mainstream school and concentrating on accessing the curriculum, is not enough to ensure full inclusion.

It is not possible to review all the literature on social inclusion here, but by briefly looking at some of the literature which charts a growing concern and recognition of the importance of social skills for all pupils, the necessity of developing specific skills for those with particular needs (such as those who are blind or visually impaired), will be highlighted.

We will begin by looking at how, within the inclusion agenda, the Government has emphasised the importance of developing social competence and the role of schools in this. We will then briefly look at how positive relationships in school can be encouraged to promote social inclusion, and will highlight the particular issues this raises for those in mainstream schools who are blind or visually impaired.

## **Social competence**



Inclusive education is a major theme of the Parliamentary Committee Report on Inquiry into Special Education Needs (Scottish Parliament 2001), although there is considerable uncertainty about exactly what is meant by inclusive education (Riddell & Banks 2001). The Scottish Executive does not see some segregated provision as incompatible with the wider goal of inclusion, although it does wish to see large numbers of disabled children in mainstream schools. The Government recognises that ensuring all children develop good levels of social competency in their school years has the potential to be a very powerful strategy for promoting lifelong social inclusion. For the individual concerned, and for the school as a community, inclusive practices which promote both social and academic well-being can have long term and far reaching positive consequences. In 1998 the Scottish Office outlined the skills which underlie social competence as:

- The ability to understand another's point of view when different from your own.
- Knowledge of how to interpret other people's emotional state and behaviour.
- Skill in suppressing immediate emotional responses in favour of more carefully considered responses in social situations.
- The ability to adjust your behaviour to make it acceptable or rewarding to others (SOEID 1998).

Schools are encouraged to address these issues throughout the curriculum. The revised guidelines for The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum 5-14 (2000) enables schools to plan personal and social development as a separate programme or as a linked programme. In primary and secondary schools social competence may be directly addressed through PSD (Personal and Social Development), and , in primary schools also through Circle time. But although it was recognised that for a whole variety of reasons some pupils may have 'special needs' in this area and need enhanced support to achieve levels of competence which others seem to acquired effortlessly (Scottish Office 1998: 3), the recent report by HM Inspectors of schools found there were still some gaps and weaknesses in programmes (Scottish Executive 2000a). This point is vividly illustrated by a comment made by a teenager attending a further education college who was blind in one eye and had partial sight in the other, who, after attending a social skills course, remarked: 'I didn't know people

looked at each other when they talked' (Stockley, 1994:13). Indeed the HM Inspectors noted that a programme that serves most pupils well, might not meet the needs of some vulnerable pupils (2000a:2).

Although blind and visually impaired pupils were not explicitly mentioned in the report by HM Inspectors, the above does suggest that schools would be expected to provide for their particular needs. It is estimated that 80% of learning occurs through vision (Langley 1996), therefore it is hardly surprising that with impaired vision the clues and signals that allow us to interpret and respond to those around us may be misinterpreted or missed all together. Therefore extra support for those who may be blind or visually impaired to develop strategies for dealing with some social situations are important. However, it is ultimately by developing the social competence of all pupils that the social inclusion of many young visually impaired people can be supported and promoted.

## **Social inclusion**

There is a wealth of literature, and continuing debate, around issues of inclusion in school for those with a disability and special educational needs, but little on the promotion of social inclusion in mainstream schools and of perspectives/experiences of those concerned. Morris (2001) acknowledges that while education policy, both in terms of school-age children and further and higher education, is now more motivated by a philosophy of inclusion, there is very little recognition of the steps necessary to enable disabled children and young people to genuinely mix with their peer group. When Morris (2001) asked young disabled people in their teens and early twenties to describe what social exclusion meant to them they talked about:

- Not being listened to
- Having no friends
- Finding it difficult to do the kinds of things that non-disabled people
- f their age do
- Being made to feel they have no contribution to make
- Feeling unsafe, being harassed and bullied

(Morris 2001: 164)

For those who are blind or visually impaired there are many

books which do address the practical and academic issues which may affect pupils with a visual impairment (for example Harrison & Crow 1993, Arter et al 1999, Sacks & Silberman 1998), but there are few directly concerned with how schools and teachers might support and help young people with a visual impairment develop their social skills and competency. Stockely (1994) states that often social communication skills are delayed and immature in some visually impaired adolescents and young adults, and whilst behaviour within the peer group may be apparently normal, social interactions with adults and with unfamiliar peers may be inhibited or inappropriate. But there appears to be increasing recognition that some children with a visual impairment develop slower than others and may follow a different sequence of development, with usual behaviours being learnt in a different order (eg: Ferrell 1996). Taking into consideration the importance of visual clues for learning it is now being recognised that children with VI need time to put together/link jumbles of incidents; indeed some need deliberate teaching (Ferrell 1996).

But there is a gap between theory and practice (Lewis & Collis 1997, Carey 2001). The need to closely link knowledge of child development together with socio-emotional development is now increasingly discussed in terms of seeing the child as part of a system of relationships, within the family, within the extended family, within society and within the school (Lewis & Collis 1997, Morris 2001, Sacks et al 1992). The consequences of not fitting in or feeling good about being in school can affect many different areas of life such as friendships, academic achievement, self esteem and feelings of well-being . Even someone as academically and professionally successful as David Blunkett (who was born blind) recalls his teenage years as 'socially awkward' and of socially feeling 'years behind the times' (1995: 68-71).

Lewis and Collis (1997) suggest that in the future the focus needs to shift from the individual performance of the blind child to the forming of relationships between the child and the social environment. They also recognise that the importance of conversations, of feelings of shared humour, and of connectedness need to be stressed and, if necessary, addressed both at school and at home. From observations of pre-schoolers they show that from the age of around four several of the blind children became aware of their own part in the group of children, and also that what they said or did had an impact on the other members of the group, but that

there were seldom verbal exchanges of ideas between the blind child and the sighted children (Lewis and Collis 1997).

## **Issues of social inclusion in school**

The RNIB study found that the most important factors relating to what makes a good inclusive school all related to social inter-personal aspects of school life; a teacher who really listens and classmates who do not bully and tease (2001a:159). Kekelis (1992) takes this idea a little further and suggests that if the mainstreaming experience of the visually impaired student is to be optimised, classroom teachers must make social interactions a priority. Kekelis also stresses that it is not sufficient that these children simply interact with others; they must engage in social exchanges that maximise their social development. The role of classroom teachers is also highlighted by Vaughn & Schumm (1996) who discuss the inclusion of children with learning disabilities and the role of the classroom teacher as orchestrating a positive social climate in the classroom by providing a model of acceptance, understanding and social support. However, many teachers may lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to take on this responsibility, for, as highlighted in the RNIB report, there needs to be a better awareness and training for teachers in mainstream schools about the needs of blind and partially sighted pupils (2001a: 75). Sensory services provided to schools have therefore been encouraged by The Scottish Executive (SSC 2001) to evaluate their role in supporting schools, teachers and pupils in areas such as service delivery and ethos.

Another important area of social inclusion in the school is the playground. As one of the primary social spaces in school it is where many relationships are made (and lost), and for those who are blind or visually impaired negotiating this physical and social space can be very difficult. Lewis and Collis (1997) graphically illustrate what this may mean for a blind or visually impaired child should there be an imbalance between developing academic and social skills:

If too much effort is concentrated on performance and skill, there is a risk that the child will be looked upon as an object, not a subject; that the child will be looked upon as something to form and create, not somebody with his or her own intentions feelings and motives.... Who wants to play with somebody who is a nobody? (Lewis & Collis. pp83)

Positive peer relationships are crucial to feelings of belonging, self esteem, self confidence and general well-being; they are also complicated and complex. Connections between social skills, friendships and break-time activities have been shown to be linked in a number of ways (Pelligrini & Blatchford 2000). Morris (2001) states that for children and young people, social interaction with their disabled and non-disabled peers at school or college is a key dimension of community participation and therefore of inclusion (or exclusion). The RNIB report found 29% of primary and 14% secondary pupils felt left out of break time activities (2001b: 119). Many schools with blind or visually impaired pupils have the extra support of auxiliary staff, but as many commentators and school staff are becoming aware, the social inclusion of individuals (in the classroom and in the playground) may be hampered by the very presence of these staff. As noted by Morris (2001) disabled children's experiences in both special and mainstream schools showed there were 'high levels of surveillance of disabled children by adults.' (2001: 169). How then can schools promote both the academic and social inclusion of blind or visually impaired young people?

### **Developing social skills**

Sacks, Kekelis and Gaylord-Ross (1992) were aware of the 'paucity of research and practice' in the area of developing social skills with blind and visually impaired students, and although this edited book was published in 1992 (with a second edition printed in 1997) it is still one of the few books dedicated to this topic. The focus of the book is on pre-school and primary aged pupils, with chapters on theory and research and guidelines for specialist teachers, class teachers and parents to assist in the successful mainstreaming of blind and visually impaired children. For example, specialist teachers are encouraged to help the visually impaired student to communicate his or her needs effectively, and class teachers are encouraged to design activities that promote co-operation and sharing between visually impaired and sighted students (Sacks & Kekelis 1992: 133-138). There are also chapters on practical ways to maximise social integration (Sacks & Reardon 1992) and approaches to increasing assertive behaviour and communication skills (Pogrud & Felice 1992).

Stockley (1994) describes a study of a college programme which taught social skills with an emphasis on social use of language. Eight students (16-20 years) participated; they

all had mild-moderate learning difficulties and one student was blind. Role modelling (by tutors), and systematic training, were seen as key components of the training. Students later reported having fewer difficulties and this was interpreted as them feeling more confident in a variety of social settings (Stockley 1994: 13). This study was based on the understanding that imitation of effective social interactions enhances confidence, which is an approach that underpins the Goldstein method (see Appendix 111). As described by Brandenburg (1995), there used to be more distinct rules for our behaviour, but now it is often up to young people to find out what is expected of them in particular situations, so, in the Netherlands, they use a training that has been adapted from the Goldstein method (see chapter 6). This training concentrates on learning social skills such as getting yourself introduced; starting a conversation; refusing things; being criticised and criticising. For young people to feel motivated they need to be aware of the benefits of successful social interaction with those around them, especially those of a similar age. It is therefore important that students who have a visual impairment have as many opportunities as possible to engage in social interaction with their peers. Friendships play an important role in this.

In the RNIB report when parents were asked what they felt would most improve their child's social life most respondents (31%) said 'more local friends' (2001b: 37). Friends can support and affirm a sense of self. For these pupils with a visual impairment, comments such as; 'they don't make fun of my eyesight' and 'if I have a problem they will help me' denote friendship (MacCuspie 1992: 87). It is therefore not surprising that initiatives, such as Buddy schemes and Mentoring, which attempt to create relationships of support, are increasingly being used to address social issues within the school setting (Scottish Executive 2000a). Newton and Wilson (1999) propose initiating a 'circle of friends' as a way of building a community that recognises the central importance of relationships and community connections in all our lives, with an emphasis on the involvement of peers and their relationships with the 'focus child'. For blind and visually impaired pupils such a support network could prevent misunderstandings between individuals and groups, for as described by MacCuspie (1992) in interaction with their peers the visually impaired students have limited access to information about both their own levels of competence and that of their peers. This limitation seemed to contribute to

the VI students' belief that sighted people are superior and made it difficult for them to derive an accurate comparison of their performance and that of their sighted peers (1992: 87).

However, it is also important that children and young people with a visual impairment also have the opportunity to have contact/make friends with others with a visual impairment. Rosenblum (2000) writing about adolescents with a visual impairment in the United States observes that it is not uncommon for adolescents to have little or no contact with other age-mates who have a visual impairment (2000: 434). The isolation often felt by pupils with a visual impairment who attend mainstream schools can be ameliorated by teachers proactively bringing together age-related groups, as discussed by Sinclair et al, (2002).

MacCuspie (1992) also highlights that both the teachers and parents generally based their perceptions of the VI children's social acceptance on the absence of classmates' physical or verbal abuse of the children, not on the presence or absence of positive social experiences (1992: 91). The RNIB report also highlighted bullying as an issue with three in five secondary pupils saying they had been bullied at some stage, and with most instances of bullying taking place within the school setting (2001a: 130).

In the selection of literature reviewed above, we have highlighted:

- The growing awareness of the importance of social skills/competence for social inclusion in school and in the community, and of the role of the school in supporting and promoting these.
- The importance of friendships and inter-personal relationships for the confidence and self esteem of children and young people
- The recognition that visually impaired children and young people may need extra and specific support in developing their social skills.

## **Project outline**

This study was funded by SEED (Scottish Executive Education Department, Special Educational Needs Innovation Grants Programme) from April 2001-March 2002.

In this study we wanted to find out what schools, teachers and education authorities were doing to promote the social inclusion of pupils with VI in mainstream schools, and we wanted to talk to pupils with a visual impairment, and their parents, to hear about their experiences.

The project had four aims.

1. To identify the range of school based strategies and initiatives that promote social inclusion for pupils who have a visual impairment.
2. To describe the experiences of social inclusion/exclusion for pupils with visual impairment in mainstream primary and secondary schools in Scotland.
3. To examine materials currently being used in the Netherlands for social skills training with this group of young people, and to establish how these are being supported and monitored.
4. To produce guidelines and identify support materials to facilitate the social inclusion of pupils with a visual impairment in primary and secondary mainstream schools.

Different methods were used for each stage of the project, and these will be discussed more fully at the beginning of the relevant sections. We began by identifying four areas in Scotland (6 Councils) where there were small clusters of VI pupils attending mainstream schools (this information was gleaned from discussions with RNIB Education Officer: Family Services, and teachers of VI in Sensory Services. Where possible a balance was sought between urban and rural authorities. These discussions then led to the identification of 4 secondary schools and 4 primary schools where two or more pupils with a visual impairment were currently enrolled (pupils were chosen by their school, and were in their age appropriate year group regarding academic ability). Schools were asked to facilitate interviews with the pupils and support and/or teaching staff. Parents were also interviewed. The researcher also observed some classes and some break-times in schools visited.

All pupils and parents gave their permission for the interview to be taped and all interviews were fully transcribed. By listening to the tapes and re-reading the interview scripts several times, themes were identified and



a coding frame was formed. Data was then analysed using a qualitative data analysis package (NVivo).

In Chapters 2 & 3 we will highlight the issues raised by pupils and parents, and in Chapter 4 we will discuss the views and experiences of school staff. Chapter 5 discusses the results of the postal questionnaire which was sent to Heads of Service in all 32 local authorities in Scotland. In Chapter 6 we will describe two initiatives which directly address issues of social skills for visually impaired children and young people. A discussion of the issues raised in all the interviews and the recommendations that have emerged from the interviews and the questionnaire will be found in Chapter 7. We also include (Appendix 1V) draft guidelines for practitioners of ideas to promote social inclusion and develop social skills for those with a visual impairment. (These guidelines will be further explored and developed during a seminar to be held by the Scottish Sensory Centre in June 2002). With such small numbers of pupils, teachers and parents interviewed we cannot make generalisable statements. This does not, however, reduce the importance of what they say for evaluating educational responses to their needs. The interviews were designed to be illuminative, to provide reflection on current practices and policies and to stimulate constructive responses from education authorities and schools where they find room for improvement.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The names of all participants mentioned in this report are pseudonyms.

## Chapter 2

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 2 Interviews with pupils

Interviews with pupilsThe focus of this study is how social inclusion can be promoted in schools, and although practical concerns like having printing enlarged and appropriate seating arrangements in class can often be easily identified and remedied, they are nonetheless important and directly relate to pupils' feelings of being included and belonging to a school community. However, as the RNIB (2000/1) reports, the most important factors relating to what makes a good inclusive school relate to social inter-personal aspects of school life, and this is what mattered most to the pupils we interviewed.

All interviews with the 17 pupils who took part in this project were held in school and all of the pupils had a Record of Needs. One interview was with three pupils together, one other interview was held in school with a parent present, all the others were one-to-one. Every pupil was asked to give their consent for the interview, and they were asked for permission for the interview to be taped. We interviewed 10 girls and 7 boys (9 pupils in primary school and 8 pupils in secondary school – see Appendix 1). Six of the primary pupils and 3 of the secondary school pupils received support from a special unit/centre for visually impaired located in their school.

It was important to us that the participation of young people in a project such as this should not be tokenistic: that is where children are asked to say what they think, but have little or no choice about the way they express those views, or the scope of the ideas they can express. Guidelines produced by Save The Children (2001) helped us formulate

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our project in a way that would give the pupils the opportunity to raise issues that were important to them; so we used topic guidelines, rather than questionnaires. The emphasis was on listening to what the pupils had to say about things that were important to them. We were sensitive to some pupils possibly feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed about certain topics and were flexible in what questions were asked, how they were asked, and in what order. The topics included; best things about school; who at school would help you sort out a problem; favourite activities at home and at school; what makes a good/bad day at school; and finally a 'magic wand' question where pupils were asked to put forward any ideas that would make their time in school happier.

We will discuss the pupil interviews under three themes, but these are overlapping and not mutually exclusive. There were certain issues on which pupils had more to say than their parents (eg: friendships and getting direct support from teachers) and these will be grouped under the following headings:

## **Support**

A good day at school

Things that could be better

## **Support**

As succinctly put by a primary school pupil, who had been unhappy at a previous school:

The best things about this school are its got nice people ... people will help me if I need anything (John, 10 years old)

Support for many pupils did appear to hinge upon staff being both knowledgeable and aware of their visual impairment. As described by a secondary school pupil:

Some teachers understand you and know where you're coming from, and some don't. (Sandra, 13 years old)

Although pupils did not readily talk about staff providing direct emotional support there were several comments about the importance of knowing that staff, who understood you, were around if you needed them. It was implicit in many statements that this understanding should be related to the pupils' visual impairment and the particular issues that stemmed from this. This secondary pupil said she didn't often feel she needed support, but she knew it was there if she needed it:

I think it's quite a good school. If you need support, it's always here for you. The teachers are quite nice. (Judith, 15 years old)

There were several other pupils who said they didn't often approach teachers for support, but they would be comfortable about doing so, if needed. Another element of support also raised by a number of pupils was of someone who would listen, but not necessarily make decisions or take responsibility away from them. This P7 pupil said:

Q If you needed to talk to somebody at school about a problem who would that person be?

Mrs XXX

Q How would they be able to help you?

They would talk to me and tell me what to do like, if .... And would say that if I didn't want to tell them they would say 'its up to you' and they wouldn't force me.

(Andrew, 11 years old)

The availability of support and understanding appeared to be an issue for some pupils who were receiving peripatetic support. A primary school pupil remarked how difficult things had been in his previous primary school, and how he appreciated the once a week visit from a peripatetic teacher. Yet, further comments from him and his parents, suggest that although he didn't appear to use the support available in his new school (which has a unit for visually impaired pupils), having that support readily available appears to have resulted in a much happier and confident pupil.

Although pupils did talk about the support they got from having positive relationships with staff, what appeared important to them was having friends. When one primary pupil was talking about how she felt about moving from one

school to another she said:

I didn't feel really good there (in the previous school). In (current school) I feel that I have friends. In my last school I didn't have any friends. (Lisa, 10 years old)

Friends could provide support in several ways, for example 'they tell me that there's a car coming' (Sandra, 13 years old), and if help is needed to see something on the board 'they would just let me see their jotters and I would write it down' (John, 10 years old). But it was explicitly recognised by a number of those interviewed that having friends also offered them some kudos and protection against being bullied:

I've got lots of friends. The kids don't really bother you. They tend to either keep out of your road or they ask you lots of questions.

Q What kind of questions?

I don't really get asked because I've got quite a lot of friends, so I don't really get asked.

(Judith, 15 years old)

I got bullied quite a lot in primary... I have loads of friends (in current school) and I have not been bullied, so it has been great. (Joan, 13 years old)

Bullying and/or name-calling was (or had been) an issue for almost half of the pupils interviewed. Although the reasons for bullying are complex, several of those interviewed felt it was directly related to their visual impairment;

I had one person hassle me when I was in 1st year ... She demanded that I didn't look at her any more because I couldn't focus on her and I would screw my eyes up and she'd then get a bit snidey with me. But then my sister, who is also at this school, went up and had a word with her and told her what was wrong with me and she said that she was sorry. (Sandra, 13 years old)

My eyes look really small and when I'm in a situation where I don't know anybody, it can be

quite awkward ... they say things like ....  
(Judith, 15 years old)

Nine of the pupils interviewed attended schools that had a unit/centre for visually impaired pupils. For many of these pupils making friends and having contact with others with a visual impairment was seen as supportive, and helped them feel less alone and different. But with many of them travelling considerable distances to attend these schools, contact with friends outside school hours was difficult.

### **Feeling good at school**

We tried to establish what it is that promotes feelings of inclusion, belonging and well-being by asking; 'what would make a 'good' day at school?'. For many pupils the sense of achievement from doing well in a test or a particular class was important. But many answers did stress the importance of relationships. Some of the answers were:

I could have probably brought in something really funny and everybody was really laughing and coming up to me and wanting shots and all that, that would make me really cheerful. (Lisa, 10 years old)

Not getting shouted at ... Everything about lessons – like I done good in maths and language. (Andrew, 11 years old)

When I'm in the playground playing 'a slow boat to China' (Colin, 8 years old)

Playing with my friends. (Keith, 9 years old)

Not getting picked on (by other pupils).  
(Tracey, 11 years old)

### **Changes to make things better**

When we asked the question: 'If you could change anything in the school to make your life better, what would it be?', the answers were mainly about inter-personal relationships with teachers and with other pupils. This is a selection of what was said:

I'd like to change the attitude of the kids ...

we're all put into a category like 'that's the VI's' and 'That's the blind people'. (Judith, 15 years old)

Not to be bullied (George, 9 years old)

I would like more things to play on (Jane, 11 years old)

I would like all the teachers to be nice (John, 10 years old)

Although those interviewed generally felt supported in their schools, many of them expressed frustration, disappointment, and often resignation, regarding some practical support issues in the classroom. A selection of their comments indicates many ongoing concerns such as issues of communication between staff:

There was somebody in my class and they needed support to read off the board, but the teacher that was supposed to help them isn't in right now ... the teacher just dismissed him and said that he would catch up when she comes back ... and she didn't do anything to help him .. but that kind of thing is in the minority. (Judith, 15 years).

Our teacher went off to have a baby and there was a stand-in teacher and I said to her that I couldn't see the board and she just criticised me and said that I should get a pair of glasses. But glasses don't do me any good. It's just down to ignorance. Its not like she was meaning to be horrible, she just didn't know, but that's not good enough, because people should have the information. (Sandra, 13 years)

We asked if they could write in bigger writing, but they wouldn't do it (Sandra, 13 years)

They did it for a while (write larger on the board), but then they forget, and they go back to their wee joined up writing (Alan, 15 years)

Observations in classrooms indicated some inclusive practices, such as a teacher unobtrusively lowering an object so that a visually impaired pupil would be able to see it. There were also observations of some class/subject teachers having no contact during the class with the visually impaired student; leaving all contact/communication to the TVI (see also Chapter 4).

### **Summary of pupils' views**

Three issues stand out from these interviews:

- the importance of knowledgeable and available support from teachers;
- the importance of friends both for self-esteem and protection from bullying;
- the need for better communication between teachers.

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 3 Interviews with parents

Sixteen parents were interviewed (4 sets of mother and father, 8 mothers). Usually these interviews took place in the family home, but on two occasions it was more convenient to arrange the interviews in other locations. Although the parents of all the pupils we talked to gave their permission for their child/children to be interviewed, three parents declined to be interviewed themselves.

The interviews with parents took a similar approach to that of the pupils. We used a topic guide and gave every opportunity for the parents to talk about issues that were important to them and their child. The topics included; what they like about the school; what gives your child confidence; what support is available for yourself and your child; how easily does your child make friends; and do they enjoy meeting new people.

There were certain issues on which parents had more to say than pupils (eg: practical support, social inclusion and worries about the future), which will be grouped under the following headings:

#### **Support**

[Social inclusion](#)

[Things that could be better](#)

#### **Support**

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Although several parents mentioned the importance of being able to pick up the phone and talk to someone at the school if they were worried about something, their concerns were more about teachers being informed about visual impairment, and ensuring practical support for their child.

The views of parents echoed those of their children, in that having knowledgeable and supportive staff who were available and approachable was very important.

The teachers all have a fantastic modern knowledge of kids with VI (John's mother)

There was more help there than she could've got at the local school ... its been the best sort of move we could've made (Joyce's mother)

The communication from the school is excellent, you're well informed ... nothing is overlooked, everything is dealt with, it's great! (Joan's mother)

The support is fantastic... Before I came here I phoned the school ... and I spoke to the head teacher, and then I phoned the child psychologist and we had a meeting with all the teachers.... (Tracey's mother)

Support however, did not always work out as anticipated:

In her cooking classes she came home complaining that she had a special attendant there and Susan said that she wouldn't let her do anything, even measuring out things. She wasn't pleased about that. (Susan's mother).

So I phone the school maybe three months after the computer was in and I said to the teacher 'how's John getting on with the computer?' and she says 'well, I have no idea because I don't know how to use it.' (John's mother talking about a previous school)

Several parents felt that their child would get support from being with others with a visual impairment. One mother spoke of moving her daughter twice while at primary school;

Basically she was taken out of both of them because there were no other VI children in the school and, to be quite honest, they didn't have a clue what they were doing (Lisa's mother)

Sometimes parents had felt unsupported and had to find out things for themselves – sometime from the most unlikely sources:

The first term Tracey was at school she had such a hard time coping ... and at that time I didn't know much about VI and what help you could get, and what help you couldn't (Tracey's mother).

I think it was a taxi driver who told me about it (particular school). (Lisa's mother)

The possibility of their child being isolated and lonely in school did worry some parents:

John had never seen anybody else with Albinism, which made him feel really different. And he didn't know anybody who was blind. So he felt different from everybody else. (John's mother)

Several parents acknowledged the delicate line between providing support and that support possibly stigmatising their child, and drawing attention to them as different. In the interviews with the young people there was a sense of them appreciating support that was easily available if/when it was needed. Some parents also felt that support should, if possible, be more low-key. This point was illustrated by a mother (who also has a visual impairment), who felt that classroom support could result in teasing, and that if this happened support should possibly be withdrawn. But she stressed that the pupils should then be closely monitored so that any deterioration in school work would be picked up immediately. She described support as ideally being 'hidden' with both pupils and parents able to access it when they needed to.

## **Social inclusion**

These parents felt that the social side of education should be a priority:

To us she would get an education in any school she went to, But, its not that sort of thing we're worried about. Its like the social side ... personal needs and independence ... she loves trips (Jane's father )

They did all the practical things. They painted the stairs in the school ... put double handrails in ... they put lines in all the classrooms. But it was the day to day things they never got right. (John's mother talking about a previous school)

Parents were aware of particular social issues for their children:

He is fine when he knows people. John is quite withdrawn when he meets somebody new, when he doesn't recognise the voice... some people have the impression that John is not a very sociable kid, while literally what has happened is that John hasn't seen them ... he loses his self confidence when he can't take part in conversations (John's mother)

She's actually not good with her peers. She's actually better with adults then she is with children of her own age and she's better with kids younger and older than herself...' (Tracey's mother)

Socially she's fine now. She's got lots of friends at school. Its just a pity that there are no out of school clubs for children with a visual impairment. (Lisa's mother)

Parents recognised the importance of friendships, and the difficulties that sometimes resulted in their children attending schools outwith the area:

He can't go out at five o'clock at night with Steven who he plays with during the day ... he's had to lose a lot to get an education and that is not fair ... parties at the weekends and the

sleepovers, he doesn't get that kind of thing.  
(John's mother)

She's still got friends, yeah. She sees them through, you know, her sort of interests ... she gets on well with people, she picks friends up fairly easily. (Joyce's father)

What can we say ... it would be alright if the school was in this area, but she can't make pals in this area because all the children go to school together. (Jane's mother)

The issues of bullying was also raised by several parents

Because there's no bullying here (current school) ... that then alleviates all the other problems. She couldn't do the lessons and she was falling behind at primary because every day that she went in, she couldn't deal with what was happening... her confidence is gradually growing and she's able to mix easier with other people, and, hence, made new friends. (Joan's mother)

He's lost a lot of his childhood because he's had to have this smart talk ready for people who want to... ehh ..., you know, have a dig at him. (John's mother)

### **Things that could be better**

As indicated above many parents did recognise friends and social inclusion as an important part of their child's time at school. There were a number of parents who had moved their child from one school to another because of lack of both practical and emotional support. However, parents generally felt that their child was receiving support in their current school, but there were concerns about what was going to happen in the future:

We don't have any help or support in choosing schools. I feel, and a lot of the other parents feel, that we're just left to get on with it. (Lisa's mother)

I'm a bit scared for her ... its big (secondary school). There's lots of stairs, as well as going to different class rooms in different buildings ..

buildings across the road ... swimming pool round the corner and down the hill at the sports centre. (Tracey's mother).

### **Summary of parents' views**

- Like their children, the parents appreciated knowledgeable and supportive staff. For many parents it was important to be able to trust staff to be 'up-to-date' about learning aids and techniques that would support their child in school.
- Parents were also aware of the difficult line that teachers and support staff had to tread in order to provide support that allowed their child to fully engage with the curriculum, in a way that was not stigmatising.
- Friendships and social inclusion were recognised by parents as an important part of school life, and they appreciated schools that offered more than practical help.

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 4 What do schools do to support pupils?

We visited 4 primary and 4 secondary schools. Two of the primary schools had specialised units/centres for visually impaired pupils, as did one of the secondary schools. When discussing the interviews with teachers we have indicated their position, the type of school (primary or secondary) and have indicated which school by a letter. The schools are:

School A Primary school on periphery of a city. School roll over 200 pupils

School B Primary school in industrial town. School roll over 500 pupils.

School C Secondary school in small town. School roll over 1,000 pupils

School D Secondary school serving large geographical area. School roll over 1,300 pupils.

School E Primary school in rural area. School roll over 300 pupils.

School F Secondary school in inner-city. School roll over 1,000 pupils.

School G Secondary school in small town. School roll over 1,200 pupils

School H Primary school on periphery of industrial town. School roll over 300 pupils.

### School staff interviews

Interviews with school staff took place after we had interviewed the pupils. Because of the wide range of responsibilities and experiences of the staff interviewed we used a topic schedule which would allow for particular experiences of working with a pupil, or general expertise regarding pupils with a visual impairment, to be fully discussed. Our questions included: responsibility for pupils with a visual impairment; resources and facilities available in the

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school; school ethos; examples of good practice to support social competency; and staff development issues. We interviewed a wide range of staff (see below). Three groups of TVI (teachers of the visually impaired) were interviewed together (groups of 3, 2 and 2). All other staff were interviewed individually.

## **Interviews:**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Numbers interviewed</b>
Class teacher primary	3
Subject teacher secondary	2
TVI's	9
Speech and language therapist	1
Learning Support	4
SEN Auxiliaries	1
Special teacher (primary)	2
Headteacher (primary)	1
Senr. teacher for sensory impaired	1
Total	24

We will discuss the interviews with teachers under the following headings:

### **Awareness**

Initiatives to promote social inclusion

Support and communication

### **Awareness**

We first asked all the teachers a general question about school ethos and inclusion in order to establish the general atmosphere in which they felt they worked. The majority of those interviewed said they felt the schools they worked in did have a positive and supportive ethos. There was some criticism by peripatetic TVI's that inclusion was OK, but could be better in some schools, and a comment by a Learning Support teacher that an inclusive ethos was quite positive towards those with a sensory impairment, but not so positive towards those with other learning difficulties.



These teachers express what they understand as an inclusive ethos:

I see it as the children (with VI) being included in the mainstream class and the (TVI) teachers included in the class as well .... I think inclusion works both ways, we (TVI) are included in the school and we include other children with us. (TVI, primary school B )

The staff here are used to having VI pupils in the class, and one of us in class as well. I think its seems a very positive thing in the school, in fact I know it is. And it is good for the other children too ... it sort of expands their experience (TVI, secondary school C)

The importance of a positive ethos towards inclusion is one that was seen by this teacher to have repercussions throughout the school:

Most of them (other pupils) are extremely accepting ... They pick up a lot on the teachers approach (special teacher, primary school E)

By describing some of their experiences, we were able to glean an understanding of the awareness of teachers of the emotional and social issues that may face pupils with a visual impairment. Awareness is, however, an ongoing process and often appeared to emerge when a unforeseen issue arose, or when a situation had not been resolved successfully:

Our first blind pupil ... academically it was a great success .... But a lot of the staff and pupils didn't know what to do when she came down the corridor ...and the corridor would fall silent ... it was pretty horrible .. so we had a talk with the guidance team in the school and things filtered down through PSD classes ... and gradually it was resolved. (TVI, secondary school C)

One teacher related how, at Christmas time, a pupil with VI asked to go to the school dance. The TVI attempted, with the guidance teacher, to find out if there were any classmates going who would be able to 'look out' for this pupil. However, the general profile of the year group made this very difficult, and consequently the pupil didn't attend the Christmas dance. This teacher went on to note:

We need to think about this again because it will loom again quite shortly, and I know she will want to go.

(TVI, secondary school C)

Letting pupils with a visual impairment take an active role in decisions and strategies that may help them is also an important aspect of awareness:

I let him try out different positions and asked him which one he felt was the one where he could see the blackboard best (class teacher, primary school H)

He likes to be independent. He could come here (LS Base) and download stuff, but he preferred to do things at home. I think different pupils respond differently and the kind of support you offer may vary depending on the pupils. (learning support, secondary school F)

At the moment, she is getting more support than she would wish for, but that's going to be reviewed shortly. She has identified where she felt she didn't need support and where she felt she did. (support teacher, secondary school D)

Offering support in a subtle way, also indicated an awareness that many pupils do not want to be singled out:

Try and demonstrate near her so you don't make a big issue out of 'come down to the front' (PE teacher, secondary school C)

The people that support her in class also work with other pupils ... so she's not getting singled out, which could be embarrassing (learning support, secondary school D)

You try for a 'withdraw' kind of approach. Yes, you are working with a whole group, but you are there at a distance. They (VI pupils) know you are still there for them, but not standing right beside them all the time. (TVI, primary school A)

The importance of successful (and sometimes unsuccessful) interpersonal relationships between pupil and support staff was also acknowledged, and strategies put in place:

We decided to give the pupils a variety of experiences

with different members of staff (support). If you're too attached to the one person all the time, both sides can find it stressful. (learning support, secondary school D)

Informal support was also recognised as important:

I have little informal chats with her every few weeks and ask how things are going. Also we keep an eye on her. (support teacher, secondary school D)

They do meet here in the morning when their taxi drivers drop them off. They have to tell us that they're here ... often that can be a wee time where, if they've got a problem, or if they've to remember something or if they're not feeling well they'll tell us about that then. When the bell goes they just join the others. (TVI, primary school B).

## **Initiatives that promote social inclusion**

Although school ethos and awareness is a crucial part of promoting social inclusion in school, many schools we visited proactively initiated strategies to support their pupils with a visual impairment. National strategies such as circle time and PSD classes are a good starting point:

Circle time and things like that are a really good way of discussing that (bullying), and encouraging children to treat each other with dignity (special class teacher, primary school E)

There is circle time in P3 – a lot of talking and listening and not interrupting somebody and face them if you're speaking to them – that's for everybody – its good for our children, but its included for everybody. (TVI, primary school A)

The mentoring system (being developed) will be for children who need support, even for a short period of time or over a longer period of time. It will help them overcome social difficulties or poor inter-personal relationships, or to support them in their academic work, or if they're having difficulty (headteacher, primary school E)

They (other pupils) have had talks about the way they

can help people and its been videoed ... they did some wee work sheets and things you can work through, but its ongoing... We (VI teachers) did a few PSD slots and have a ten minute awareness talk with the rest of the class. (TVI, primary school A)

Buddy schemes and mentoring are, however, often perceived as something that would involve a pupil with a visual impairment as the recipient. However, this pupil with a visual impairment had recently become a buddy to two younger pupils:

L has coped very well ... she has a sighted buddy and a little girl who is blind ... the sighted child really enjoys chatting to her. (TVI, primary school A)

This pupil was encouraged to attend a lunch-time club:

We're trying to get S (pupil with VI) into the lunch-time drop in club to get her to mix with some friends ... She lacks confidence a bit. (learning support, secondary school D)

This initiative was part of a larger strategy that recognised the importance of a successful transition from primary to secondary school:

Once children (with VI) are identified as coming here, we put them into one of our local feeder primaries for one day a week ... so they get to know other pupils who are coming. (TVI, secondary school C)

Although few teachers interviewed saw bullying as an issue in the same way that the pupils and parents did, this school had been proactive in putting initiatives in place to support vulnerable pupils:

The school has the FAB system (Friends against Bullying). S (pupil with VI) had had problems in primary school ... we've gone to great lengths to make sure that she's going to be happy here... She's also become part of a small social skills group to raise self esteem, and last week they did a self esteem rating test and S came out really high. That was a contrast ... the difference is the fact that she's got some friends now. (support teacher, secondary school D)

Several teachers were aware of the added difficulties

that pupils with a visual impairment might face in making friends:

Its just not quite as easy for them to make friends, basically because they don't see them or picture them in a room – you have to be so close before you can see expressions and that sort of thing. (TVI, secondary school C)

As recognised by this teacher positive relationships are based on respect, not on pity, and teachers can play an important role in fostering such respect, by providing opportunities for the pupils to be seen by their classmates in a positive light:

These children aren't being friendly with them because they feel sorry for them, they're friendly because they're nice to be friends with, not because they need to be included. Children can be very sympathetic as well as cruel. If they (pupils with VI) can give a contribution to the class that makes the class look at them and think 'oh yes!', then that helps. (special class teacher, primary school E)

## **Support and communication**

Although many of the initiatives mentioned above would be supported at national and school level, the personal input from a teacher is a vital ingredient of a successful intervention. We therefore asked teachers if they felt supported, and what, if any, support they would like to have. This teacher was happy with the support she received:

In terms of the formal structures in the school they are very supportive ... I have never felt that I have just been left to get on with it. (class teacher, primary school A)

Most of the teachers we talked to were TVI's who, if they were based in a unit for visually impaired, were able to offer regular informal support to class teachers. For those TVI's who provided a peripatetic service it was often felt to be more difficult to provide support for class/subject teachers:

Being specialist teachers we should collaborate and let them (teachers) know (about pupils with a visual impairment), but its trying to find the time to get everything done. (TVI primary school B)

Formal support for class/subject teachers via staff development was mentioned several times, but usually as a 'one-off' occurrence. This TVI recalled providing an infrequent awareness raising day:

We have a full awareness raising day – we don't do it every year, but we have done that as part of the in-service days. (TVI, school B)

Generally the feeling was that much support (especially around concerns about social inclusion) was informal and although greatly valued, it did raise issues about the content of formal communication structures:

If we collaborate it's usually about what part of the curriculum we're going to do and what our aims will be and how many of the objectives will be reached and then we don't have time to discuss just general things. I would say collaboration with colleagues is so important, but we don't have time for it. (TVI, primary school B)

What we do is at the beginning of each session we go into the departments to talk about pupils with a visual impairment and about what their needs in class are, and about what support they will be getting, and sometimes issues come up at these meetings as well. (TVI, secondary school C)

Even within formal support structures, the communication of information within schools and between teachers is not always straightforward:

A booklet is produced ... all their needs are in here and this is produced for staff ... the majority of teachers are very aware of who she is and her needs, but you'll get the odd teacher that maybe doesn't tie up the name with the child – but that's the exception to the rule. (support teacher, secondary school D)

The teacher who used to forget that she couldn't read his writing has left! I don't know how often I told that man he had to write bigger. (learning support, secondary school G)

Teachers did, however, feel better supported when there had been good communication between school and parent, and school and

pupil. Being able to exchange information and discuss issues is important for everybody concerned:

I was just thinking of primary/secondary liaison and how the information got to us. I felt there were good structures there ... Pupil with VI came to school with me being aware of what she might be needing. I didn't label her, but it gave me background information.  
(support teacher, secondary school D)

We try to be open about communication and make sure people are kept informed and that information is channelled appropriately. We expect every member of staff to take on board the opinions of others if somebody notices something about the child that they haven't (headteacher, primary school E)

Support for teachers in the classroom is an important issue, but two teachers (a primary class teacher and a secondary subject teacher) felt that they did not 'get to know' their visually impaired pupils as well as others in the class. This was not a criticism of the support offered, rather an awareness that having another adult directly involved with a pupil could restrict teacher-pupil relationships forming in the usual way.

### **Summary of teachers' views**

It was recognised by the majority of teachers that the ethos of the school was important in fostering inclusive practices and attitudes for teachers and pupils.

- PSD and Circle time initiatives were seen as important.
- Many teachers felt better supported in fulfilling their role of supporting pupils with a visual impairment, if there were inclusive structures in place and effective communication/exchange of information between staff.
- Support teachers in the classroom could prevent teacher-pupil relationships forming in the usual way.

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 5 What do councils do to support inclusion?

Questionnaire responses

Policies and initiatives

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Summary of responses to questionnaire

#### Questionnaire responses

One of the aims of this project was to identify the range of school-based strategies and initiatives that promote social inclusion for pupils who have a visual impairment. This aim would be partly answered through our interviews with teachers, but in order to provide an overview of the situation throughout Scotland we developed a short postal questionnaire (Appendix 11) which was sent out to Heads of Service in all 32 local authorities.

We constructed the questionnaire in such a way as to encourage those who completed it to share with us any examples of good practice, initiatives or guidelines which they were aware of in schools which would promote the social inclusion and social competence of pupils with a visual impairment. We also asked questions such as what strategies were used in schools to promote social inclusion and how social inclusion was monitored in order to provide a context for discussing the views and experiences of those we had interviewed.

Twenty-nine questionnaires were returned.

Although many of our questions allowed for comment and/or

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explanation most took the form of 'tick box' answers, which allow for speed and ease of completion. However, although this format allows for some direct comparison of services provided between councils, such comparisons need to be viewed with care as the professional status of those who answered the questionnaire varied and therefore reflected knowledge of council policies in some areas, but not necessarily in all areas. Those completing the questionnaire were Senior Officers from Education Departments, Psychological Services, Sensory and VI Service managers and staff, and Learning Support and SEN Services managers.

As an indication of the distribution of VI pupils in mainstream primaries - 24 Councils had more than 5 primary schools and 13 councils had more than 5 secondary schools that included pupils who were blind or visually impaired. However as a result of local government reorganisation, and changes in service provision in some councils, it is impossible to find comparable figures that would show whether or not there are now more VI pupils enrolled in mainstream schools than, say, ten years ago.

All councils offered peripatetic support to primary and secondary schools.

All but two councils offered pre-school home visiting by TVI. Five councils had a VI Unit in primary school and 7 had VI Units in secondary school – with 2 councils having both and 2 councils in a collaborative arrangement providing access for both to a primary and a secondary unit for their pupils.

## **Policies and initiatives**

We asked respondents to indicate which policies/initiatives promoted social inclusion for pupils with VI in schools (Q6). A small number of councils (5) made the proviso that these were not specifically aimed towards pupils with VI. The following table shows the range of policies used to promote social inclusion:

<b>Initiatives/strategies/ policies</b>	<b>Not promoted</b>	<b>Promoted</b>
Ethos Network	12	16
Positive Behaviour	3	25
Anti-bullying	7	21
Anti-racism	18	10
Circle time	8	20
PSD	3	25

Pupil Councils	11	17
Peer support	12	16
Buddy schemes	12	16

Promoting anti-racism in schools was only seen as important for social inclusion by a minority of councils. Reasons for not ticking this option were not given. One council commented:

There is no way I would wish to single out. VI pupils are treated very much as members of the school community. We would tend to target specific areas if there was felt to be a problem.

Eight councils did not promote circle time and 12 councils did not promote buddy schemes. Although one respondent noted (as an additional comment):

Buddy schemes in secondary have greatly helped the VI pupil especially in S1 in making the transition easier by having an identified 'friend'. Circle time appears to be working well in primary allowing the VI child to take part and to have a voice when required.

Another council noted that in addition they promoted social inclusion through the:

Implementation of Key Areas detailed in "Self Evaluation by Peripatetic Sensory Services" document eg: Key Area 4 Aspect 4.5.

Key Area 4, Aspect 4.5 of this document (SSC 2001) offers a clear guide on the range of supportive strategies that these services should be considering: Theme (i Personal and Social Development; Theme (ii Confidence and Self Esteem. This document can help in planning as well as evaluating services.

One authority, echoing concerns expressed by some children and parents, noted at this point:

The main difficulty for pupils re inclusion within a rural authority is having the opportunity to meet with other VI pupils.

## **Funding for activities**

The majority of councils would appear to have budgets and be prepared to pay for support (either through extra staff or transport) for class outings and residential trips (Fig 1).

Fig 1

However, the numbers reverse for councils supporting pupils with a visual impairment in 'after school' clubs, etc (Fig 2).

Fig 2

However, 13 councils who did not tick this response box, added comments which confirmed that transport/funding would be available if requested.

Cases will be dealt with on an individual basis eg taxi arrangements can be negotiated for later pick-ups, etc.

VI units get funding for after school clubs, etc.

Funding would be available for any (VI) pupil wishing to participate in activities.

One authority acknowledged problems in providing this support:

After school activities – problem accessing these to most severe of our VI children – lack of transport and adult support.

Alternative methods of financing these after school activities were suggested:

Now being pursued under New Opportunities Fund.

Occasionally where difficulties with payment, Social Services have assisted.

## **Monitoring inclusion**

The monitoring of inclusion was through two main structures the IEP (26 councils) and annual reviews in school with parents (23 councils). The figures for pupil involvement in any of these meetings are confusing as we did not ask an either/or question here. But again from comments it appeared relatively rare for

pupils to be routinely or structurally involved in meetings with provisos such as 'dependent on age' being mentioned several times.

If the child is able this is practised. If possible child is given report.

Some secondary pupils included.

Dependent on age of pupil.

## **Supporting social inclusion**

More than two thirds of councils involved other agencies such as social work, speech and language therapists, and peripatetic specialist teachers, in supporting pupils who were blind or visually impaired. Eight councils also involved mobility/rehabilitation officers and five mentioned educational psychologists. Other agencies/professionals mentioned were careers service, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

We asked if councils work in partnership with other agencies to promote the social inclusion of pupils with VI. The categories we gave were: RNIB, Societies, Voluntary Agencies and 'Other'. Seventeen councils work with RNIB, 9 with Societies and 6 with voluntary organisations. We did not define societies or voluntary organisations. Twenty-seven authorities responded to 'other' sometimes giving names of 'other' organisations, sometimes using this as an opportunity to describe 'how' they worked with organisations. RNIB is consulted for general and specific advice, eg: equipment. RNIB parent support, courses and funded projects supporting inclusion were mentioned and in one case joint staff development. Local Societies for those with VI were mentioned as providing support groups for parents and for specific eye conditions. One authority mentioned an unspecified service agreement. It was surprising that not more mention was made of this, as previously 8 councils mentioned rehabilitation/mobility officers contributing to social skills/inclusion (Q9). These people will in most cases be employed by either Social Work Services or local Societies for VI. In this context, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association is mentioned under 'other' as providing mobility training. The Royal Blind School facilities are mentioned, as are Scottish Sensory Centre for courses/resources, and VI Scotland for parent support. Voluntary organisations are mainly contacted for funding, with Rowntree Trust and Calibre being mentioned by name. Respite care was also mentioned under 'other'. Seven councils gave a general statement saying they would work with other agencies on a case to case basis. In all, 27 councils responded to this question which shows a healthy

awareness and good outlook for partnership with the voluntary sector.

Having asked how social inclusion is promoted in schools and how social inclusion for pupils with VI is monitored (Qs 11 & 12 ) we hoped to find out how councils' inclusion policies are monitored and whether social inclusion was part of this. Twenty-four authorities said that they monitored their inclusion policy in schools. Those identified as being responsible for this were mainly from senior management within the education departments (Q11). Two responses said headteachers were responsible and six replied that their system was being established or did not yet have the line of responsibility clearly defined. We asked if social inclusion was part of this process of monitoring (Q12). Twenty-four respondents replied that this was the case. Those responsible were named as the same as for Q11.

When asked what steps were taken if a problem was identified 14 councils indicated that this would initially come through the VI service; 10 councils indicated that this would initially involve the school, with one other suggesting the social work department and another council initially involving an educational psychologist. Some gave additional information as to how problems would be handled:

In as unobtrusive manner as possible we try to alleviate the problem – maybe by increasing support (either human or other resources...)

... Teachers/Auxiliary staff can discuss concerns and plan how to address identified problems.

Discussions with parent/teacher and/or pupil and support team, actions planned consultatively.

Twenty-three Councils said there was social skills awareness training for pupils with visual impairment– with 22 saying this also occurred for sighted peers. Twenty-seven councils provided awareness training for staff.

One respondent commented re peer and staff training:

Yes, regularly on an individual basis and particularly at major transition stages.

One identified how time was found for staff training:

Yearly INSET for nursery and teaching staff. Use of PAT/CPD time. Formal/informal.

Every council said they would be interested in receiving information on promoting social inclusion of pupils with a visual impairment, and every council, except for one, said they would be interested in specific training for staff to support this (financial constraints on the council was the reason given by the one exception).

### **Summary of responses to questionnaire**

- All 29 councils who replied offer peripatetic services to schools with pupils with visual impairment. There are 5 primary school units and 7 secondary school units for pupils with visual impairment with 4 councils having access to units in both sectors.
- Councils use a range of strategies to promote social inclusion of all pupils including pupils with visual impairment.
- A range of professionals and agencies, including voluntary organisations, support the councils' education departments in contributing to the social inclusion and social skills training of pupils with visual impairment.
- Most councils monitor their inclusion/social inclusion policies, with senior management within education departments being responsible for this.
- Social skills awareness training is available for pupils with visual impairment, their peers and school staff in the majority of authorities. This training is provided mainly by TVI's along with school staff.
- Involvement of pupils in meetings and/or decisions that affect them, did not always appear to be routine procedure.

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**Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland**

**Chapter 6 Social skills training: examples from the Netherlands and Scotland**

[Visit to SENSIS Centre](#)

[Sharing the Vision Project](#)

['Kids Together Club'](#)

In this chapter we will describe two initiatives which are particularly aimed towards developing the social skills of visually impaired children and young people. It is important to stress, however, that what follows are descriptions of these projects, not an evaluation of these initiatives. We will first describe our study visit and observations in the Netherlands (at the SENSIS Centre), and then describe the "Kids Together Project" in Scotland.

### **Visit to SENSIS Centre**

In October 2001 we visited SENSIS, a centre in the south of the Netherlands. There are 3 such centres in the Netherlands, each covering a geographical area (Grave is for the South). Teachers of the visually impaired come here for short courses throughout their career. Families, children and young people with VI (0-20 years) also come regularly to the centre or at least once a year and may continue to visit throughout their lives. The school at the centre used to have 400 pupils, but now has 40. The area covered by this centre is thought to have about 2,000 pupils with VI and has 80 teachers of the visually impaired.

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The following information was given to us during several interviews and workshop sessions with staff in the centre. We also spent some time observing a social skills class being held in the centre, and talking to some of the participants.

Our visit was hosted by a psychologist who began by describing the importance of social skills which she defined as 'those abilities which make interaction with other people easier.' She felt that blind and visually impaired pupils needed more training, more strategies and more explanation than others, as it is not always possible to compensate if you cannot see the visual clues around you. Examples such as asking, listening, giving feedback, saying no and introducing yourself are important and maybe more difficult for those with VI because of problems with eye contact and insufficient vision to allow for imitation and therefore they may be exposed to negative experiences. This can result in tensions between attracting attention and being inconspicuous. There are also additional social skills that are useful for people with VI - such as asking for help, rejecting help, reacting to remarks and starting a conversation - which need to be addressed.

The psychologist felt that the motivation for learning social skills is stronger for those who are blind or visually impaired in mainstream schools than for those who remain in specialist provision. Although in Holland there is the equivalent of PSD (personal and social development) in some schools this is not considered sufficient to ensure that pupils who are blind or visually impaired develop the social skills they need. In schools in the Netherlands there are Guidance teachers whose role it is to empower pupils to do things for themselves, often through buddy type systems. But it is acknowledged that there is a possible tension in schools between the balance of developing cognitive and social skill learning.

The Goldstein method is a 'structured learning therapy' with an emphasis on acquiring social skills. Participants identify social skills which they would like to improve and videos are used to show appropriate social behaviour (see Appendix III for a brief outline). The adaptations made at the Sensis Centre for use with young people and adults with VI would appear to be minimal. There would be a smaller number of people in a group (5-8 participants) and there would be a focus on situations particularly relevant to people with a



visual impairment (e.g. refusing help). More verbal clues and descriptions would be given. Videos of blind or visually impaired people would be used as role models. There would be two workers per group. Other changes would be that the identification of social skills needed would be done by the trainer talking to each individual before the group started.

There would be 4 weekly meetings to learn one skill, and training would be over 3-15 meetings. For those who may be blind or visually impaired different social skills would be addressed, such as:

- Introducing yourself
- Listening
- Asking questions
- Starting a conversation
- Asking for help
- Refusing help
- Being criticised
- Criticising
- How to deal with feelings.

The motivation factor is very important and it was suggested that social skills training using this method (rather than more flexible indirect methods) works best when young people are of an age and maturity to be able to identify what it is they need (and suitable social situations in which they would use such a skill). The five points highlighted above would also be slightly modified to include stages such as turning to face the person, extending your hand as you introduce yourself, etc.

Unfortunately little information was given about work with younger children. It was suggested that sessions would be much shorter (less than an hour); that there would be more attention given to the group and the feelings within the group; and that the social skills would often be part of some other (usually practical) activity. The motivation would then come from being part of that group and participating in that activity. We were briefly shown a game (rather like snakes and ladders) where cards would be picked up outlining a particular situation with several different options for how to react and the player was asked to choose the appropriate reaction.

This was a small class of 4 students (3 male and 1 female) with their class teacher. None of the students were blind.

Two television screens were used to play the video of a situation where a student with a visual impairment was on work experience and a colleague was celebrating the birth of a son. Two screens were necessary so that all students could sit very close to the screen. The first video was of the student not participating in the celebrations. The students were asked to describe what happened and what they thought could improve things. They appeared confident and at ease doing this and came up with many good ideas of what would help make the situation better. The second video was shown where the student did participate. The students were asked to role play the first video and then asked to role play the second video and positive feedback was given by the teacher throughout this.

The students appeared comfortable and familiar with this structure and they were able to 'ad lib' and elaborate on the second video (for example after going through the physical aspects of the social skills such as rising from your chair to greet someone, they introduced extra dialogue such as 'what is the baby's name'). They also gave each other clues/ instructions as to what to do and when. The lesson continued over coffee and biscuits with the teacher reinforcing the social skills learnt. After less than an hour the lesson ended and the class was dismissed.

Later that day we briefly discussed the social skills group with two of the participants, both young men aged 17 years. Both made the comment that the age gap of those participating in the group was too large and they thought it would be better if they were all of a similar age. They both stressed the importance of learning social skills, but then remarked that learning social skills was one thing, but they needed and wanted the opportunity to 'try them out' in situations where they would be with others of their age who were not visually impaired. As weekly boarders they were not in Grave at weekends, and when they went home at weekends they said they often spent the time alone/with family.

## **Sharing the Vision Project**

This project was the result of collaboration between VISSCC (Visual Impairment Support Service for Children in the Community) which encompasses three neighbouring education authorities (Clackmannan, Falkirk and Stirling), and the RNIB (who funded the initiative). An article

describing the project was published in *Visability*, March 2002.

VISSCC is a multi disciplinary team consisting of a community child health doctor, orthoptists, teachers of visually impaired children and liaison health visitors. VISSCC is jointly funded by the local education authorities and health trusts.

### **'Kids Together Club'**

We had two meetings with staff involved in the initiative and had access to a video made during the project. The first meeting was with two of the teachers involved, and occurred immediately after the project had ended. We also attended a VISSCC meeting early this year, when the evaluation of the project was being discussed.

The project aimed to establish peer support groups of visually impaired children and young persons from the three local authorities (as above), which are part of the Forth Valley Health board. A successful pilot programme, led to the establishment of a group of 14 primary aged children, 5 teachers, 1 support for learning auxiliary and some parental support, who met fortnightly during the autumn term 2001.

It was recognised that children with visual impairment in mainstream settings, belong to a low incidence group, and do not have the opportunity to meet with other similar children or spend time working on general life skills. It was therefore felt that without such support visually impaired children can lose confidence and restrict their own activities. The project aims were to encourage the children to:

- Meet and make friends with other visually impaired children
- Discuss VI issues
- Work on life skills from an equal baseline and develop these skills
- Be more confident and able within their own inclusive settings
- Raise their self esteem

During one of the sessions a 'parents day' was held where parents and invited professionals were able to meet each other and speak informally. The professionals were also able

to participate in joint observational assessments during the activities. We were shown an informal video of the project which shows the group engaging in many different activities and having a great deal of fun!

A couple of teething problems have been identified such as the need for the project to have a 'home' so that resources did not have to be packed up and stored away after every session, and more ancillary staff, but overall the comments by the children, their parents, and their class teachers were very positive, and it is hoped to run the programme again soon.

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Chapter 7 Discussion and recommendations

Discussion

Responsibility for sensitive support

Good communication

Importance of School Ethos

Friendships and inter-personal relationships

Policies and Strategies

Recommendations

#### **Discussion**

There was an overall consensus by all those interviewed on what would promote social inclusion for pupils with a visual impairment. In slightly different ways, and with slightly different emphasis pupils, parents and teachers all talked about the importance of teaching staff being knowledgeable about visual impairment; the importance of support being available and unobtrusive; the importance of communication (between teachers, between pupils and teachers, and between teachers and parents); the importance of friendships and positive social interactions in school; and, the importance of involving pupils in decisions that affect them. The experiences of those we interviewed clearly

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illustrate how important the above are in the daily lives of those concerned. The pupils in particular, eloquently and perceptively described what helps to make them feel included in school, and equally, what it feels like when they are not.

### **Responsibility for sensitive support**

There was general recognition of the importance of sensitive support for pupils in the classroom. Pupils, parents and teachers shared the view that to promote feelings of inclusion in the classroom, support should be unobtrusive. However, the experiences of several pupils indicated that sometimes class teachers appeared to ignore or forget to make simple, but important, adaptations to their teaching practices. Universal adaptations to teaching styles, such as speaking and writing clearly, and presenting learning materials in different formats, could be of benefit to the class generally, and would prevent feelings of exclusion for those pupils who depended upon them. What emerged from the interviews, however, was an expectation by several teachers that it was up to the pupils to approach a class teacher to, for example, ask that they write larger on the board. This approach was usually presented as empowering the pupil, but it does not take into account the power relationships between pupil and teacher. Such an approach can therefore result in the issue being individualised rather than being about a general concern to promote inclusion. As some interviews with pupils indicated, many of these issues were often ongoing which could result in a pupil feeling both excluded and marginalised in the classroom. No pupil is going to feel confident about regularly asking a teacher to write larger, and why should they? It is up to school to promote a strong inclusive ethos where staff are encouraged and supported to include all their pupils in classroom activities.

### **Good communication**

Pupils and parents recognised that it is the awareness and knowledge of teaching staff that promotes feelings of being socially included in school. However, without knowledge being exchanged and awareness being shared in a supportive environment, teachers will be uninformed and unaware of ways to support their pupils. As indicated above some schools had formal ways (such as information booklets and formalised meetings) of providing staff with

information and the needs of some pupils. But, this was not always successful and sometimes basic information about a pupil's visual impairment was not passed on to class teachers, or had been forgotten. As recognised by some teachers the formal requirements of accessing the curriculum took precedence in formal meetings and rarely was time allocated to how pupils might be socially included in school. Peripatetic TVI's often had difficulty communicating with class or subject teachers due to lack of time. In the absence of 'time' being built into the arrangement, the TVI has to hurry to their next school or pupil and teachers to their next class.

### **Importance of School Ethos**

The overall ethos of the school was a valuable support for many teachers in their attempts to fully include pupils in all aspects of school life. School development plans, staff development and the role of the headteacher are important in nurturing and promoting an atmosphere where social inclusion is seen as important enough to be discussed in formal as well as informal arenas. Many teachers did however recognise the importance of inter-personal relationships in school for those pupils with a visual impairment, and some were well attuned to the needs of particular pupils. There were also a small number of teachers who felt that they did not 'get to know' their visually impaired pupils as well as others in the class and who expressed regret that this was the case. The teacher-pupil relationship is an important one and thought should be given to how that might be nurtured and developed when most of the contact with the pupil in class may be mediated through a support teacher.

Those schools which already had initiatives aimed at developing social skills and self-esteem (eg: lunchtime clubs and buddy schemes) were able to utilise these for pupils with a visual impairment. However, although many pupils with a visual impairment can/do benefit from such initiatives, as highlighted by the HM Inspectors, some pupils need extra support and we would strongly suggest that schools look closely at who may need extra support and how that can best be done. Many visually impaired young people may be busy playing down their problems so that they fit snugly into the mainstream environment so it is important to involve them in discussions and decisions that affect them. It should, however, be remembered that social inclusion is not a one way process that is the responsibility

only of the visually impaired pupil, as many are socially excluded because their visually unimpaired peers do not know how to include them.

As succinctly put by one young person interviewed: 'The best things about this school are its got nice people', and therefore it's not surprising that the thorny issue of resources (for more support staff or equipment, etc.) was rarely mentioned. The attitudes, empathy, knowledge and understanding of peers and teachers are the vital ingredients to feeling happy, safe, and included in school.

## **Friendships and inter-personal relationships**

Friends can provide support and contribute to self-esteem in many ways, but it was explicitly recognised by a number of pupils interviewed that having friends also offered them some kudos and protection against being bullied. Although few teachers commented on bullying or name calling it was, (or had been), an issue for almost half of the pupils interviewed. By schools proactively engaging pupils with a visual impairment in, for example, buddy schemes and lunch club initiatives (as mentioned above), positive social relationships with peers could be fostered and developed.

Several parents also felt it was important for their children to have friends and be able to socialise with peers both in and out of school. For those pupils who lived some distance away from their school, contact with school friends could be difficult.

## **Policies and Strategies**

The importance of early intervention for children with visual impairment cannot be overemphasised and was evident in the support provided by councils to mainstream primary and secondary schools. In cases where Home Visiting Services support families of pre-school children it is vital that someone with expertise on visual impairment is available for consultation and advice, and all councils need to be vigilant in providing this support.

It is notable and disappointing that promoting anti-racism in schools was only seen as important for social inclusion by a minority of councils. Racism does exist in Scotland, and can often be hidden or institutionalised, so schools should be



proactive in promoting their anti-racist policies to ensure the inclusiveness of their school community.

Given the recognition by the Scottish Executive of the importance of educating the whole child, and encouraging positive relationships in school, it was surprising that, for example, a number of councils did not promote circle time or buddy schemes. Many pupils interviewed talked about being bullied, and there was evidence of successful buddy schemes involving blind or visually impaired pupils, so it is important that councils actively promote and sustain such initiatives.

The availability of mobility training was mentioned by only a third of respondents. Part of inclusion – both physically, emotionally and socially – depends upon the ability to move around the school as independently as possible. By denying pupils with a visual impairment the necessary training/instruction for this, their ability to independently get from one class to another, meet friends and participate in break-time activities is greatly reduced.

Pupil involvement in decisions that may affect them is an important policy issue. Although many pupils may be involved in meetings at school to discuss their progress and/or concerns, it would appear that their presence at such meetings was not always part of routine procedure. Councils and schools have a responsibility to actively involve pupils in these decision-making procedures, and strategies should be put in place to facilitate this.

Our project focussed on children and young people in mainstream schools. However, schools are part of the local community and cannot 'go it alone'. Pupils need to feel that they are also part of the community whether it be the one they live in or the one they go to school in. In order to foster social inclusion schools or authorities need additional help and resources from other agencies and organisations such as local societies and charities. Although two thirds of councils did involve other agencies, less than half involved local societies and charities. Although the Scottish Executive encourages the participation of local societies and charities through funds such as the SEN Innovation Grants Programme (which funds collaborative projects between the voluntary sector and local authorities), it would appear that some councils are not taking advantage of this.

Inclusion and in particular social inclusion are an important part of government policy. Social inclusion can have many interpretations depending on context. It may relate to socio-economic issues or, as in the case of this project to the experiences of individual or groups of children in the day to day social and educational intercourse with peers, teachers and other staff. There are a number of national initiatives to support this eg Ethos Network and strategies that can be employed by schools, eg: Circle Time, Buddy Schemes. In addition, new legislation: Special Education & Disability Act (2001) comes into force in schools throughout the UK in September 2002 and this will have implications for education authorities as the Responsible Bodies for Schools. From October they will have new planning duties under the Special Education & Disability Act (2001) to ensure access to the environment, curriculum and information for all children with disabilities. Councils are currently at different stages of developing/finalising their inclusion policies. There is currently a National Inclusion Project looking at this issue, so it is reassuring that many authorities have policies in place and have identified at what level within the authority the responsibility for monitoring should lie.

The Scottish Executive are proactively encouraging schools to develop a positive ethos which will promote the inclusion of all pupils, socially and academically, in their school and in their community. The policies are in place and the evaluation by the HM Inspectors notes the progress made and gives a clear indication of what still needs to be done – especially in relation to those pupils who may need extra support. This report has highlighted the particular position of those with a visual impairment in mainstream schools and gives a clear message that inclusion can and does work, but that all authorities and schools should be further encouraged to fully embrace inclusive policies and practices. In particular, attention should be given to staff development and the promotion of a positive ethos which will include all members of the school community.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for HM Inspectorate of Education**

Include issues of social inclusion, specifically those regarding pupils with visual impairment, in inspections of councils, schools, and peripatetic sensory services.

## **Recommendations for Scottish Executive Education Department**

To bear in mind the recommendations listed below when allocating funding.

### **Recommendations for councils**

- To provide enhanced support for pupils with a visual impairment for the development of social skills
- Social inclusion policies to be promoted and monitored in context of pupils with visual impairment.
- Funding to be made available for time for TVI/class teacher/subject teacher communication.
- Council policies and staff development on social inclusion issues to be monitored and evaluated.
- Promote council policy on listening to children.
- Encourage and fund opportunities for pupils with a visual impairment to:
  - 1 Attend after school activities and clubs
  - 2 Meet others with a visual impairment both locally and nationally
- Foster collaboration with voluntary organisations in supporting:
  - 1 Social inclusion
  - 2 Social skills training
  - 3 Mobility training
- Consult with children and young people on design of children- friendly playgrounds

### **Recommendations for schools**

- To provide enhanced support for pupils with a visual impairment for the development of social skills
- Time-tabling for TVI/class/subject teacher communication
- Review communication with parents
- Ongoing Staff development/awareness training on VI issues
- Review strategies for promoting social inclusion
- Ongoing awareness raising with peers on VI issues
- Review procedures for listening to children with a visual impairment
- Consult with children and young people on design of children -friendly playgrounds.

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Appendix I

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## Appendix I

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**Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland**

Promoting social inclusion

**Appendix I**

Appendix II

The following table provides an overview of pupils who took part:

School	Age	Male	Female
Primary - Unit	11		X
Primary - Unit	10	X	
Primary - Unit	10		X
Secondary - Unit	15		X
Secondary - Unit	13		X
Secondary - Unit	17		X
Secondary	12		X
Secondary	15		X
Secondary	15	X	
Primary - Unit	10		X
Primary - Unit	11	X	
Primary - Unit	8	X	
Primary	9	X	
Primary	11		X
Primary	10	X	
Secondary	12	X	
Secondary	15		X

**Appendix II**





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**Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland**

**Appendix II Questionnaire**

This project is funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department through the Scottish Sensory Centre (May 2001 – March 2002). The aim of the project is to identify good practice in mainstream schools so that we can produce guidelines and suggest materials for use in primary and secondary schools. We want to identify the range of school-based strategies and initiatives that promote the social inclusion and social competence of pupils who have a visual impairment; to find out who is involved and what works.

We have been talking to a small number of pupils, parents and staff in 4 primary schools and 4 secondary schools in Scotland to find out about their experiences of school, to find out what they think works and what could be done to improve things. To be able to place these experiences in context, and provide an overall picture of what is happening in Scotland **we are now asking every council in Scotland to complete this short questionnaire.**

We realise that some good practice may well be implicit in the ethos of the school or occur through other activities such as PSD or circle time. We are interested in any examples of good practice, initiatives or guidelines that you are aware of in your council which would promote social inclusion/ competence of pupils with a visual impairment in mainstream schools.

We are Marianna Buultjens (Scottish Sensory Centre), Joan Stead (Research Fellow) and Mary Dallas (RNIB – Family Services Officer). If you want any further information please contact Joan at:  
Simon Laurie House  
University of Edinburgh  
Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ  
Telephone 0131 651 6221  
Email: joan.stead@ed.ac.uk

1 Name of Council \_\_\_\_\_

2 Position/address of person completing the questionnaire \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3 Please indicate how many mainstream primary schools in your council currently have pupils with a visual impairment

0-3 schools

3-5 schools

5+ schools

Promoting social inclusion

Appendix III

4 Please indicate how many mainstream secondary schools in your council currently have pupils with a visual impairment:

0-3 schools

3-5 schools

5+ schools

5 Please tick if your council offers the following services to pupils with a visual impairment:

Pre school home visiting service by a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI)

Peripatetic support from TVI to play groups and nurseries

Peripatetic support from TVI in primary schools

VI Unit support in primary school

Peripatetic support from TVI in secondary schools

VI Unit support in secondary school

Other support (please list) \_\_\_\_\_

6 How is social inclusion for pupils with a visual impairment promoted in schools? (please tick all appropriate boxes)

Through whole school approaches, for example ...

Ethos Network

Positive behaviour

Anti-bullying strategies

Anti – racism strategies

Circle time

PSD

Participation in Pupil councils

Participation in Peer support schemes

Participation in Buddy schemes

Please give examples/comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7 Does the council provide transport and/or other funding for pupils with VI to attend the following

activities?

Participation in 'after' school clubs/choirs/orchestra/drama groups etc.

Participation in class/school outings /residential trips

Please give examples/comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8 How is social inclusion for pupils with VI monitored in schools?

Through target setting/IEP's

Termly reviews: in school with parents

in school with parents and pupil

Annual reviews: in school with parents

in school with parents and pupil

Other/comment \_\_\_\_\_

9 Are there other professionals visiting the schools who may contribute to the social skills/inclusion of pupils with VI?

Speech and language therapists

Social workers

Peripatetic VI support

Other

10 Does the council work in partnership with other agencies to promote the social inclusion of pupils with VI? eg:

RNIB Description \_\_\_\_\_

Societies Description \_\_\_\_\_

Voluntary agencies Description \_\_\_\_\_

Other Description \_\_\_\_\_

11 Does your council monitor its inclusion policy in schools?

Yes

No

If yes, whose responsibility is this? \_\_\_\_\_

12 Is social inclusion part of this?

Yes

No

If yes, whose responsibility is this? \_\_\_\_\_

13 What steps are taken if problems are identified/ issues need to be addressed regarding social inclusion?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14 Is there any social skills/awareness training in school specifically for visually impaired pupils?

Yes

No

If yes, who provides this? \_\_\_\_\_

15 Is there any social skills/awareness training in school for sighted peers regarding their VI schoolmates?

Yes

No

If yes, who provides this? \_\_\_\_\_

16 Is there any social skill/awareness training for school staff regarding pupils with VI?

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, who provides this? \_\_\_\_\_

17 Would your council be interested in information and guidelines for promoting social inclusion of pupils with VI?

Yes

No

18 Would your council be interested in specific training of staff to support social inclusion of pupils with VI?

Yes

No

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please return by FRIDAY 21ST DECEMBER to Joan Stead in the SAE provided.

### Appendix III

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Appendix III Goldstein Method

This method began in America in 1975 by Goldstein who described it as 'structured learning therapy'. Originally intended for 'working class' adults and those with a mild learning disability the emphasis was on acquiring good social practical social skills. There is a focus on conditions by which clients become more social skilled, acquire useful behaviour patterns, decrease their social fear, and acquire realistic expectations regarding their own competence. The emphasis is on doing not talking. Group dynamics and individual feelings/emotions are not encouraged during the sessions, and if they do arise they are not directly addressed. The reason given for this was to create clear boundaries for participants about there being no possibility of them having to 'lay themselves bare' (so to speak) or be embarrassed by others in the group unexpectedly doing so. There was also the comment that by being 'less structured' the tutor would have to be negative to keep on task (by stopping people talking about other issues). Strict adherence to the structure was said to mean that there was no chance of failure.

The method can be summarised as:

- Directive
- Short
- Uses recognisable situations
- Emphasis on concrete behaviour (discussion is about behaviour, not feelings)
- Emphasis on doing (imitative and anticipatory role play).

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Appendix IV

Directions for the trainer are to:

- Give a natural dynamic performance (scripted introductions, etc)
- Reduce tension
- Focus on participant, not on the group.

Groups are usually between 8-10 people who have already completed a questionnaire which asks each participant to rate their performance in particular social situations. For example, there may be seven questions around striking up a conversation with 'tick box responses such as 'I never do this', 'I rarely do this', 'I do this nearly always' etc. From these responses the trainer allocates particular individuals to a session which corresponds to what they have identified as needing help with. This 'self selection' is a crucial part of the motivation to take part and learn from the training.

The most important components in each training session are:

- Modelling
- Behaviour training
- Transfer training
- Home assignments

The group sit in a 'U' shape with the trainer at the head. The trainer uses a 'set piece' introduction/explanation, and the training begins. A short video (2-3 minutes) is shown of a situation where a particular social skill is shown as lacking. The group are asked to comment on the video and identify what is wrong. A strategy is introduced by the trainer. The five steps are:

- Consider if you want to do this (eg: start a conversation)
- Choose a good moment
- Say what you want to do (I'd like to talk about ...)
- Ask the other person if this is a good time
- Listen to the response of the other person

Another video is shown of the same social situation, but things now go well and the group are asked to identify what has changed. Then a third video is shown with the actions freeze framed when one of the five points above takes place, to emphasise the method/strategy.

Members of the group are then chosen by the trainer to role play the first video as imitative role play, that is simply repeating the words and actions they have seen on the video.

They are then asked to imitative role-play the second video and positive feedback is then immediately given by the trainer to the person who had successfully enacted the strategy. The trainer may also ask the other group members to give positive feedback with the positive feedback directly related to the realisation of the skill. This process will be repeated until all members of the group have had experience of imitating the strategy as illustrated in the second video.

Members of the group are then asked to think of their own situations where they could use this skill and then take part in anticipatory role-play. The trainer takes each situation and, by talking to that particular member, carefully establishes the salient features and then asks another group member to imitate this situation. The participants are then asked to repeat the role-play, but this time using the five steps outlined above. At the end of each session members are asked to identify a situation where they could use this skill in the coming week and are asked to do so – this is the 'home assignment.'

Subsequent sessions adopt the following structure:

- Feedback on home assignment
- Imitating role play
- Anticipating role play
- Discussion of home assignments

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Appendix IV Draft Guidelines for Practitioners to promote social inclusion of visually impaired pupils in mainstream schools

These guidelines have been compiled from a number of sources including the interviews with pupils, parents and staff, literature and development/awareness training materials. These guidelines concentrate on issues of social inclusion and are based on the assumption that access to the curriculum has been realised. The aim of the guidelines is to equip practitioners, pupils with a visual impairment and their peers, with strategies to promote positive social interactions. These guidelines will be further developed during a seminar organised by the Scottish Sensory Centre in June 2002.

These guidelines have worked for particular people in particular circumstances – there is no ‘blueprint’ for social inclusion which will be suitable, appropriate or successful in every situation, so we encourage councils, staff of schools and sensory services to adapt and innovate in order to:

#### General:

1. Provide specific social skills training for pupils with visual impairment; including analysis and discussion of social situations and use of role-play.
2. Provide opportunities for awareness raising and discussion of social inclusion issues for sighted peers.
3. Provide regular training and updates for class and subject teachers.
4. Provide playground space/structures that are easily identifiable and accessible.

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5. Organise area clubs/workshops for pupils with a visual impairment to meet each other (eg; Kids Together Club).

### **Specific:**

1. Provide opportunities to develop mobility and independent living skills in and around the school.
2. Ensure that pupils with a visual impairment get the opportunity to meet with others who have a visual impairment (via clubs, RNIB weekends and internet access)
3. Provide opportunities from an early age for pupils with a visual impairment to develop body awareness and suppleness through appropriate physical activities.
4. Encourage the inclusion of pupils with a visual impairment in playground games and activities.
5. Support social 'transition' between primary and secondary schools using strategies such as ensuring that pupils meet up with future peers before the summer holidays and using or introducing a 'buddy' system.
6. Help create 'circles of friends' for particular pupils to provide support for attending school disco's, dances, etc. (see Newton & Wilson 1999).
7. Use seating arrangements and group activities in class proactively to enhance social experiences.
8. Encourage and support pupils with a visual impairment to describe/explain what can and can't be seen and the implications of this.
9. Facilitate discussions about appropriate behaviour and language in different circumstances – not just about what teachers and parents think should be said and done!!
10. Ensure that anti-bullying policies are in place with strategies to support pupils who are bullied (eg: Anti bullying network, FAB - Friends against bullying, etc).
11. Facilitate the participation of pupils with a visual impairment in, for example, buddy schemes (as buddies themselves and as those to be buddied), school councils, and lunch clubs.

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## Promoting social inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Scotland

### Appendix V Bibliography and Resources

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