

# Habilitation Policy

St Vincent's School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs



<b>Approved by:</b>	Mr. L. Green & The Governing Body	<b>Date:</b> November 2025
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## Introduction

Habilitation is the structured and supportive process that helps children and young people acquire essential skills for daily life (the word is derived from the Latin “*Habilitare*” meaning “to make suitable”). These skills include communication, motor skills, self-care, and social interactions. It’s about empowering children with particular physical, emotional or cognitive challenges to reach their full potential and become active participants in their communities. Habilitation is a tailored programme that may involve working alongside therapists, teaching and care staff to deliver interventions tailored to each child’s unique abilities. The goal is to enhance their quality of life and foster independence, ensuring they can thrive in their own way.

A key element of this work for the visually impaired child is the development of two important skills, **MOBILITY** and **ORIENTATION**.

- Mobility is the ability to move efficiently in one’s environment.
- Orientation is the use of the remaining senses to establish one’s location in that environment.

It is as important for a visually impaired child to learn these skills as it is for them to undertake the standard curriculum such as reading, writing and mathematics. Mobility instruction has to be available as needed by the individual child throughout their academic experience.

Patterns of length and frequency of lessons may vary at different points in the programme.

## Primary Levels:

- Start 10-15 minutes as often as possible from 4 years upwards
- 45/55 minute lessons by the age of 6 plus.
- 1hr 30 minutes – 1hr 50 minutes for ages 15- 19 \* (subject to Individual Mobility Programme)

## Aims and Objectives

To provide the visually impaired child or young person with the skills and experience necessary to enable them to travel independently with safety and efficiency to the fullest extent of their own capabilities. The encouragement of self initiated independent movement is a key factor in achieving this aim.

## Philosophy

The philosophy behind the teaching of Habilitation is that it promotes the development of:

- Tactile perception (Touch)
- Auditory skills (Listening)
- Low vision perception (Best use of available functional vision)

- Olfactory perception (Sense of smell)
- Kinaesthetic perception (How the body reacts to movement)
- Body awareness
- Spatial relations (e.g. the concept of personal space)
- Distance, time and speed
- Estimation
- Laterality (Dominance of one side of the brain) and directionality
- Judgements
- Movements and motor skills
- Concept developments (taking forward learning and using it in different situations)
- Route planning and memory
- Orientation skills
- Learning to be responsible for their own safety during movement

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

The Habilitation programme contributes to students' SMSC development through

- Developing the confidence of our young people through social and community based activities, highlighting and encouraging the benefits of their role as an individual as part of a wider cultural and social identity
- Enabling our young people to identify, understand and overcome their concerns, worries and feelings by broadening their awareness of moral and social issues and encouraging their resolution through rational, spiritual and ethical thinking
- Helping our young people to understand how their actions and their voice can be used to influence and integrate with the social and cultural diversity of our country

### **Differentiation for levels of ability**

Although the aim is to equip the child or young person with the skills to integrate into a sighted world the extent to which the individual will achieve this will depend greatly on their own ability, maturity, degree of impairment, additional disabilities and experience. The ultimate standard of independence reached will vary with the ability and determination of each child, though the personally tailored programmes will seek to maximise the child or young person's individual potential. For example, modification to techniques will be required to suit the various needs of the different degrees of visual and additional disabilities (see Monitoring and Tracking checklist that each child will work through at their own pace).

## **Safety**

The safety of the child or young person is always of paramount importance throughout all aspects of the training and it is for this reason that the teaching of habilitation skills are undertaken on a **one to one basis** with a designated **Habilitation Officer**.

The activities undertaken as part of the programme are subject to regular risk assessment and review.

## **Teaching Methods**

Whilst the tailored programmes will be completed by qualified and dedicated Habilitation officers, all staff within the school play a role in supporting the programme during classroom activities, break periods and time spent within the residential groups. All staff are appropriately trained to achieve this.

Habilitation lessons require intense effort and concentration and are often both mentally and physically tiring. These are very important factors to remember when timetabling and trying to fit Habilitation into the school curriculum.

## **Classroom Approaches**

- Orientation groundwork
- Development of basic concepts
- Body image
- Laterality
- Directional
- Basic shapes, letter shapes
- Parallel lines
- Map work, scale models, tactile materials, recorded maps

## **Knowledge of:**

- Upstairs/downstairs
- Door openings
- Fire exits etc.
- Relevant use of audio applications for indoor and outdoor sounds
- Sequencing
- Knowledge and upkeep of canes and tips.

## **Habilitation Officers**

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(See Habilitation Department Staff Training Policy course for all staff)

- Tailoring of methods and techniques to the individual needs of each child.
- Keeping parents well informed of their child's progress
- Ensure that those who have most contact with the child are aware of child's mobility skills
- Child: As much practical and 'hands' on experience as possible in both indoor and outdoor travel methods

## **Progression**

Considering their age, ability and specific needs, individual children will work through the Programme. The aim is for a visually impaired child to achieve as close to parity as possible with their sighted peers.

- Assessment
- Pre-cane skills
- Environmental concepts
- Indoor orientation
- Sighted guide technique
- Formal cane training (long/symbol)
- Residential area travel
- Quiet shopping area
- Busy shopping area
- Transport
- City centre travel

## **Assessment**

- Visual assessment
- Walk and Talk assessment
- Converse with parents
- Observe the child at playtimes and in the classroom
- Try to include their favourite toy (with younger students)
- Ascertain information available regarding the child
- Crafty Sams check list
- Orientation and Mobility checklist sheets
- Indoor and Outdoor assessment sheets for Primary School Children
- Quiet Residential Travel for Primary School Children

- Skill checking lessons
- Screening checklist (M.I.S.E)
- Progress file

### **Visual Impairment Special Needs**

- As sighted children take the ability to travel independently for granted, they also take for granted the knowledge and experience gained through travelling independently. This is one of the most important skills a visually impaired child can learn.
- Without the special techniques of Habilitation training many have the option of either relying on someone taking them out or they remain indoors.
- Basic independence can help confidence and self esteem.
- Being unable to get about can have a damaging effect on self-confidence and even emotional well-being.
- Ultimately employment is almost impossible to find and social interactions, leisure and recreational activities are severely limited. Physical well-being and fitness can also be affected.

### **Disability Specific Skills**

- The level of understanding of each child will differ greatly. Emphasis being placed on listening, understanding and following instructions.
- Development of: posture and gait; sound localisation; sound shadows; echo location and other background information.
- Tactile: the hand; the cane; the soles of the feet; thermal clues; kinaesthetic - the detection of gradients and lateral tilts; the estimation of distance travelled.
- Vestibular: the detection of degree of turn or of veering.
- Smell: used in a discriminatory sense.
- Vision: the use of residual vision (if any)
- Taste.

## **Cross Curricular Links.**

- Habilitation has cross-curricular links with P.E., Maths, English and Food Technology lessons i.e. healthy living and exercise, money, reading signs and timetables etc.
- Links with Citizenship and PHSE are made throughout the programme by:
  - a. Activities demonstrating personal and group responsibility in their attitudes to themselves and others.
  - b. The rights and responsibilities and duties of citizens and the role of the voluntary sector.
  - c. Money management.
  - d. Planning a journey.
  - e. Healthy living and the importance of diet and exercise.

## **Resources**

- Treadmill.
- Computer.
- Indoor and outdoor maps.
- Computer programmes of both indoor and outdoor sounds
- Low vision cards.
- Variety of canes and cane tips.
- Information books and handouts.
- Tactile manual dexterity aids
- Bank note detectors
- Level indicators
- Dictaphone
- Mobile phone & Apps