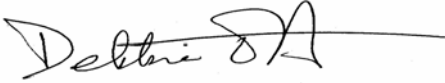


# Children, Schools and Families

## Braille Literacy Policy

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## 1. **Acknowledgement**

While drafting and redrafting this policy we received many helpful comments and suggestions from close colleagues, professionals in the wider world of visual impairment, Braille users and from parents. The policy is much the better for this consultation and we are extremely grateful to all those who contributed.

## 2. **Introduction**

Braille and print are alternative, but equal, routes to literacy. Successful literacy results in an enjoyment of the written word, the ability of the reader to gain information from written source material and the ability to make written records for a variety of purposes.

### **Braille**

Braille is a writing system which enables blind and partially sighted people to read and write through touch. It was invented by Louis Braille (1809-1852), a French teacher of the blind. It consists of patterns of raised dots arranged in cells of up to six dots in a 3 x 2 configuration. Each cell represents a letter, numeral or punctuation mark. Some frequently used words and letter combinations also have their own single cell patterns.

## 3. **Purpose of the Policy**

The majority of pupils with a visual impairment in Hertfordshire, including those for whom Braille is their primary medium for literacy, are in local schools

The purpose of this policy is to inform schools and the local authority on the use of Braille as a tool for literacy. The policy outlines the approach taken but is not a Braille curriculum, detailing the teaching and learning strategies and materials available at each stage of study. As a team we are beginning to set down the experience of our teachers and so develop a Braille curriculum and set of guidance notes and we will be pleased to report on this as it progresses.

## 4. **To whom do we teach Braille?**

We aim to teach Braille to pupils with a severe visual impairment for whom the use of Braille would be the only means of accessing the written word or would be beneficial to increase fluency and comprehension. As a guide, it would be rare for a pupil able to read text smaller than N36 to be taught Braille but we would always discuss this with the parents, pupil and concerned professionals.

We aim to discuss and agree individualised teaching plans for each pupil in consultation with the pupil (if appropriate), the parents/carers, and school staff. Plans will take account of the long-term prognosis of the eye condition, of ophthalmologist advice and of assessment determining level of fluency and comprehension of the written word. The main approach to the written word will be identified.

Occasionally a pupil having difficulty reading font size N24, perhaps with a reduced visual field or a poor prognosis, might have a dual approach. In such cases the pupil will also be taught by sighted methods, alongside learning Braille. This dual approach and the factors informing the decision as to which of the two approaches will be the primary medium for literacy will be discussed individually.

The individualised teaching plans will be reviewed at least yearly. The teaching plans will be reactive to changing circumstances and progressive in terms of long term agreed goals and short term IEP goals.

## 5. Overview of Provision

5.1 A Specialist Teacher with Braille teaching skills, almost always a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI), will be allocated to each pupil to maintain consistency and continuity. The Specialist Teacher and a Curriculum Access Specialist (who particularly looks at the starred\* items below) visit the school and between them provide:

- Teaching of pre-Braille skills
- Teaching of Braille literacy skills (Reading and writing)
- Teach/train the pupil in the use of specialist equipment
- Train/advise school staff on the use of specialist equipment and ICT programmes\*
- Teach/mentor school staff on the conversion of text and learning materials into a tactile form\*
- Consultation on timetabling to support the development of Braille skills (this might be particularly important for a pupil in secondary school only recently introduced to Braille)

We aim to visit a school age pupil, whose sole access to the written word is Braille, for 2 x 90 minutes per week, although these visits may be amalgamated or more flexibly timed and may be a mix of direct pupil support and LSA/Teacher/School support.

### 5.2 Parents and Peers

We liaise with parents around decisions regarding Braille and recognise the importance of such decisions for the family. We provide parents with hand-written visit records which refer to the work completed with the pupil and school and sometimes add tips/advice for this work to be supported by the parents/carers, also explaining when the next visit will take place. A full, typed report is written annually and we are happy to consider interim reports in particular circumstances.

Some charities, such as the RNIB, run courses for those who wish to learn Braille. Birmingham University offers an Online Braille course and the National Federation for the Blind in America has a similar course with a correspondence component (there are however some differences between British and American Braille codes). These courses are written for literate adults and, while helpful for parents, will use a teaching approach very different to that appropriate for a young child.

In addition, we are beginning to offer an introduction to Braille for the parents of children attending our early years groups. Some parents have observed the teaching of Braille in the school their child attends.

Where schools wish, we are very happy to facilitate simple familiarisation of the Braille code for the pupil's friends and peers in class.

### 5.3 Pre-Braille Skill Development

As pre-readers, sighted learners are exposed to the written word all around them and, incidentally, begin to understand the significance of written symbols. The child who will learn Braille requires a parallel but more structured approach. Listening to stories and developing a love of books are key starting points and tactile books, some with a little Braille, are available for young children.

It is also important to develop specific skills such as

- Auditory and memory skills
- Tactile curiosity and discrimination, light finger touch
- Wrist flexibility, finger dexterity and finger strength
- Tracking and scanning skills including hand position and two handed co-ordination

#### 5.4 Grade 1 or Grade 2 Braille?

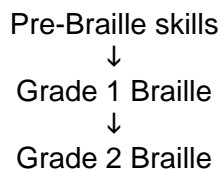
Braille has two main forms.

**Grade 1 Braille** uses the 26 letters of the alphabet in the same way that letters are used. The advantage of learning Grade 1 Braille is that it allows pupils an opportunity to access literature reasonably quickly. It also allows the pupil to learn to spell in the same way as their peers. The disadvantages are that some pupils, as their reading progresses, find that reading is slow and books are bulky.

**Grade 2 Braille** uses symbols to represent abbreviated words (for example “afn” for afternoon) and combinations of letters, for example symbols are used to represent combinations of the letters, ‘ING’, ‘AND’ and ‘FOR’. Some characters change their meaning, depending on where they are and how they are spaced. There are different Braille symbols for different languages and also specific Braille codes for maths, music etc. The advantages of Learning Grade 2 Braille are that it reduces the size of books and enables quicker reading. The disadvantages are that it takes a long time to learn and become fluent in Grade 2 Braille.

The route to Braille literacy is dependent on each individual child.

In common with recent thinking\* we feel that, in many cases, the appropriate route for Braille literacy is:



Once a pupil using Grade 1 is able to read, write and spell with some fluency the transition to Grade 2 Braille may begin. This may take place early for some pupils and later for others (external test papers might be an additional factor) and should be considered in consultation with the pupil, parents/carers, school and specialist teacher/QTVI, rather than viewed as age dependent.

Also the transition from one step to another is not absolute and abrupt. For example elements of Grade 2 Braille can be gradually introduced even as the pupil is consolidating skills in Grade 1 Braille. Individual circumstances also require individual consideration. So for example a modified approach might be appropriate for a teenager whose sight deteriorates when they are already very literate through print.

## 5.5 Learning Braille

The love of stories and books, and the desire to be an author/story teller are prerequisites for developing literacy skills for all children.

Assuming Pre-Braille skills are sound we would normally teach

- The letters of the alphabet
- Braille specific symbols (The number sign, capital sign, simple punctuation etc.)
- Numbers and numerical functions
- The skills required to decode Braille words as well as light touch and smooth left to right hand movement.
- The ability to write simple, regular and high frequency words and construct simple sentences.

As Grade 2 is introduced, the aim is to gradually develop the child's knowledge of contractions, wordsigns and abbreviations while simultaneously developing more complex phonetic skills, aiming for:

- Exposure, via both Grade 1 and Grade 2, to a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts and genre
- Greater fluency for both reading and writing
- Writing in different forms for different audiences (e.g. poetry, narrative, scientific reports)

Alongside this we would also introduce, in parallel with their peers, higher order skills.(e.g. skimming, scanning, research skills, use of the World Wide Web etc.)

## 6 Resources

The resources used to develop literacy skills and book awareness may include:

- The use of real objects in order to establish the link between an object and its written or tactile form as represented in books.
- Tactile games and activities(e.g. Pegboards, Tactile dominoes, Ludo, Scrabble etc)
- Commercially or individually produced pre-reading materials (e.g. The 'Feeling Ready to Read' materials.)
- Labelling of objects in the familiar environment.
- Transcription of the school's reading scheme into Grade 1 Braille.
- The production of pupil specific materials whilst the pupil is in transition from Grade 1 to Grade 2 Braille.
- The use of Braille Reading Schemes
- The Perkins Brailier

Resources are provided to enable school staff to produce materials (e.g. a Perkins Brailier, Duxbury Braille transcription software etc.) Our Curriculum Access Specialist provides guidance, training and support in the use of these.

In addition, we ensure families and schools are aware of sources of Braille and tactile books. (e.g. RNIB National Library Service, Living Paintings Trust, Tactus and Clear Vision.)

## **7 Equipment and ICT**

With knowledge of the child or young person, our specialist teachers, through reports and submissions, advise the local authority and the Visual Impairment Team of the equipment that will be needed. We typically provide:

### For the pupil,

- A Perkins Braille or equivalent electronic Braille writer
- A range of specialist consumables, including Braille paper.

Older pupils are introduced to the use of laptops with Braille translation software, linked to an embosser, and Braille note takers.

### For the School

- A Perkins Braille to assist the development of staff skills
- A desktop computer for preparing Braille materials.
- An embosser for the production of prepared materials
- A fuser for producing non-text materials. (e.g. Pre- Braille tactile materials/games, illustrations, diagrams, maps etc)

In addition, items required for shorter or longer periods may be available on loan from the service. (e.g. tactile games, globes, talking calculator, talking scales, maths kit, etc.)

## **8 Assessment**

The aim of assessment is to provide information about a pupil's understanding and achievement, in order to guide the next steps in teaching and learning. Many assessments will take place alongside other members of the class / tutor group and will be carried out by the class / subject teacher.

In addition, the specialist teacher will provide formative assessment of the Braille specific skills. This will include checking such skills as the ability to Braille the letters of the alphabet and regular CVC words, writing their own name, reading simple words in Braille and, as they move into Grade 2, recognising upper group signs, lower signs, wordsigns, abbreviations and punctuation signs. Similarly skills in Maths notation will be checked (e.g. basic number notation, 4 rule signs and, later, fractions, decimals, units of weight, capacity etc.)

For summative assessments, to assess the pupil's overall skill in reading Braille, the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability - Braille Version is used.

## **9 Staff Training**

### **9.1 Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (QTVIs) / Specialist Teachers**

All QTVIs have successfully completed the Braille element of the mandatory qualification.

### **9.2 Teaching Assistants (TAs) / Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)**

The service provides tuition to TAs/LSAs so they can learn, and support the learning of, Braille. Additionally the service is willing to consider supporting TAs/LSAs who wish to take external courses and exams in Braille. We also train and support them in the use of Braille production software.

## **10 Specialist Braille Codes**

As specialist codes, such as those for higher maths, science, languages, music and computer code are required by the young people, a member of staff familiar with the code will be assigned to support the pupil and the school.

Periodically, the service reviews the knowledge of the specialist teachers with regard to these codes and seeks to ensure coverage is available.

The RNIB Transcription Centre South West provides a free music transcription service to individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

## **11 Pupils with additional needs**

A very few pupils with additional needs might continue with Grade 1 and not progress to Grade 2. For others, Braille might not be the best vehicle for literacy and an alternative method, such as Moon can be taught where appropriate (further information can be sought from the VI Team in individual cases.)

## **12 Arrangements for examinations**

For Key Stage tests and public examinations, in consultation with the QTVI, the school applies for special arrangements which can include:

- Provision of Braille papers
- Early opening of papers by the QTVI to check the need for any further adaptations
- Additional time
- Supervised rest breaks

The school can also apply for past papers to provide opportunities for practising under exam conditions.

This policy will be reviewed during the Summer term, 2011

*\*From an article by Clare Wilson, RNIB Braille and Moon Literacy Development Officer, originally published in RNIB's 'Visibility' magazine, Summer 2005)*