**The Visual Environment**

An important factor which can aid or hinder learning is to give careful consideration to décor and lighting.

Décor

Décor includes walls, floors, ceilings, furniture, displays and people.

Décor has an effect on lighting levels in addition to aiding the mobility and general learning of the student.

A major problem is glare created by light reflecting off shiny walls and surfaces.

Consideration has to be given to contrast and clarity. Is there contrast between the door frame and wall, notices and the background?

Walls and Windows

* Windows with blinds
* Contrast of furniture and equipment against background
* Matt finish not gloss on walls
* Define borders by using furniture, floor and wall coverings.

Furniture

* Orderly classroom layout
* Storage space clearly marked and accessible where appropriate
* Check for sharp edged furniture
* Avoid reflective surfaces
* Have a choice of contrasting surfaces to work on when using dark/light materials
* Edges of tables should contrast with painted edges.

Displays

* Keep simple and bold
* Notices at correct height.

Lighting

* Different eye conditions require different levels of lighting therefore lighting should be adjustable by use of blinds or additional lighting.
* Lighting should not cause discomfort, glare or deep shadows.
* Corridors and staircases cause problems due to poor lighting.
* **It is very important to ensure that the level of lighting is good and a pupil’s position in relation to the light source is correct as this can dramatically affect their learning. Light should come from behind the pupil. Ensure that there is no bright sunlight shining in their face and their immediate work surface does not produce glare. Make sure any demonstration or presentation is clearly visible to the pupil with the light falling on what is to be seen and not from behind, producing a silhouette.**

**The Sound Environment**

For all pupils with a vision impairment, the information gained by sounds can be either of value or distraction.

Factors which affect a given sound will include:

* Size of the room
* Furniture and furnishings
* Number of people in the room
* Position of vision impaired person in relation to sound source.
* Other competing sounds.

**The Tactile Environment**

The pupils’ work area needs to be orderly to prevent time wasting searches for equipment.

In the wider area of the classroom and around school a vision impaired student may not be as confident in their mobility as in familiar surroundings.

* Unmarked steps, stairs and slopes can put the pupil at risk. Hard surfaces can cause confusing echoes particularly during busy times of the day. Foot clues and hard clues are useful e.g. change of surfaces.
* Shelves, fire extinguishers, doors and windows half open can be hazardous.
* Open spaces can be more difficult for vision impaired pupils to cope with. For some vision impaired pupils mobility training is essential.

**The Social Environment**

Specialist equipment used for curriculum access can cause isolation therefore classroom organisation has to be carefully considered to prevent this happening.

Pupil’s visual acuity will vary depending on a variety of circumstances, secondary pupils are very aware of what aids they feel most comfortable with and when they need to use them.