



# Braille policy

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## Policy Amendments:

Date	Detail

## Introduction

Braille is an identified tactile system of reading and writing for severely sight impaired or blind persons. Whilst appropriate technology is now readily available for blind persons to use without the need to learn braille, it can be expensive and can require ongoing expense to upgrade or repair equipment. If equipment fails, or schools/parents cannot fund such equipment, then acquiring braille reading and writing skills is a sensible alternative. Even learning basic braille (the alphabet) can be useful for essential everyday tasks in adulthood, such as labelling, writing short notes, shopping lists or appointment reminders etc.

The decision for a pupil with visual impairment to learn braille needs to be taken on an individual basis. Any decision should not be taken without discussion with the pupil, their parents or carers and the Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) based in school.

## General criteria for learning braille

Constant use of modified or enlarged text and modified diagrams will slow down a child's rate of learning and eventually put them at a disadvantage. As a child moves into KS2 and then into secondary education, text increases in volume and the pace of class based work intensifies. Reading modified curriculum material or writing by hand for any length of time for a severely sight impaired pupil is very demanding and exhausting. Braille may be a better alternative.

**Congenitally blind children** – if a child is born blind and their sight loss is permanent, they would generally begin pre-braille skills at the earliest opportunity. Many of the pre braille skills are fine motor activities which any young child needs to acquire, such as developing a palmar grasp, pincer grip, finger isolation and bilateral hand use. These acquired skills lead very easily into beginning braille, usually by the age of 4. Parents would be encouraged to learn braille alongside their child and to purchase a brailler for home use.

**Severely sight impaired children** – Whether a pupil with severe sight loss begins to learn braille would depend on a number of factors :-

- Whether their sight was likely to deteriorate. This would be confirmed by a consultant ophthalmologist.
- Their current level of vision and how this is affecting access to learning. If the text size they can see currently, is greater than N36.

# This is N36 size text

- The level of motivation the pupil has to learn braille.
- Any additional factors to be considered such as physical disability or communication difficulties.

## Teaching braille

### Introduction

If, and when a decision is made that a pupil will learn braille, it will be taught by a QTVI, Specialist Teaching Assistant with the RNIB Certificate in Contracted Braille (UEB) and supported by any Teaching Assistant working with the pupil. This is crucial, especially in the early stages of braille. There are several braille reading schemes available and the selection of which one is used, will depend on age, ability and motivation of the pupil. Lessons would be individually tailored to pupil.

The pupil should have good finger strength and good finger isolation before they start learning braille. Most braillists find it easier to write braille than read braille. The policy would be to start initially with braille writing, as this can give a boost of confidence and motivate a pupil to begin reading braille. However, braille reading would be encouraged alongside the writing so that a child could check their work and begin reading short sentences and stories.

**Posture** – Correct posture in both reading and writing braille is very important. The correct height of chair to table is important. A cushion pad will be used to raise the child if necessary. The pupil will be encouraged to sit up straight and not slouch.

#### **Braille writing -**

- The desk or table should be flat and just below elbow level to allow free movement of the arms.
- The brailler should be positioned to allow the lower arms to be comfortably extended to touch the braille keys.
- The rhythm should be consistent and almost musical.
- Firm pressure of the keys is vital, using the correct finger on each key.
- Strong dots and accurate dots are essential.
- Form a habit of doing a space after each word.
- Encourage the pupil not to look at the brailler when writing. This will of course depend on their level of sight.
- Short sessions of constant practise is better than once a week.
- The brailler should be available to the pupil so they are able to write independently (this is especially important in Reception where free flow learning is in place).

#### **Braille reading -**

- The desk or table should be flat and just below elbow level to allow free movement of the arms.
- The environment should be relaxed with the reader sat comfortably.
- The hands should be slightly arched and the fingers at an acute angle to the page.
- Very light finger pressure is essential so the weight of the hands should be borne by the forearm and not the fingertips. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> finger pads should be on the line of braille, thumb and little finger acting as support. Braille is read with either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> finger pad.
- Use double line spacing until confidence is built up.
- Returning to the next line can be by one of two methods.
  1. Return left across the line read to the beginning and drop down. If the pupil reads with the right hand, the left hand can be used as a marker on the line being read. This helps to speed up the journey to the next line.
  2. Return part way across the line read, drift down to the line below and return to the extreme left to begin the next line.

The aim of teaching braille would be for the pupil to be a competent braillist in both reading and writing by the end of Key Stage 1, having begun in the Reception year. They may be competent in uncontracted braille only, or competent in uncontracted braille with knowledge of some contractions and shortforms. Fully contracted braille will only be taught once the pupil is secure in phonics. Completion of fully contracted braille may take more time and will be dependent on the ability of the child. This will give a good foundation to transition to secondary education.

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