



Visiting Teacher Service

The Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind/Visually Impaired

Background

The Department of Education and Skills provides a visiting teacher service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired. The service is commonly referred to as the VTHVI service. It is staffed by qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing and visual impairment. The service offers longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from the time of referral through to the end of post-primary education.

Each visiting teacher (VT) is responsible for a particular region and is allocated a caseload of pupils. The VT supports the children, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual needs of the child. The work of the VT involves liaising with other professionals and agencies such as audiological scientists, ophthalmology services, speech and language therapists, low vision specialists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staffs, and with parents.

Visits to the Home

For babies and younger children, the VT interacts directly with the child to support its development. Support is usually provided in the home in the presence of the parents and visits take place by mutual agreement. The VT may:

- provide information and advice to parents about their child's hearing or visual impairment
- reinforce and model good communication and language support for children with hearing impairment through everyday activities, interaction and play
- inform parents about the range of communication options available, including spoken and sign language
- work on stimulating vision and provide support in the development of pre-braille skills and mobility for children with visual impairment
- discuss and demonstrate the management of amplification devices, low vision aids and assistive technologies
- help parents to monitor and celebrate their child's progress
- provide information on the range of education options available to assist parents in choosing a school for their child as the child approaches school age
- make recommendations to the school regarding assistive technologies that may be required when the child is enrolled in school, and
- facilitate contact with other parents of children who are deaf/visually impaired so that parents can share experiences and information and can provide mutual support.

Visits to the Primary School

At primary school level, the support provided by the VT may include:

- direct teaching, particularly in the areas of language and communication

- modelling teaching approaches for resource teachers and mainstream class teachers
- contributing to the child's individual education plan in cooperation with parents and school staffs
- assessing and recording the child's progress in attainment of learning targets
- empowering mainstream staff to deliver the curriculum by advising them of the potential educational and social impact of hearing or visual impairment on a child's development
- making recommendations and advising teachers on the use of assistive technologies, amplification equipment, low vision aids
- advising on the acoustics (in the case of deafness) and safe environment (in case of visual impairment) in the classroom, and
- liaising with other professionals and agencies who provide services for children with hearing or visual impairment.

Visits to the Post-Primary School

In advance of transition to post-primary school, the VT works with the parents and schools to assist with the transition process.

In addition to the type of support provided at primary school level, the VT at post-primary level:

- assists with the child's transition from primary to post-primary
- makes recommendations regarding reasonable accommodations provided by the State Examinations Commission, and support schools' application for such accommodations, where appropriate and,
- prepares a transition report which the student may provide to disability officers in third level education, further education and training agencies, or potential employers.

Referrals

Referrals may be made in writing to the VTHVI service by

- Parents
- Schools
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- HSE Audiological and Ophthalmology Services
- Eye Clinics
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)
- Cochlear Implant Unit, Beaumont Hospital
- DeafHear

Each referral should be made on the standard referral form, and must be accompanied by an up-to-date audiology or ophthalmology report, as appropriate.

Referrals should be sent directly to the local visiting teacher