

Emmaus Student Support FAQs

The Visually Impaired Department (VI Dept)

- **What does VI stand for?**

VI stands for Visual (or Vision) Impairment. Visual impairment is a term used to describe a significant loss of vision that can't be fully corrected by wearing glasses. There are lots of visual conditions or damage to parts of the eye that can cause total blindness or a significant loss of distance, near or peripheral vision (on the side), extreme sensitivity to light; not being able to see in 3D or difficulties focusing or processing and interpreting what is seen.

- **If you are blind does it mean you can't see anything?**

No, very few people are totally blind and cannot even see light or shadows. Often a person who is registered as blind has some available vision.

- **Do blind people have super hearing?**

No, but because this is a sense that they use a lot they often learn to be better at using their hearing. They also learn to use their sense of touch.

- **How do visually impaired or blind students learn at St. Paul's?**

Just like you! However, they might use special equipment, assistive technology (such as an iPad) modified, large print resources or Braille and tactile diagrams for reading and writing. They might also have a practical assistant in lessons to help them to do things such as use tools safely in technology, take notes from the whiteboards, set up and use equipment or manage their resources.

- **What is the white stick for?**

This is called a **cane**. A symbol cane is held to indicate to other people that they have a sight difficulty. The second type is a long cane which is used by some students with visual impairment to scan along the ground in front of them. It helps them to walk safely in areas of school or along a route that they know well. The cane is used to: detect hazards and changes in surfaces, such as slopes and steps; to stop them bumping into walls or to find key features in the environment.

- **Why do some students from the VI Department hold onto the arm of a member of staff or their friend?**

This is called using a **sighted guide**. The student with visual impairment tells the sighted guide where they want to go to, then they hold onto the arm of the guide above the elbow and walk together. The guide informs the student being guided about the environment so that they learn about their location and the route that they are taking. Some students also have a running guide. You may have seen this technique being used in the Paralympics? If you want to learn how to become a sighted guide, please contact Mrs Gray, Head of the VI Department, to find out more.

- **Why are handrails and steps painted yellow around school?**

This is to make them more visible to students with visual impairment.

- **What is Braille?**

Braille is a series of raised dots arranged in patterns that represent letters, whole words and parts of words. You read Braille through touch; using your fingers. Manual or electronic Braille note takers are used to write in Braille.