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GUIDE FOR THE ADAPTATION OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL INTO AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT



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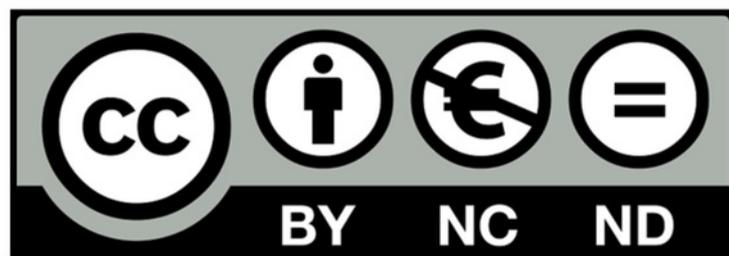
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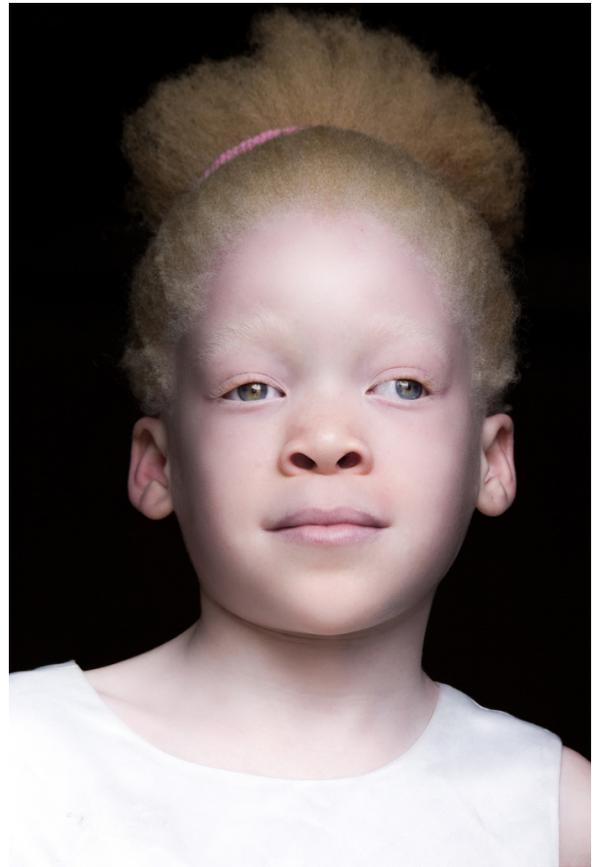
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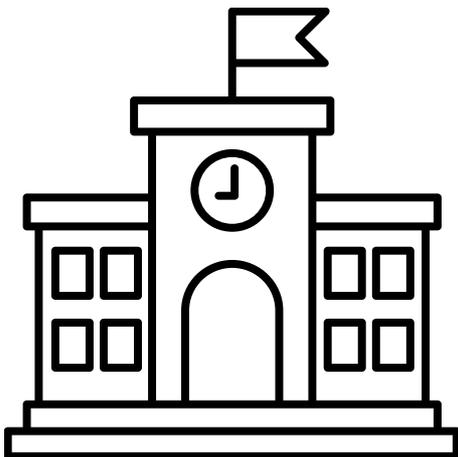
1. INTRODUCTION

The schooling of primary and secondary school students with low vision as a result of genetic conditions like Albinism or Aniridia involves a series of special needs that are often little known by the school. Children with low vision have severe difficulties in achieving educational success (80% of the information we receive is through sight) and in breaking down their barriers to socialization and entrepreneurship.

In order to try to alleviate these socialization issues and promote an autonomous way of life, there has been a commitment for some years now towards inclusive education through a process of immersion of students with low vision in standard schools, leaving behind the models of specific and segregating schools. However, despite the huge benefits of inclusive schooling (which foundations are found in the international education policy of "Education for All" - UNESCO, 2009) we cannot ignore the issues it still has.



Educational development in the classroom can be altered as teachers need to be taught about low vision and its consequences, generate new adapted materials, and use learning methods based on ICTs, which implies a great effort from the school and the teachers. The pedagogical lack of knowledge in the teaching processes required for students with low vision, added to the increasing digitalization of schools since COVID-19 and the greater workload they require for teachers (as there are no standardized resources and methodologies for low vision by schools or educational managers) makes the situation considerably more complicated.



In the wake of the coronavirus, the situation for students with conditions that cause low vision actually worsened, since the pandemic caused significant delays in student diversity assessments (which are essential to define educational care guidelines) and shortcomings in the methodological specialization of teaching due to both a lack of resources and a lack of information on the condition (ERDF-2020).

In this context, the partners of the Erasmus+ project “SEEING THE INVISIBLE: INCLUSIVE DIGITALIZATION OF LOW VISION STUDENTS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION” have created this guide for secondary school principals with tips and proposals to adapt their centers and turn them into an inclusive school for children with low vision.



2. MECHANISMS OF THE SCHOOL BEFORE LOW VISION

With the arrival of a student with low vision in a school, doubts may arise among the teaching staff, administrators, and managers about how to achieve their full inclusion in the classroom and around its facilities. This is why the school must have a School Educational Project (SEP), as well as a curricular project that includes both the commitment and the measures taken to adapt the school and turn it into an inclusive school for students with low vision.

These documents should include, at least:

- The coordination and organization of resources.
- Monitoring the implementation of resources.
- Material resources for adaptation.
- Human resources (teachers, managers, etc.).
- The Plan for Inclusion and Diversity, which includes the measures to be implemented to ensure the inclusion of students with low vision in the school.
- The Coexistence Plan, which includes the mechanisms and measures to be carried out to guarantee the coexistence of students with low vision with the rest while avoiding conflicts and discrimination.

2.1 The figure of the teacher

Teachers have a key role to play in the inclusion of students with low vision, since they are responsible for adapting educational resources and methodologies to the needs of the student. Thus, we recommend that you have the support of other teachers and school leaders for the coordination and development of adaptations.

The teacher's first actions must be to convey to the low vision student's classmates the implications of having a classmate with special needs, with the goal of involving the entire classroom in the process of building an inclusive and enjoyable environment for everyone. Along these lines, the teacher must emphasize the efforts that the student with low vision has been carrying out throughout his or her life and that they will continue to carry out. Their peers must understand that things that require little effort for them can be very difficult or practically impossible for a person with low vision. It is also necessary to explain the use and care of the materials for adaptation that the student with low vision will use, making clear that their deterioration will not only cause problems due to their intrinsic value but will also harm their classmates who won't be able to use them properly.

A good communication strategy is for the student with low vision to satisfy the doubts and lack of knowledge of their reality that their classmates will surely have. This, properly prepared and guided, is a good exercise that favors empathy among the students. Explaining their own needs regarding lighting, placement of elements to avoid movement problems, optical and non-optical aids needed and used, the procedure to guide people with low vision... All of this is personal information and adequate supervision must be kept by the teacher on this kind of issues.



All classmates must know and assume the necessary changes of behavior they have to make to avoid creating a disabling environment for the student with low vision, such as keeping the classroom tidy (without objects around that can be obstacles), leaving doors fully open or closed... This is essential to transmit inclusive values and monitor their day-to-day implementation.

2.2 Groups and classrooms

Schools, within their autonomy and capability for self-organization, can organize the groups of students by classroom according to various criteria. In order to build an inclusive school, it is necessary to try to prevent the formation and consolidation of groups that corner students with special characteristics or needs; the tendency must be to consolidate heterogeneous groups in which the exchange of situations and experiences favors the enrichment of collective life, and the use of criteria that favor the generation of homogeneous groups has the serious risk of leading to discrimination and the establishment of enclosed teams. The objective must be the promotion of equal opportunities -in short, equity- as the basis for inclusive teaching.

Inside the classroom, we must continue to promote and work with the same criteria that favor diversity and inclusion, so forming diverse working groups is a good working strategy. It is also important to establish rotational mechanisms to prevent groups from becoming fixed structures that favor segregationist practices, a dynamic that can naturally appear among students and that must be counteracted as much as possible in a preventive way. However, these interventions in the composition of working groups must be made in a justified manner and with awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of external interventions by the teacher. When working groups are finally consolidated and develop positive dynamics of integration and mutual support in cooperative learning methodologies, it may be better to keep the groups or make changes only in a timely and measured way.

Teachers must be attentive to the first symptoms to avoid the exclusion of any student from the work groups. In such a case, immediate intervention is required to change group structure.



2.3 Support resources

2.3.1 Support teams

It is important for teachers to have support professionals who have the specific technical knowledge regarding low vision as well as technological support devices, which will allow you to acquire the necessary information and knowledge to implement an inclusive classroom. In schools, counsellors are in charge of determining the support actions aimed at students with special educational needs (in our case those with low vision) and who collaborate with teachers to coordinate support actions.

Another controversial issue is the location and development of support for students with special educational needs, which is counterbalanced by bringing these students together in the same classroom and group to make the use of resources profitable, with the danger of generating spaces of segregation. The use of aids in the classroom should not become a factor of discrimination. On the contrary, in an inclusive framework, aids must be located and implemented in the same spaces that are shared with the group of students as a whole, even if this implies adapting the whole group to ensure the effectiveness of the inclusive effect of the aid. The overarching criterion that must guide teaching must be to try to ensure that group environments are not exclusive.

Locating supports outside the classroom should only occur for reinforcement work. In any case, it's necessary to avoid separating the student with special needs from the rest of the classmates during the school day at the usual time.



2.3.2 Psychological support

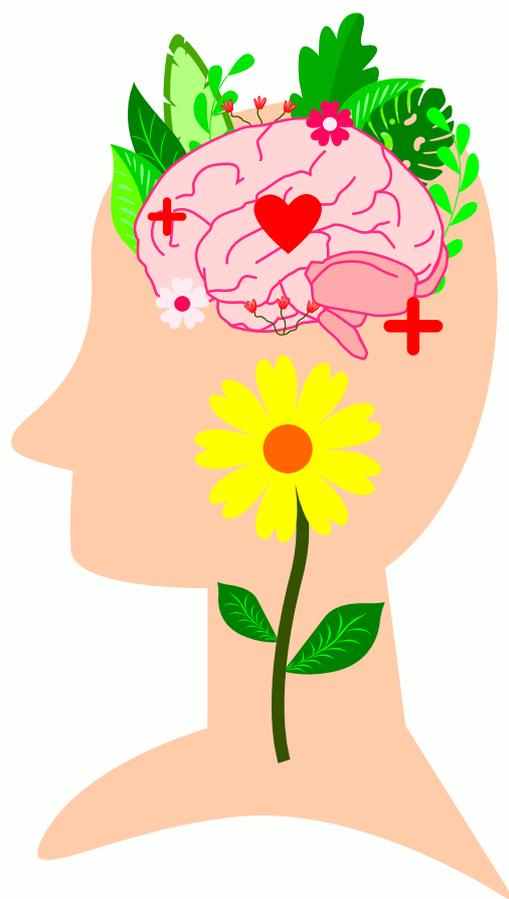
Students with low vision require psychological follow-up and support very similar to the rest of their peers. Having low vision doesn't necessarily entail the need for ad hoc psychological support, as long as there are no other circumstances or disorders unrelated to Albinism or Aniridia. Since both conditions are genetic and the person has them since early childhood, there is no need to overcome a traumatic event at a certain point in life. Teenagers with low vision are aware of their limitations, but this is not usually a psychological problem per se.

However, the pathological problems and consequences of Albinism and Aniridia can vary over time, increasing the problems for the young person and leading them to new situations with limiting consequences that may need support to adapt to the new circumstances and overcome the obstacles that arise to assume new life perspectives. In these cases, the psychological work should focus on working on the acceptance of the visual loss and the new condition of the teenager, while trying to promote and maintain positive and open attitudes towards the treatments and work to promote their rehabilitation.



The new diagnoses also begin the process of assuming the new situation and facing the challenges that lie ahead; this entails a grieving process that must be combined with work on optimizing the visual remains that can lead to a great personal challenge. The probable initial feelings of confusion and anguish don't have to lead to other more disabling ones, like panic, anger or depression, which can cause the affected person to lose even the ability to understand what is happening to them. The strategies to work on these situations are well known by psychological care professionals and transcend the skills and possibilities of the teacher, but it is important for them to know that in circumstances that involve a traumatic event for the student, the signs of understanding, proximity and support from teachers and classmates are essential to help them assume new situations.

In the evolution of grief that a student may experience before deep and sudden changes in their visual evolution, it is important for teachers to be able to detect situations of denial of the new situation, which can be expressed through the refusal to use the aids or carry out the exercises recommended by their doctors and adopt negative or uncooperative attitudes in general, which can lead to situations of social isolation. It is as important to recognize these situations as it is to assume that this is a phase that has to be passed through in the grieving process that culminates with the acceptance of the new situation and the appropriate therapies and helps. Assuming this reality leads to opening new perspectives, a process in which teachers can help a great deal through guidance and training.





2.3.3 Online training course

Teacher training for inclusive education should be an objective of both the school and the education administration. There are many resources that can currently be found online for teaching students with low vision, created by specialized and experienced entities like ONCE. On the other hand, we also recommend that the teacher receives prior training for the adoption of the materials.

For example, within the framework of the Erasmus+ project “SEEING THE INVISIBLE: INCLUSIVE DIGITALIZATION OF LOW VISION STUDENTS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION”, in which this guide has been created, we have created a VIRTUAL TRAINING COURSE FOR TEACHERS.

The “VIRTUAL TRAINING COURSE FOR TEACHERS: Inclusive Digitalization of Students with Low Vision in Primary and Secondary Education”, is an e-learning course implemented on the [Virtual Inclusive Education \(VIE\)](#) platform, that seeks to complement the training of primary and secondary teachers through an innovative methodology for the inclusion in equity of students with low vision as a result of Albinism or Aniridia. This course is having an impact on different teaching communities in Europe, enhancing their training in the face of the novelty that having students with special needs related to low or no vision caused by conditions like Albinism and Aniridia can mean in their classrooms. The course aims to:

- Provide teachers with specific training on low vision, which allows them to understand the abilities of their students, the consequences of their rare diseases and low vision, and to know effective teaching processes adapted to them.
- Promote inclusive, innovative, adapted, and appealing school education for students, with and without low vision.
- Raise awareness among the educational community on the importance of adapting schools to people with low vision.



2.3.4 Expert entities

ENTITIES OF INTEREST ON LOW VISION:

[ONCE \(Organización Nacional de Ciegos de España\)](#)

[SOCIEDAD ESPAÑOLA DE ESPECIALISTAS EN BAJA VISIÓN](#)

[ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DE LA SALUD](#)

[EBU – The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe](#)

[World Blind Union](#)

ENTITIES OF INTEREST OF ALBINISM:

[ALBA, Asociación para la ayuda a personas con Albinismo](#)

[ALBINISM EUROPE](#)

[DANSK FORENING FOR ALBINISME](#)

[NOAH Albinismus Selbsthilfegruppe e.V.](#)

[ALBINIT](#)

[OOGVERENIGING](#)

[Norsk Forening for Albinisme Norsk Forening for Albinisme](#)

[Albinism derneži](#)

[Albinism Fellowship](#)

[Simplemente Amigos - Fundación Nacional de Albinismo](#)

[Corporación de albinos Chile](#)

ENTITIES OF INTEREST ON ANIRIDIA

[Aniridia Europa](#)

[Aniridia Italiana](#)

[Aniridi Norge](#)

[Aniridia Rusia](#)

[Asociación Española de Aniridia](#)

[Aniridi Sverige](#)

[Aniridia Wagr Ukraine](#)

[Aniridia Network](#)

[Aniridia Finland](#)

[Aniridi Danmark](#)

[Aniridia Bulgaria](#)



2.4 Adaptations of Access in the School

Curricular adaptations of access are those modifications made to meet the needs of students so they can access the spaces of the school in an inclusive way. Therefore, these adaptations don't impact the curriculum nor the official syllabus taught at the school. School adaptations of access for students with low vision are likely to be useful for other students as well; we need to focus more on both the help they need and their possibilities, rather than on what they cannot do.

For this reason, prior to the implementation of adaptations of access for students with low vision we recommend creating a previous document including the specific needs of the student in terms of accessing the spaces of the school and the mechanisms to monitor these adaptations.

How should we adapt our school for the inclusion of students with low vision?

Make the school's layout known: first of all, in order to guarantee both their safety and autonomy, it is important that the students know the school's layout and the routes they must take to reach each space (classroom, courtyard, assembly hall, etc.), as well as the distribution within the classroom (doors, windows, blackboard, tables, chairs, switches, etc.).

Tell about furniture changes: if there are changes in the distribution and/or location of tables, chairs, common elements, etc., tell them to the students with low vision so that they do not have problems or difficulties in accessing.

Avoid architectural barriers: these are all the obstacles that limit, hinder or prevent these students from accessing and moving around the school safely and freely. There are still many schools with this kind of barriers. The objective is to try to prevent the school from being a disabling environment that limits the development of these students for not considering their abilities or needs. The main barriers usually found are:

- Inside the school: we recommend that corridors, classrooms, rooms... basically all spaces to be as clear as possible, without objects that could impede movement. Lack of space is a barrier that hinders the freedom of movement of students with low vision.
- Access to the school: one of the first barriers is the access to a school with stairs; these should be properly signaled and highlighted to facilitate access.



Adapt the school's common spaces: all students must share the same spaces, so we must avoid differentiated or segregated spaces that generate discrimination. Adapting common spaces is a critical safety measure, especially for students with low vision, so keeping everything orderly must become a common goal.

On the first day, both the environment and the common spaces must be shown and explained, for which we will describe each of these spaces, as well as the reference points and the location of the furniture. We seek to achieve their autonomy and for them to learn how to move safely within the school.

- Adaptation within the classroom: it is important for the distribution of tables and chairs within the classroom to allow to move around with enough space and without impediments. The adaptation of the classroom for low vision students is done to meet a need, not as a privilege nor as a punishment. Some of the most recommended adaptations are:

Avoid half-open doors, since they can pose a danger for low vision.

Place low vision students near the board and avoid light sources that could dazzle them.

Verbally describe what you're writing on the board.

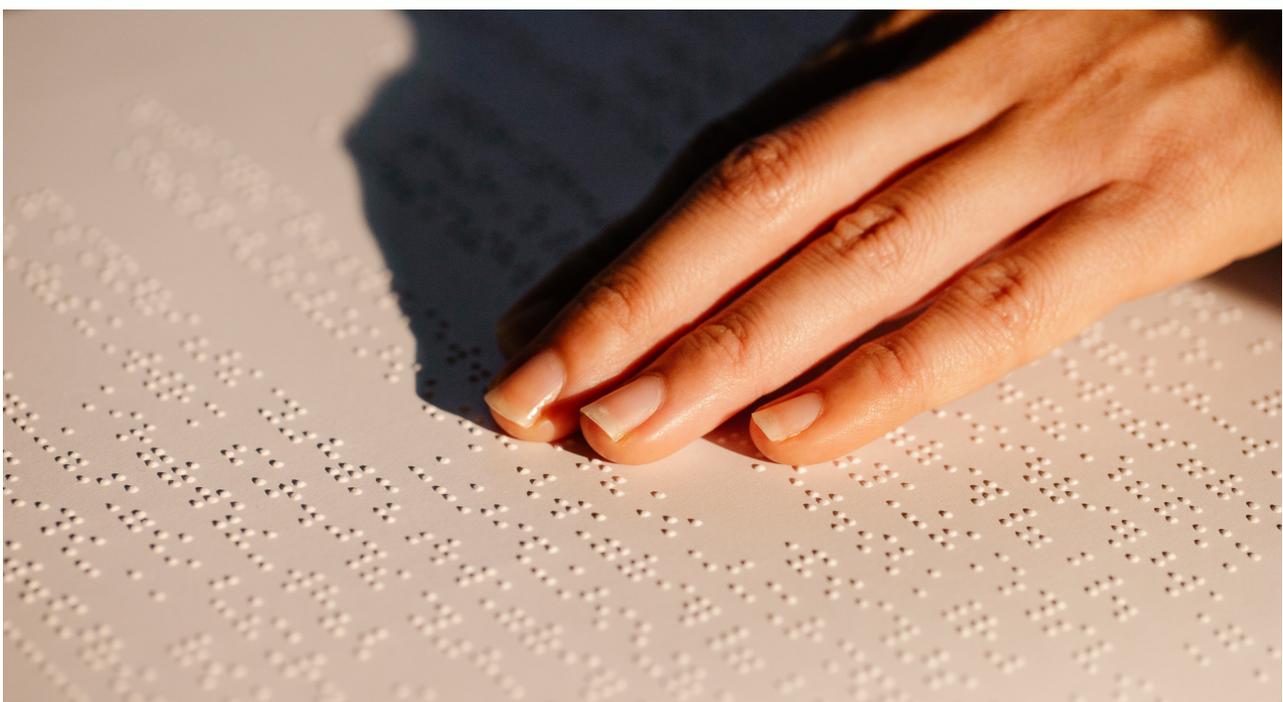
Allow low vision students to get as close as they need to objects for them to perceive their shape and location.

- The Dining Room: it is recommended and positive that, especially in self-service, the colors of the crockery and cutlery contrast with those of the trays and tables to make them easier to locate. With younger students it's advisable to have support staff in the canteen until they achieve their autonomy.
- The Courtyard: students with low vision in cases such as Albinism may need sunglasses or sunscreen, so we recommend supervising that they don't stop using these measures due to shyness or embarrassment, in addition to supporting them and strengthening their autonomy.

Have material and technological resources: we recommend that the school (to the extent of their possibilities) has access to resources like screen magnifiers, computers with large screens (17 to 21 inches), tablet devices, digital books and whiteboards to meet the needs of students with low vision.

Considerations when dealing with students with low or no vision:

- Identify yourself by name when addressing them so they recognize us.
- Let them know when you're talking in a group.
- State when you are leaving the room.
- If you must take the arm of students with low vision to help them move, talk to them beforehand so as to not startle them.
- You have to get low vision students used to everyday gestures with visual content, such as nodding or shaking "no" with their head, shrugging their shoulders, raising their hand to ask to speak in the classroom, etc.
- Tell them of any changes made in the distribution of furniture, explaining and describing to them current locations.





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