

JAPAN

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The Roles of Schools for the Blind as Centers

for Supporting the Visually Impaired

Mainly Support for Visually Impaired Children Attending Ordinary Schools

(the Case of Kanagawa Prefecture)

1. Preface

As stipulated in the National Curriculum Standards, the schools for the blind are expected to fulfill functions as regional support centers for the visually impaired by utilizing their instructors' expertise and school facilities and equipment. A school for the blind could serve diverse Center functions. One important function is to provide educational consultation and support services for the visually impaired children enrolled in ordinary schools and their guardians. The Kanagawa Prefectural Hiratsuka School for the Blind has been enriching its systems for providing educational consultation services. It is also endeavoring to provide other diverse types of support such as "resource room" programs and visiting guidance (for the School personnel to visit ordinary schools to assist in the education of the visually impaired children enrolled in such schools) in meeting with children's needs.

2. Functions of the schools for the blind as regional centers for supporting the visually impaired

The Hiratsuka School for the Blind has been endeavoring to fulfill the following five functions as a Center for the visually impaired.

- (1) Functions as a center for providing educational consultation and support services.
- (2) Those as an information center concerning visual impairment.
- (3) Functions as a center for training school personnel.
- (4) Those as a center to promote and extend understanding and knowledge concerning visual impairment.
- (5) Those as a center to promote lifelong learning by the visually impaired.

In supporting the visually impaired, it is necessary for the diverse related institutions and facilities to make efforts by mutually and closely collaborating (see Figure 1). The schools for the blind are also emphasizing the collaboration with the diverse related institutions such as medical, educational and welfare.

- (1) Functions as a center for providing educational consultation and support services
 - Early educational consultation and support: infants
 - Educational consultation and support for children attending ordinary elementary and secondary schools.

(2) Functions as an information center concerning visual impairment

- Supply of information on visual impairment
- Leasing of equipment
- Provision of guidance examples, teaching aids, etc.

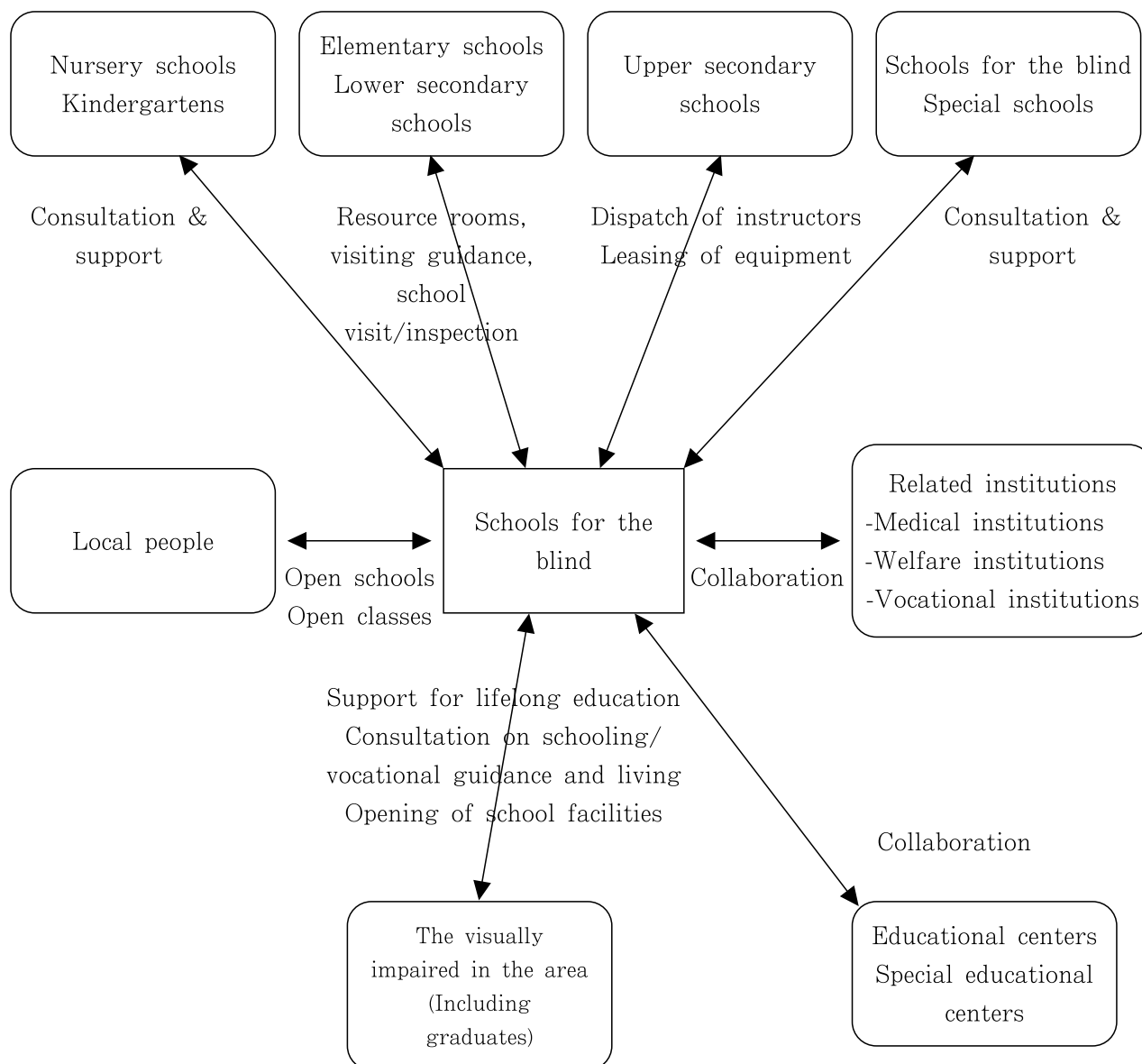


Figure 1. Collaboration by Schools for the Blind and Related Institutions

(3) Functions as a center for training school personnel

- Participation in the local training programs for newly appointed special class teachers
- Programs to promote the understanding of education for the visually impaired covering personnel of elementary and lower secondary schools
- Participation in the Kanagawa Prefecture Study Group for the Education of the Visually Impaired

(4) Functions as a center to promote and extend understanding and knowledge

- General educational and other support for elementary and secondary schools
 - Reception of applications to visit/inspect schools for the blind.
 - Dispatch of personnel of schools for the blind to elementary and secondary schools as instructors.
 - Reception of art and other works, letters, etc.
- Holding of massage classes in the area's shopping malls.
- Dispatch of personnel of schools for the blind to community centers as instructors (moxa (tsubo)therapy).
- Open schools, school visits, trial enrollment.
- Implementation of open classes.
- Collaboration with local volunteers.

(5) Functions as a center to promote lifelong learning

- Holding of PC classes for the visually impaired in the area.
- Consultation on schooling / vocational guidance and living.
- Opening of school facilities.

3. Outline of early educational consultation

As of August 2002, 13 infants are visiting the Hiratsuka School for the Blind for educational consultation. Their ages range from 0 to 5, and they mainly live in Hiratsuka City where the School is located, and the nearby municipalities.

The frequency of educational consultation depends on the individual case due to the child's developmental stage and the degree of assistance needs. It is roughly from once to twice a month.

In providing educational consultation for infants, it is very important to provide their guardians with developmental consultation and rearing consultation. Also important is close collaboration with medical institutions, nurseries, kindergartens and preschool day centers.

4. Support for children attending ordinary elementary and secondary schools

The support for the visually impaired children who attend ordinary schools may take, or require, diverse forms depending on the needs of the individual children or the school's circumstances. Even in a single case, the support may be provided by combining several types of support, and the type of support may change as the child advances in grade.

- Support for guardians and school personnel in charge
 - Telephone consultation
 - Consultation by visiting the school
- Provision and lease of equipment and teaching aids
 - Leasing of Perkins brailers
 - Leasing of braille teaching aids
 - Lending of books, etc., owned by the schools for the blind

- Forms in which children receive guidance at schools for the blind ("resource room", etc.)
 - Consultation if necessary
 - Case: A 5th-grader in O City: use of braille
 - Periodical consultation and support
 - Case: A 5th-grader in O City: visual impairment
 - School-visit about once a month
 - Learning how to use lenses for the weak-sighted
 - Consultation on subject study and teaching aids
- Forms in which personnel of schools for the blind provide guidance and consultation by visiting ordinary schools.
 - Visits according to needs
 - Periodical visits
 - Cases:
 - A 3rd-grader in S city, once a week, introduction to braille
 - A 4th-grader in F town, once a month, use of braille, subject guidance and consultation on teaching aids
 - A 2nd-grader in Y city, once a month, use of braille, subject guidance and consultation on teaching aids

5. Future issues

The issues that the schools for the blind must tackle in the future in order to support the visually impaired children who attend ordinary schools include the following.

- Improvement of the learning environment - support for the development of the system for providing teaching aids

The teaching aids can be prepared through diverse methods. For instance, they may be prepared by the classroom teacher, the special class classroom teacher, or the caregiver. The schools for the blind may help their preparation, or entrust their preparation to volunteers. It will be important to provide appropriate teaching aids by effectively combining these methods.

- Mental support for the visually impaired children

When children lead their school life, it is very important that they are accepted as members of the same class, as this will allow them to maximally display their abilities. This equally applies to visually impaired children. Such children may face diverse psychological problems. However, for such problems also, it is necessary for the schools for the blind to support the children by cooperating with guardians and classroom teachers.

- Support for the efforts made by the ordinary school as a whole

The visually impaired children who attend ordinary schools should be taught and cared for by the school as a whole without leaving their affairs all up to the classroom teacher or special class

classroom teacher. It is necessary for the schools for the blind to support the efforts made by the school as a whole, also in preventing the persons in charge of looking after the said children from becoming isolated in the school.

○ Creation of a system that the guardians, etc., can consult at any time

The guardians of and classroom teachers, etc., in charge of visually impaired children who attend ordinary schools tend to lack information on visual impairment. It is important for the schools for the blind to supply such persons with diverse kinds of information, and serve as Centers that they can consult at any time.